

Journey of the Heart

A Love Story

by Judith Bronte

Izumi Mizukio's name in Japanese means, "beautiful fountain of pure water." And it's no wonder, for her eyes are so blue that they put the sea to shame. Finding little kindness within her troubled home in Japan, Izumi timidly works to earn her mother's love. When her Japanese father commits suicide because of gambling debts, Izumi's American mother takes her to Three Mile Bay, in upstate New York. There, Izumi's loneliness is overwhelmed by John Johannes, a striking young man who falls deeply in love with her. Now she must find the courage to return John's love, even at the vehement disapproval of her mother.

Note to brand-new readers: *Journey of the Heart* was the first romance I ever wrote, penned over a decade ago when I was just a beginner. If you've never read me before, I suggest starting with something more recent, such as *Homegrown Dandelions* <http://judithbronte.com/dandelions/D_1.html>. It better represents what I'm turning out presently. :-)

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Chapter One

No Longer A Child

"For a small moment have I forsaken thee; but with great mercies will I gather thee."

~ Isaiah 54:7 ~

A hot Japanese sun shone through the white curtains of Izumi Mizukiyo's bedroom. (Pronounced 'E - zoo - me Me - zoo - ke - o') She turned over in bed, ignoring the sun's call to wake up. Not to be ignored, it shone into a mirror standing on the right side of Izumi's futon, reflecting a bright glare onto her sleepy eyes.

"Okay, I'm awake," she said groggily, sitting up. Satisfied with her acknowledgement of the new day, the sun dispersed its reflection, leaving Izumi to rub her stunned eyes. Though she wanted to move the mirror, the glare served as a useful alarm clock. Sitting up in bed, she began brushing her black hair in the small mirror, talking to the reflection as to a familiar friend. "Did you enjoy my graduation?" Not waiting for a reply, she continued, "I'm so glad you could come! My parents meant to be there, but something came up. I'm sure they would have come, if they could." Her face fell a little, but brightened upon the next thought, "Mrs. Tanaka, our teacher, called us 'young women' at the ceremony yesterday. She never called us that before," Izumi added quickly, as if Mrs. Tanaka's address to her students was proof enough of her womanhood. Izumi picked up her diploma, and read it again, savoring every word.

The Tanaka Young Ladies School hereby certifies that Izumi Mizukiyo has fulfilled the requirements needed to graduate. Izumi has honored her teacher, Mrs. Natsumi Tanaka, by finishing first in her class.

She ran her finger along its edges lovingly, for this small piece of paper represented long hours of tedious work. A satisfied smile parted her lips. "They will be proud of me now."

Izumi's bedroom was not actually a room at all. Wooden partitions fenced off a small square of space from a larger room, making up three of her walls. The bedroom was just big enough to comfortably accommodate a futon and a small mirror given to her by Mrs. Tanaka. The partitions stood up against the wall, encircling the only window in the small apartment. Izumi loved to set her room up around this window, for at night, she would stare dreamily out and imagine herself strolling through a Japanese garden, inhaling the fragrant honey of the nearby flowers. She would keep this picture in her heart as she slept, and would dream of it as a baby craving for its mother. A peaceful smile would often creep across Izumi's face, making her look beautiful and serene. What a pity that her parents never noticed this nightly transformation!

Izumi carefully folded up her partitions, taking care to do it quietly. Her parents slept in a partitioned room against the opposite wall. Quietly, she put away the futon and placed her mirror on the window's ledge. Izumi tiptoed to the kitchen, and knelt next to a small stove with one burner. It stood solemnly beside a tiny refrigerator that sat on the tatami floor. Unstacking some containers in the corner, she pulled out a bag of rice. Izumi measured portions of the white grain into a pan, carefully rinsing it in the kitchen sink. She quietly set the pan on the burner, and turned on the fire. She then went to the closet, and slid open the thin wooden door. Behind the clothes, Izumi pulled out a small table, about a foot tall. Placing it in the middle of the room, she arranged the bowls and tea things on it.

Tiptoeing carefully back to the closet, Izumi stood there shaking her head. Her whole wardrobe consisted of school uniforms. It would have to do for now, but what a way to dress on the first day of her womanhood!

After dressing, Izumi sat down at the table, and eagerly waited for her parents to wake up. Now that she was a woman, and no longer a child, they would be proud to have such a daughter. After all, had she not finished at the top of her class?

Both of her parents had seen the little notes that Izumi had posted around the apartment, in the hope that they would attend her graduation. Neither one had said anything about it, so Izumi hoped that maybe they intended to surprise her by coming after all. In vain, had she searched for them among the crowds of happy students and proud parents. As a faithful dog sits at his master's feet, hoping for a pat of affection, Izumi now waited for her parents, hoping against hope, for some sign of their approval.

"Izumi!" her mother's sudden burst of voice made her jump. "Why aren't you in school? Leave now, before your father finds out!" snapped Mrs. Mizukiyo. Feeling the disappointed tears welling up inside, Izumi silently bowed her head. "I am dressed for school," she reasoned to herself, "she just forgot." However, this thought was of little comfort.

Assuming, that for once, her daughter had forgotten the time, Mrs. Mizukiyo went about eating the food Izumi had prepared. Izumi left quietly. The hot tears fell fast and thick, but no one noticed the small "woman" crying silently as she walked down the crowded street. She headed towards the zoo and spent her first day of womanhood chatting to the animals.

"O thou afflicted, tossed with tempest, and not comforted, behold, I will lay thy stones with fair colours, and lay thy foundations with sapphires."

~ Isaiah 54:11 ~

Chapter Two

A Rebellious Daughter

Mrs. Anna Mizukiyo sat down and began eating the rice Izumi had so lovingly prepared. She took no thought to thank Izumi, or God, for her meal. Anna had noticed the omission, however, for the voice of her childhood in America came rushing back, as if it had been yesterday.

"God bless this food ... (in a whisper) did I say it right, Daddy?"

How happy were those memories! Then her mind sped to the day she announced to her parents that she was getting married.

"Guess what? I'm getting married!" Her parents' faces turned grave though, when she told them who she was going to marry.

"Anna, he's not a professing Christian. We forbade you from ever seeing him again. And not because he's Japanese, (her father added, seeing the words on Anna's tongue), but because he openly defies God by his speech and actions. He 'is loud and stubborn;' his 'feet abide not in [his] house.'" (Proverbs 7:11)

"But Daddy, I love him! and he loves me, I know he does! He wouldn't have asked me to marry him if he didn't!" Anna's father sat down on the sofa beside her and looked into the blue eyes of his only child.

"Anna, what did Christ say true love was?" He picked up his Bible and turned it to John 14:15 and 24. "If ye love Me, keep My Commandments... He that loveth Me not keepeth not My sayings: and the word which ye hear is not Mine, but the Father's which sent Me."

"Daddy, where does it say in the Bible that I can't marry someone who isn't a Christian? Where?" Anna's "where" had an unmistakable ring of defiance in it. Her father patiently read Second Corinthians 6:14.

"Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?"

There was a pause of silence before he spoke again. "Anna, you know this verse by heart. I'm not reading it to you for the first time. To marry a non-believer would be sin. For 'To him that

knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.' (James 4:17) You know better." Anna shook her head.

"I don't see how it's sin to marry someone I love!" As she said this, Anna left her parents' home, and turned her back on everyone who truly loved her. The next day she got married and left America, to live with her husband in Japan. Anna tried to suppress these painful memories, but they came crashing through her consciousness as a giant wave pounds the sand.

Anna thought of the day Izumi was born. She was so proud of her baby! Anna could still see the abundance of beautiful, black hair crowning Izumi's tiny head. And those wide blue eyes! Nurses from every department of the hospital would come, and gaze at the beautiful Japanese baby with blue eyes. Every feature of Izumi's face was Japanese, except those clear pools of blue staring up at her mother. How special Anna thought her new baby was!

Then Anna remembered her husband's reaction to his new baby daughter.

"Onna no ko," (Japanese for "girl"), he muttered angrily, "what do I want with a girl? I must have a son! I am the eldest son of my father, and someday, all he has I will inherit. I must have a son to pass on the honored name of my family, and keep the inheritance in my name!" Anna had never seen him so angry before. It frightened her. The days that followed Izumi's birth were check marked with vivid memories of beatings and abuse. It had never stopped, really. The day Izumi was born, her husband stopped pretending he loved her. However, Anna would never admit this, even though she knew it to be true.

"He loves me," she would argue. "After all, we have been through a lot, and he has never left me. He would have left me if he didn't love me. That proves it!"

"Seventeen years," she sighed. "can it really be so long ago?" She took another bite of rice. "Someday, I want to go back to my home on Three Mile Bay, New York. I believe Dad & Mom left the house to any children I might have. That's what it had said in the will, when they died. Knowing my parents, they were 'praying' for my children, and thought they would need a place of refuge or something." At that thought, Anna angrily slammed her rice bowl down on the lacquer table. "As if Izumi needed refuge!"

"Appoint out for you cities of refuge"
~ Joshua 20:2 ~

"He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love."
~ 1 John 4:8 ~

Chapter Three

The Dishonored Son

"Bloody and deceitful men shall not live out half their days."

~ Psalm 55:23 ~

When Anna woke up that morning, she noticed that Yoichi hadn't come home. This was a common habit with him, and she learned early on not to question his whereabouts. So Anna ate her breakfast, without giving her absent husband one thought. If she had known why he was absent this morning though, she might not have had any appetite for the rice Izumi made.

Yoichi Mizukiyo, (the "ichi" at the end of his name means "firstborn son"), would usually spend his nights and mornings in a smoke filled room in Yokohama, gambling his inheritance away. Sometimes Yoichi won, but mostly he lost. In fact, he had lost more money than he realized, playing the addicting games of Mahjong, and Pachinko. (Popular games of chance in Japan.) For several years, Yoichi led a life of gambling excesses, causing him to sink deep in debt. His creditors had allowed Yoichi to borrow money hand over fist, knowing his father was wealthy. Someday the old man would die, and leave his great fortune to his eldest son. This is what they were counting on, and so was Yoichi.

Today would be different, however. After spending three hours in front of a Pachinko machine's hypnotizing lights, Yoichi felt someone tugging at his shoulder.

"What do you want?" he asked impatiently.

"Your father is dying. Come quickly." Yoichi obeyed immediately.

Toshikazu Mizukiyo had led a long life. Now he wanted to die peacefully, confident in the knowledge that the honorable family name would continue for several more generations. He had disapproved of his son's choice of wife, for he had hoped that Yoichi would choose a woman of his own country. The blonde, blue - eyed Anna, (with a Dutch heritage), was not what he had hoped for. But Mr. Mizukiyo knew how hard his son was trying to be worldly, and thought it was somewhat humorous. Yoichi had a lot to learn before he would be as wise as his ancestors. Years would add wisdom to his son.

However, several hours ago, Mr. Mizukiyo received word of his eldest son's gambling fever and large debts. Many of Yoichi's excesses were told him in great detail. The longer he listened, the angrier he became. This was no longer a laughing matter. His eldest and most honored son had

disgraced the ancient family name, exposing it to ridicule. He must save face, (save honor), and do it quickly, for Mr. Mizukiyo knew that soon, he would die.

Yoichi bowed and knelt beside his dying father.

"Weariness fills my heart, for your disgrace has come to the doors of my house. The inheritance that you have so long taken for granted is given to Shunji ("ji" meaning "second son"). From this hour on, I have no firstborn son." A stunned Yoichi stared disbelievingly at his father.

"Father, if I do not pay the creditors their money, they will kill me ... or worse!" Yoichi was visibly shaken. Beads of sweat ran down in rivulets on his face. The "or worse", was in Yoichi's mind, more terrifying than death.

"I have no firstborn son," his father repeated. Mr. Mizukiyo would not even look at his dishonored offspring. Yoichi opened his mouth to protest, but the words would not come. He knew his father would never reverse the death sentence he had just given. This was how Mr. Mizukiyo was going to punish his son. Silently, Yoichi left his father's house for the last time.

"The curse of the LORD is in the house of the wicked."

~ Proverbs 3:33 ~

"Oh let the wickedness of the wicked come to an end."

~ Psalm 7:9 ~

Chapter Four
Solitary Tear

"Woe unto the wicked! it shall be ill with him: for the reward of his hands shall be given him."
~ Isaiah 3:11 ~

When Izumi returned home that evening, she found her mother standing by the window, sobbing. Concerned, Izumi started to cross the room, but Anna heard her coming, and motioned her to stop.

"Izumi, the police were just here. Your father killed himself this morning. He jumped off a bridge ..." Anna's voice trailed off. Collecting her thoughts she added, "They found his body two hours ago." She stood gazing out the window, tears streaming down her face.

Suddenly, as if something within her snapped, Anna's sorrow turned into rage. She looked up to heaven and screamed, "You win!" Angrily, she began stuffing suitcases with clothes and small belongings. "Get up, Izumi. We're leaving!" Izumi was huddled on the floor, crying. She quickly obeyed.

Izumi packed frantically, as if running from some evil person who was threatening her life. But Anna, in her wrath against God's judgment, moved with a coldbloodedness that made Izumi even more frightened than she was already. The packing was done without any thought. Soon they had everything within eyesight, jammed into four suitcases.

"Where are we going?" she asked. Anna didn't hear her daughter's frightened question, for they were in a taxicab before Izumi could close her mouth.

"To the airport", Anna commanded, "and step on it!"

"Which one?" asked the startled cab driver.

"The closest one!"

The cab ride was quiet, except for the occasional hiccup from Izumi, who had been sobbing all evening. With the oncoming of darkness, Tokyo city became alive with bright neon signs. The sidewalks were crowded with carefree people, coming and going from one store to the next. All this remained unnoticed by Izumi. In one evening, her whole world had turned upside down. It seemed ages ago since she last visited the zoo, chatting to any creature who would listen. Her loneliness suddenly became terrifying. Izumi leaned her head against her mother's shoulder for

comfort, but Anna jerked it away. She had not forgotten her first beating from Yoichi came when he found out that Izumi was a girl, and not a boy. With a bowed head, Izumi turned to the cab door for comfort.

Forty-five minutes later, they reached the airport. After paying the fare, Anna picked up two of the suitcases and told Izumi to do the same. They were a bit heavier than Izumi could easily manage, but with some determination, she was able to keep up with her mother's fast walk. When Anna came to a sudden stop, Izumi bumped against her.

"Sit here, and don't move." Izumi obediently sat down on one of the yellow benches, her eyes never leaving the ground. A single tear slid down her cheek and splashed onto the airport linoleum.

"What's down there that you find so interesting?" asked an English voice.

Izumi understood English perfectly, but was too shy to look up and see who was speaking to her. Maybe the voice was speaking to someone else, she decided.

"I said, 'What's down there that you find so interesting?'" the voice repeated slowly, thinking that maybe she didn't understand English.

Izumi was now certain someone was talking to her. Slowly, she tore her eyes from the linoleum square she had been focusing on, and lifted her head cautiously to see who was speaking to her. Her eyes looked directly into the face of a grinning, young man. Upon seeing her blue eyes he let out a surprised gasp. They were the most beautiful pair of blue eyes he had ever seen! He couldn't help comparing them to fountains of deep blue water. She had obviously been crying, which was the reason he had spoken to her in the first place.

He had watched a girl in a school uniform, approach the benches, struggling to carry two, heavy suitcases. He noticed the way she kept her head bowed, and had witnessed the solitary tear that told him she was crying. Feeling sorry for her, he decided to try and cheer her up. He was unprepared, however, for the look in Izumi's face. Feeling embarrassed, he repeated the question for a third time. But, before he had the words out of his mouth, a tall, blonde headed woman sat down next to the short, black haired girl.

"Surely, that isn't her mother," he thought to himself. Anna's abrupt coming silenced him, for the young man decided it was time to end the one-sided "conversation." He prayed the girl would not get in trouble for anything her mother thought he might have said, for Anna's face betrayed that she was not happy. "Please God, don't let the little girl get in trouble for something I did. And please, help me keep my mouth shut!"

God answered before he asked, for Anna had not noticed him. Her mind was brooding upon the fact that Yoichi had left her. ("He loves me," she would argue. "After all, we have been through a lot, and he has never left me. He would have left me if he didn't love me. That proves it!") Those words echoed in her ears.

Izumi was left in solitude to wonder about the grinning American. She felt like laughing, every time she thought of him turning red with embarrassment. For the first time that day, she almost felt happy.

Mother and daughter sat there for several hours, waiting for their airplane, occupied with their own thoughts. No signs of affection or concern came from Izumi's mother, a fact that did not escape the young man.

"The merciful man doeth good to his own soul: but [she] that is cruel troubleth [her] own flesh."
~ Proverbs 11:17 ~

Chapter Five
Night Vigil

"When my father and my mother forsake me, then the LORD will take me up."
~ Psalm 27:10 ~

It was 2am before the airplane lifted off the ground. As it gained altitude, Izumi tightly held on to her seat. She soon fell asleep, tired and worn out from the strenuous events of the day. As a long lost friend, the familiar garden dream faithfully returned to her. A small smile played peacefully on her sleeping face, as if lost in a world more pleasant than the one she had been experiencing. Truly, God is a merciful God, to give Izumi this reprieve from sorrow!

"For Thy mercy is great unto the heavens"
~ Psalm 57:10 ~

There were three things in life that Izumi valued most: Love, Gentleness, and Mercy. She rarely witnessed these qualities in the people around her, so when she found them, Izumi would savor every moment as if hoarding food for the long periods of famine that were so familiar to her. Indeed, had she not endured famine that very day? How welcome then, was the kind look on the face of the embarrassed American! If he had known the happiness that the one smile gave her, he would not have reproached himself for speaking.

Anna sat in the seat next to Izumi, her mind wakeful and restless. She knew God was judging her for the decision she made seventeen years ago. Her father's voice kept tugging at her: "Behold, I set before you this day a blessing and a curse; A blessing, if ye obey the Commandments of the LORD your God, which I command you this day: And a curse, if ye will not obey the Commandments of the LORD your God, but turn aside out of the way which I command you this day, to go after other gods, which ye have not known." (Deuteronomy 11:26 - 28) The harder Anna resisted the conviction of the Holy Spirit, the colder her heart became. She looked at her sleeping daughter, who unlike herself, was resting peacefully. Anna quickly got up from her seat next to Izumi, and walked to the other end of the airplane. There she found an empty seat and fell asleep.

Izumi was sleeping soundly, when she sensed her mother's absence. As if in a dream that suddenly turned nightmare, she began to cry in her sleep, without making a single sound.

The dark-lit airplane was filled with sleeping passengers, except one. A young man had found, to his great surprise, that the girl he had tried to cheer up in the airport, was sitting two rows across

from his- peacefully sleeping. From his vantage point, he could see the look of hate on Anna's face, as she left her resting daughter. Five minutes later, Izumi began to cry in her sleep.

Upon seeing this heartbreaking sight, he quietly got up, and sat down in Anna's seat, beside Izumi. Contented that her mother had returned, she fell peacefully back into her dream. All night, the young man sat watch, filling in for the delinquent mother. When the sun announced a new day, he silently returned to his seat, near tears himself.

Anna returned before Izumi woke up, and they sat side by side through the rest of the flight without one word passing between them.

"I ... considered all the oppressions that are done under the sun: and behold the tears of such as were oppressed, and they had no comforter."

~ Ecclesiastes 4:1 ~

Chapter Six

Window Reflections

"The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God."

~ Isaiah 40:3 ~

The plane ride had been several hours long, for it was not until late afternoon that they arrived at the Watertown, New York, International Airport. Everyone collected their bags, and descended down the airplane ramp. Izumi stepped out into the sunlight and, unknowingly, put her feet down on American soil for the first time in her life. She did not have any time to take in the new surroundings, for her mother claimed their luggage and hurried through customs.

By the language everyone was speaking, Izumi correctly guessed that she was in America, for Anna had not told her daughter where they were, or where they were going.

Izumi soon found herself in a crowded bus station, glancing at the destination sign over the bus driver's window. It said "Three Mile Bay." Suddenly, Izumi knew where they were going. She was finally going to see the home her grandparents had left her in the will. She had often tried to imagine what it looked like, for she could never get her mother to talk of her former life.

After boarding the crowded bus, Izumi felt free to investigate her surroundings. Looking out the bus window, she could see the terrain outside. Everything was covered with green vegetation and trees of all sizes. If she squinted, she could see mountains in the far distance. She heard someone say they were the Adirondack Mountains. Everything was new and exciting to her, for she was no longer scared. They had a destination, and she found the anticipation a good balm for the stress of the previous day.

Izumi noticed that at every stop along the way, people would get off the bus, and scatter along their separate ways. She soon realized, that counting herself and her mother, there were only five or six people left. She began to enjoy the privacy and quietness of the bus ride. Izumi had grown so used to public transportation in Japan, that she had never noticed the packed crowds, standing on each other's feet, until seeing the ample room of an American bus. It was not until then, that Izumi noticed the young man at the airport, sitting near the door. He could not see them, for they were seated at the opposite end of the bus. Izumi shyly watched him from her seat. He was staring out the window, watching the trees speed by. The young man had blonde hair like her mother's, and electric grey eyes. From the reflection on the bus window, Izumi could see he had a tired look on his face. She remembered the look of pity, he gave her at the airport. He had genuinely felt sorry for her, making Izumi like him all the more.

The young man Izumi was watching so intently, had not seen her, or her mother, board the bus. He was very tired, for he had not slept in thirty-six hours. He had spent the night protecting a neglected, little girl. It had broken his heart to leave her alone again, knowing how the mother obviously hated her daughter. It made him angry to watch this cold-hearted woman repeatedly ignore her daughter's silent pleas for love and attention. Silently, and in much prayer, he claimed every applicable promise he could think of, interceding as only a Christian could.

"Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them; and them which suffer adversity, as being yourselves also in the body."

~ Hebrews 13:3 ~

Nearing the end of his journey, the young man realized that it had been a journey of the heart, more than anything else. He said one more prayer, asking God to lead this child into His kingdom, by putting her in the path of Christians. That was the only thing he could do to help her. With that settled in his heart, he had boarded this bus for home.

Izumi looked into her bus window's reflection. The crumpled school uniform she wore, gave the appearance of someone younger than she really was. Her hair was messy, and her face looked exhausted. Sighing, Izumi smoothed out her hair and combed through the tangles with her fingers, just in case he looked in her direction. But to her disappointment, and relief, (a feeling only women can understand), the young man's eyes never left his window.

"I [the young man] being in the way, the LORD led me [Izumi]"

~ Genesis 24:27 ~

Chapter Seven

What Time I Am Afraid

"So shall My word be that goeth forth out of My mouth: it shall not return unto Me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it."

~ Isaiah 55:11 ~

The sky began to grow dark, for the clouds in the sky foretold rain. Izumi watched the trees bending in the wind, as if bowing to a Great Master. A shudder went through her body. The peacefulness of the journey was suddenly shattered by a bright bolt of lightning spreading its thin fingers across the night sky. Five seconds later, it was followed by a crash of thunder. Normally, Izumi loved the rain, but this was not a gentle Japanese shower, like the ones she was used to. Izumi looked at her mother's face. She was oblivious to the sounds of nature, even though they were becoming more vociferous with each passing minute. She noticed that the closer they came to their destination, the more agitated her mother grew.

At Chaumont, the bus stopped, and the few people that had remained, got off, except the young man. Izumi was glad, that when the doors opened, he did not leave with the others. That meant he was on his way to Three Mile Bay, also. The bus driver looked at the three people remaining on the bus. He could tell they were tired.

"Only three more miles to go, folks," he said, returning to his place at the wheel. Upon hearing the word "folks", the young man turned around to see who he was referring to, for he thought everyone had gotten off at the last stop. A flash of lightning lit the entire bus as he turned, clearly outlining the faces of Izumi and Anna. As Izumi saw him recognize her with a look of surprise, a loud boom of thunder rattled the window panes of the bus. Izumi's eyes quickly traveled from him, to the storm outside. Another flash of lightning lit Izumi's face, revealing how frightened she was.

Upon seeing this, the young man got up from his seat and walked over to the opposite end of the bus, where Izumi and her mother sat. He sat down in the seat in front of them, and turned around to face Anna.

"Hello, my name is John Johannes. It looks as if we have the same destination," he said, gesturing to road in front of them.

"It looks that way," she replied flatly, eyeing him suspiciously.

Not to be discouraged, he continued, "I was born in Three Mile Bay, and this is certainly the worst storm I have seen in these parts for several years. When you see lightning like this, it certainly reminds you of God's power, doesn't it?" Anna remained silent.

"Yes, it certainly does," he said, answering his own question. "When you remember that God is controlling the events of our lives, not to mention that beautiful thunder, it should help us to trust in His Providence, and not be afraid."

John spoke directly to Anna, and acted as if he had not even noticed the girl sitting beside her. At his constant mention of God, she became restless, and pretended not to hear what he was saying, hoping he would go away. He seemed not to care whether she listened or not, for he continued to speak as if Anna was attentive to every word he said. "It always comforts me to remember what the shepherd, David, said about fear. 'What time I am afraid, I will trust in Thee.'" The bus began to slow down. As it came to a stop, John got up. "Since Three Mile Bay is such a small town, I'll be sure to see you again." He turned his back, and without saying goodbye, gathered his luggage, and disappeared into the black night.

"Good riddance," said Anna, showing her disgust. His small speech had had the opposite effect on her daughter, however. Even though she was surrounded by the darkness of a strange country, to her amazement, Izumi noticed that she was no longer afraid. "He must have spoken magic words," she thought.

Soon, they too, left the sanctuary of the familiar bus, and walked off into the blustery night.

"So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God."

~ Romans 10:17 ~

Chapter Eight
Three Mile Bay

"The LORD also will be a refuge for the oppressed, a refuge in times of trouble."
~ Psalm 9:9 ~

It was late in the afternoon before Izumi woke up. Still dressed in the same school uniform that she had crossed the Atlantic Ocean in, Izumi sleepily sat up in bed. She had fallen asleep on the big bed, not even bothering to remove the white sheet that draped over it. Her eyes gazed about the room that Anna had said was to be hers. Unlike the apartment in Tokyo, this room had two windows, all her own! Izumi eagerly stepped up to the closest window near the bed, and looked out.

The window faced south, looking straight into Chaumont Bay. As the afternoon faded fast into evening, the sun slowly sank in the horizon. The sky was clear, belying the fact that the day before, was storm-tossed and angry. Now, all was forgiven, and the bay sank into a restful peace that spoke to Izumi's heart. How different this place was from Tokyo! The busy Japanese city never slept, for noise from the streets below always emanated into the apartment. It was a constancy which Izumi had taken for granted. Here, the only thing she could hear were the waves, gently lapping upon the beach, and the occasional gull gliding across the sky.

To the right of this view, stood a small house, encircled by a white picket fence, happily basking in the twilight. Along the front of the house, ran a long porch, covered in screen, creating a shelter from insects and bugs. Inside, she could see a porch swing, rocking gently in the breeze. The house was painted a soft yellow, "just like the color of the sun when it rises from the night," Izumi noted. In front of the porch, lay a thick bed of white and yellow flowers. To her delight, she noticed they were tulips. If she stood in the breeze just right, Izumi could smell their fragrance from her window.

The scene spread before Izumi, as if on display just for her. Izumi struggled to swallow the tears she felt inside.

"If I could experience, for just one day, a rest as peaceful and quiet as this, I would be content to die tomorrow." She spoke this under her breath, sincerely meaning every word.

"I wonder who lives there," she thought, wishing for a look at the inside of such a happy home. Izumi stood there, lost in her imagination.

When Izumi finally turned from the view at the window, she was frightened to notice that nightfall had plunged her room into darkness. Izumi's heart began to pound in her ears, for she had a deep rooted fear of the dark. Something about it made her feel smothered, and frightened. Then the memory of her father's hands came rushing back, with all the intensity of the terror they had tried to inflict. Izumi crouched in the corner trembling, desperately trying to think of something else. God saw her huddled in the corner, and took pity. He sent the moon, and flooded her room with a soft light.

Izumi's eyes cautiously peeked over her knees. The room had transformed into a beautiful hue of silver. Relieved to see the light, she got up and crossed the room to her bed. Izumi slowly moved the heavy bed across the floor, scooting it flat up against the south window where the moon's light was the brightest. Now she could sleep in it's light. To Izumi, light meant safety.

Content with the change, Izumi opened the bedroom door, and went in search of her mother.

"Thou God seest me"

~ Genesis 16:13 ~

Chapter Nine

Joy in the Morning

"Until the day break, and the shadows flee away, I will get me to the mountain of myrrh, and to the hill of frankincense."

~ Song of Solomon 4:6 ~

Izumi slowly navigated herself through the hallway, checking each room as she went. At the end of the hall, lay a pile of suitcases, stacked against the right side of a closed door. Izumi turned the handle, and found it had been locked. Her mother was in there, she was sure. The night before, Izumi remembered that Anna said it was the room she had had as a girl. Her hurt voice broke the silence.

"Please let me in." The only reply to her plea, were the sounds of the waves on the beach. Loneliness filled her being, and echoed through every nerve of her body, making Izumi feel sick inside. Holding her stomach, she ran to the front door, and lost what little food she had, to the bush beside the steps.

Anna had heard her daughter standing in the hall, but said nothing. Hatred had grown inside of her heart as a tall tree, rooted in bitterness. She cast off her daughter's love as a dirty rag, as something to be despised. This had been the upbringing that Izumi's parents had given her. Surely, the poet David, had someone like Izumi Mizukiyo in mind when he wrote these inspired words:

"Oh that I had wings like a dove! for then would I fly away, and be at rest. Lo, then would I wander far off, and remain in the wilderness. Selah. I would hasten my escape from the windy storm and tempest."

~ Psalm 55:6-8 ~

Anna's hate drove Izumi into the night. She wandered onto the beach, rigidly staring at the waves. The thought crossed her mind to end it all, here and now. No more trouble, no more pain. "No one cares whether I live or die," she thought. Izumi slowly approached the water.

Suddenly, Izumi was aware that she was not alone. She saw someone standing beside her, looking down into her face. She turned to leave, but a familiar voice halted her retreat.

"What on earth were you trying to do?" Izumi looked up to see the young man who introduced himself as John Johannes on the bus. Izumi's mind and heart were numb. Silence was the easiest reply.

"Answer me!" John was becoming more alarmed by the moment. She hung her head. By this action, John knew he had guessed right.

Partly out of relief that he had been there to stop her, and partly out of anger for what she had just tried to do, he began to quickly pace up and down the beach. "Why is it, that every time I run into you, I have my heart broken?" His pace became slower, however, for Izumi began to cry. She sank to the sand, burying her head in her knees.

With a deep groan, John sat down beside her. "Don't cry. God hasn't forgotten you, even though it feels like it right now." John looked at the hidden head, still crying into her lap.

"Don't believe me? Let me tell you something. I was fast asleep, minding my own business, when a strange feeling woke me up. Do you know what it was?" John asked her, hoping to make her respond. The crying became quieter. Content that his distraction was working, he continued.

"I had the most acute attack of loneliness that I have ever experienced. The feeling was so strong, that I almost couldn't breath. (glancing at Izumi) I went for a walk to get some air, and found you here." Izumi had stopped crying and was listening to what he said, though her head was still hidden. "And glad I am, that I found you when I did. The world would have been a sadder place, if you were no longer in it."

Izumi peeked out from her hiding place. He smiled the smile Izumi had remembered so well at the airport. "You see, God sent me out here, at two in the morning, to stop you. He KNEW you were lonely, and pulled me out of bed to prove it to you. As Christ said: 'Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?'" (Matthew 6:26)

Izumi was comforted by that thought, and wanted to tell John so, but she was still too shy to come out of hiding. John was content that the danger had been averted, for the moment. "You must promise me something, and I want to hear you say it. You must promise me never, ever, to attempt that again," he said sternly. John heard a muffled "I promise," come from her direction. "Speak louder," he half shouted, hoping to extract her head from the lap.

"I promise!" she exclaimed, forgetting to hide her face.

"That's more like it," said John, a bit more relieved. "You know, whenever you need help, you should ask God. I think He has proven to you that He can help, and is willing to help, if you will only ask. The Bible says: 'Ye have not, because ye ask not.' (James 4:2)" John continued, seeing the girl was listening. "But take care not to have sin in your heart, for 'If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me' (Psalm 66:18). God is only obligated to hear the prayers of the

righteous, and if I were you, I would make sure that group included me." John paused, "Would you like to become a Christian? It's the only way to stop something like this from ever happening again."

Growing concerned that he was going too fast for her, he decided to remain silent, and give her a chance to speak. She remained quiet for so long, that with a disappointed heart, he turned his eyes to the bay.

Gathering all the courage Izumi could muster, she asked, "If I became a Christian, would that mean God would have to listen, and answer, when I ask?" John, more relieved than his face showed, nodded his head, and looked at the small girl sitting beside him. "Confess all known sins to God, right now, and ask Him for the Holy Spirit. Then, believe that He will keep His word, for 'God is not a man, that He should lie'" (Numbers 23:19). John paused, "Do you understand what I'm talking about?"

Izumi understood. She had heard Anna curse God time and again, for doing- or not doing- something she had ordered. If God did not hear her mother, because she had sin in her heart, then Izumi knew what sin was. "I understand more than you think I do," she responded. John smiled again, "That's a good sign," he thought. They bowed their heads, and with John's help, Izumi surrendered her life to Jesus.

When they had finished, John looked up, and noticed a bright- eyed face staring back. "Thank you, I feel much better," she said happily.

"If she feels this good, then she did understand what I was saying," thought John, more relieved than he was before.

"Look," he said, pointing to the horizon, "a new day, for a new beginning."

"A new day, a new beginning, and a new year," Izumi revised. John raised his eyebrows. "Is today your birthday?" he asked.

Suddenly, aware of what she had just said, Izumi nodded silently. Many times, when the special day arrived, Izumi had kept silent, for her mother had made it clear that she did not want to be reminded of "that day."

"How are you going to celebrate?" asked John, momentarily forgetting Izumi's hateful mother. However, Izumi's silence, soon reminded him. "This child breaks my heart," he thought to himself.

"Do you think your mother would miss you for a few hours today?"

Izumi looked up, wonderingly. "I don't think so."

"I'll come by your house at (glancing at his watch) eleven this afternoon. We'll go somewhere and celebrate your birthday, OK?" Izumi wanted to say something, but could not. No one had ever taken an interest in her birthday before. Up till now, she had always celebrated it by herself. The fact that she was alone on that day, of all days, always made her loneliness more acute than usual. Here was someone who wanted to spend "that day" with her! The thought was more than she was prepared to take. Burying her head in her lap, she began to cry once more.

John patted her on the head. "Poor kid." After ten minutes passed, and Izumi quieted down, John looked at his watch again. "You had better go home now... say, what is your name?" It had never occurred to him to ask, before now. Izumi giggled. She had been wondering when that question would occur to him. John smiled, for it was good to see her happy again. Izumi got up, brushing the sand from her uniform. She made a small bow, introducing herself.

"Watakushi no name wa, Izumi Mizukiyo desu." Covering her mouth with her hand, Izumi giggled to see John's puzzled expression. "I said, 'My name is Izumi Mizukiyo.'"

"Nice to meet you," he said, getting up, and brushing the sand off his blue jeans. "Your name is quite a mouthful. What does it mean?"

"'Izumi' means 'beautiful fountain' and 'Mizukiyo' means 'pure water.'" She was embarrassed, but he had asked. John looked into her face. The sun's morning light shone softly, illuminating her blue eyes.

"It suits you well," he said quietly, with a half smile. Izumi blushed. She was about to say "thank you", when he interrupted her thought. "You had better go home and get some sleep. Until eleven," he nodded in her direction, and abruptly walked away.

Izumi ran home, with a happy heart, hastily returning to the refuge of her room.

"Sing unto the LORD, O ye saints of His, and give thanks at the remembrance of His holiness. For His anger endureth but a moment; in His favour is life: weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning."

~ Psalm 30:4-5 ~

"Unless the LORD had been my help, my soul had almost dwelt in silence." ~ Psalm 94:17 ~

Chapter Ten
Anticipation

"The meek ... shall increase their joy in the LORD"
~ Isaiah 29:19 ~

John had told her to get some sleep, but she could not obey. Excitement raced through every nerve of her body, as she thought of what had happened that morning. God had stepped into her life, transforming night into day. Before she did anything else, Izumi got down on her knees, and closed her eyes.

"Dear God, thank you, so much, for John. Please make me a good Christian. And most of all, thank you for not forgetting me." Standing up, she danced around the room, careful not to make any noise. Suddenly, a terrible thought came to her. She opened the door to the adjoining bathroom, and peered into the mirror. Izumi let out a small groan. The white sheet that covered her bed, had not been removed before she fell asleep on it the night before. A thick layer of fine dust had settled on top of the sheet, and to her dismay, had coated her face, her hair, and the slept- in school uniform.

"What he must think of me!" exclaimed Izumi out loud. She had a lot of work to do before eleven o'clock. Tip-toeing down the hall, Izumi unstacked her suitcase, and returned to her room. First removing the dirty white sheet, Izumi lifted the suitcase onto her bed. She opened it, shaking her head. She had packed so hurriedly, that not many items of clothing had made it to America. Strewing the contents on the bed, she pulled out her socks, an old nightgown, and a beloved doll. She soon discovered, to her dismay, that everything else was "junk."

"God, please help me," she silently pleaded. Returning to the bathroom, Izumi decided to clean what she could help. She hand-washed her clothes in the bathroom sink, and took a bath, for there was no shower. She got into her old nightgown and hung her wet clothes in the sunlight of her room.

"If only I didn't have to wear my school uniform, today, of all days!" she exclaimed. She thought of opening her mother's suitcase, and borrowing some of her clothes. Anna was much taller than Izumi, but anything seemed better than her uniform. She paced the floor, asking God for wisdom. There was only one thing standing in her way, Anna. As long as Izumi did not do anything that affected her mother, she was more likely to be left alone. And Izumi desperately wanted to be left alone today. Except for John, of course.

No, she would wear her uniform. Thanking God for the decision, she glanced at the clock hanging on the wall. It read nine o'clock. She would have time to dry her clothes.

Izumi climbed up onto her bed, and put her arms upon the sill, resting her chin on them. She took in the beauty of Chaumont Bay, silently rapturing with every wave. The calming rhythm relaxed her, for soon, she was asleep.

With a sudden start, Izumi woke up. She looked at the clock. It was ten forty-four am. With a hurried gasp, Izumi rushed to her uniform. It was very damp, and still wrinkled. Izumi had hoped it would look better than it did. She pushed aside her disappointed tears, and got dressed. Izumi brushed her hair with her fingers, and stood in front of the mirror, testing the over all effect. To her disgust, she still had the appearance of a little girl. "Oh well," she sighed, trying to conceal her disappointment from herself.

Izumi tip-toed down the hall, and past Anna's still closed door. She opened the front door, and sat down on the steps. The sun was shining warmly, but there was a cool breeze from the bay, that made Izumi shiver in her damp clothes. She suddenly had a terrible thought, "He never asked where I live!" Her horror was short-lived, however, for John soon appeared, coming up the walk.

"Be of good comfort, rise; He calleth thee."

~ Mark 10:49 ~

Chapter Eleven
Shame the Sea

"Behold, I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with change of raiment."

~ Zechariah 3:4 ~

Izumi ran down the steps to meet John, a big smile on her face. John was dressed in a new pair of blue jeans and a black jacket, for the breeze was chilly.

"Ready?" he asked, quickly glancing at Izumi. She nodded, suddenly becoming shy. They walked down the sidewalk, and crossed a street, all the while remaining silent. Izumi watched the people passing them, carrying fishing rods and wearing caps that had dozens of fish hooks encompassing their heads. Her curiosity remained silent, however, for she did not think John looked like answering questions. They entered the cool restaurant, chilling Izumi in her damp clothes. John heard the sound of chattering teeth coming from behind his back. When he turned around, he noticed the sound was coming from Izumi.

"Are you cold?" he asked placing his hand on Izumi's arm. "Of course you are," he answered, not waiting for her reply, "your clothes are wet through!" John pushed her back outside. "We're going back to your house right now! You'll catch pneumonia!" He started back in the direction of her home, not waiting for Izumi's explanation. He had gone five steps before he heard her voice call him back.

"Aren't you coming?" he asked, surprised to see her still standing where he had left her. She shook her head, ashamed of what she had to tell him.

"When my mother and I left Tokyo, we packed in such a hurry..." she paused, "this is all I have." She turned her back to John, so he would not see her tears. She had tried so hard to make this a perfect day. Izumi heard John's footsteps stop behind her.

"You've had it tough, haven't you?" he said in a low voice. Izumi quickly dried her tears, for people were giving them odd looks. Sensing what Izumi was feeling, John guided her to a sidewalk, and led her to the front of a clothing store. He took some money from his pocket, and handed it to Izumi. She stared at his gesture, unsure of what he meant. "Take it," he coaxed. "Think of it as a birthday present. I'll wait out here." Izumi was about to say "thank you" when he interrupted her with, "Go on." With a bowed head, but a happy heart, she stepped in, leaving John to wait outside.

The sales clerk watched, as a pretty Japanese girl walked from one clothes rack to the next, looking completely lost.

Izumi jumped when she heard a voice behind her ask, "May I help you?" An elderly woman smiled down at her, peering over her bi-focals. "Do you know what you're looking for, young lady?" The woman's voice was kind and reassuring to Izumi's ears.

Gathering the small reserve of bravado that Izumi had left, she casually replied, "Yes, I'm looking for a dress. Something that the women around here wear," she added.

"I see," the woman said knowingly. She had noticed, upon closer inspection, that Izumi was older than her clothes had betrayed. "I think I have just the thing," she said, leading her to the opposite end of the store. "This is the women's department," she said, inspecting Izumi's height. "Yes, I think I have just the thing," she repeated, searching through a nearby clothes rack.

"Here it is!" she exclaimed, pulling out a sapphire blue dress. "Your eyes are so blue, they could shame the sea," said the smiling woman. "This dress will compliment them. Go over to the dressing room, and try it on. See if I'm not right." Izumi obeyed. She soon had it on. It was the most beautiful dress she had ever seen.

"See, I was right," the kind woman nodded in approval, "this dress goes well with any occasion, but not so dressy that you couldn't wear it as an everyday either." Izumi looked in the full-length mirror. Now she looked grown up. With a deep sigh of satisfaction, Izumi followed the woman to the cash register, and handed over the money John had given her.

She heard the cash register ring out. "Your change, and your receipt. Have a nice day!"

"Thank you," said Izumi gratefully. The woman waved good bye, and returned to her work.

Izumi stepped outside, carrying a small bag that held her uniform. She spotted John, leaning against the store window, patiently waiting for her to come out. "Do you like it?" she said. Her voice made John look up suddenly.

Before him stood a woman, not a girl. He stared at her, trying to find the dirty faced little girl he had witnessed to on the beach the night before.

"Isn't it the most beautiful dress you have ever seen?" she asked excitedly, running her hand along the blue folds.

"Did you say something about 'beautiful'?" he stammered, only half listening to what Izumi had said.

"I said, 'Isn't it the most beautiful dress you have ever seen?'" she repeated, delighted that he, for once, was speechless.

"No, I have seen prettier dresses," he disagreed, "but then, none of them were on you." Izumi stood still. John was looking at her differently.

"Thank you," she said softly, looking down at the sidewalk.

"For telling the truth?" asked John, half jokingly. Izumi was very serious, however.

"I wanted to thank you for something you did once, even though you thought I didn't know." The air around John began to grow warm, even though they were standing in the shade. "On the flight here," she continued, "I was so terrified. My world had just been turned up-side down, and then I was traveling to some strange place. I know my mother hates me," she paused, "and I know she left me alone on the airplane. But, when she left, someone took her place beside me, and stayed with me the whole night." John looked away, fighting to keep his composure. "I never opened my eyes, but I know it was you. It meant everything to me, and I wanted you to know it." John was silent.

"You always know how to break my heart, don't you?" he said, quietly. Izumi sensed John was struggling with something, but kept silent. "It's getting late, and you still haven't had your birthday lunch." John started back in the direction of the seafood restaurant, with Izumi following close behind.

"Turn away thine eyes from me, for they have overcome me."
~ Song of Solomon 6:5 ~

Chapter Twelve

He Will Never Forget

"He that is of a merry heart hath a continual feast."

~ Proverbs 15:15 ~

The lunch hour crowd had eaten, giving the restaurant a deserted look. Izumi was glad to see that the people were gone. John pulled out her chair, motioning for her to sit in it, for Izumi acted as if she did not understand. John sat down across from her, and ordered their lunch. He looked at her, shaking his head.

"How old are you?"

"I turn eighteen, today," she replied, smiling. John shook his head again.

"You sure grew up fast," he sighed.

"It's the new dress. It makes me look older," Izumi reasoned.

"No, it's more than the dress. It's you. I don't see how I could have missed it."

"How old are you?" she asked, curiously.

"A very old twenty-four," John answered jokingly. The waiter came around with their lunch. John bowed his head, with Izumi following his example, and prayed. Then she took a bite of fish.

"This fish is delicious!" she exclaimed.

"It was caught right here in Three Mile Bay. It's one of the largest freshwater bays in the world. People love to come here, especially in the summertime, and do nothing but fish."

"Is that what those people outside are dressed for?" exclaimed Izumi. "I was wondering if everyone in America went around looking like that," she said pointing to someone walking down the street, fishing rod in hand, and wearing a big hat full of fishing hooks. John chuckled.

"How did you know where I live?" she asked suddenly. John looked up from his plate.

"I have a confession to make. I followed you and your mother when you got off the bus. I was afraid you would get lost," he explained, seeing Izumi's happy grin.

"Why don't you ever use my name? Is it so hard to pronounce?" Izumi had noticed that he never spoke her name. John put down his fork, and stared at her.

"Are you always this talkative during a meal?" he asked, trying to conceal a smile. "I never call you by your name, because I call you something else." Izumi could see he was avoiding the question, and wanted to know what name he had given her. She opened her mouth to ask, but he saw the question coming, and quickly changed the subject.

"Eat." He pointed to her plate, and took another bite of his fish. Izumi silently obeyed, following John's example. She would have to remember to ask again, some other time.

John finished before Izumi, for he had eaten quickly. Izumi noticed he kept looking at his watch, as if to hurry her on. She quickly finished her meal.

"What's wrong?"

"I want to get you back home before your mother notices you are missing." He paused, "If she asks you where you have been, tell her you were with 'a friend.' The last thing I want, is for you to get in trouble. Which reminds me, you had better go to the ladies' room and change back into your uniform. Show your mother the dress, when you think it's safe." Izumi sat silently. She had forgotten about Anna. A cold shiver went up her back. It was going to be hard to go back home. John sensed what she was feeling.

"When a man's ways please the LORD, He maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him," (Proverbs 16:7) he encouraged. Izumi smiled sadly and went to the ladies' room. She soon returned in her school uniform. John touched her sleeve. "Good, it's dry." He got up and paid the bill. They stepped out into the cool evening air, inhaling the fresh breeze that blew in gusts about them. They started walking back to Izumi's home.

"You don't look like a child anymore, even in that school uniform," he observed outloud. Izumi's heart was filled to the brim. She had had the happiest birthday of her entire life.

"Thank you for the birthday lunch, and the blue dress, John. This was the happiest day of my life!" She looked up at the sky and began counting the faint stars that were fast appearing with the approach of night. Anything was possible, today.

John smiled weakly, refusing to take part in Izumi's happy spirit. He knew, from observation, that her mother could put out any happiness Izumi was feeling right now, with very little effort. The closer they reached her home, the more John grew concerned.

When her home was finally in view, John pulled her aside.

"Do you see that yellow house?" he asked, pointing in the direction of the beach. Izumi nodded. It was the same house she had been admiring, yesterday. "If you ever need help, go there. That's where I live," he added, by way of an explanation. John searched his left hip pocket, and pulled out a small card. "These are some verses that I claim when I'm afraid. Take it," he said, shoving it into her hand. "Remember, you are a child of God. He will NEVER forget you... and neither will I," he added quietly.

"Now go." John pushed her away, and watched her form disappear behind the front door of her home.

As he saw the door close, he whispered, "God, protect her."

"Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the [daughter] of her womb? yea, [she] may forget, yet will I not forget thee."

~ Isaiah 49:15 ~

Chapter Thirteen

On Fire

"Deliver me out of the mire, and let me not sink: let me be delivered from them that hate me, and out of the deep waters."

~ Psalm 69:14 ~

Izumi closed the front door, to find her mother pacing the floor. Izumi was ready to give the answer John had told her to say, but Anna didn't ask any questions. Instead, she glared at her daughter, with an intense hatred that scared Izumi. She held on tightly to the card John had given her, as if her life depended on it.

"It's your fault," said Anna, twisting the pillow she held tightly in her arms. "I never had any trouble until the day you were born." Izumi froze. "Yoichi loved me," she stated firmly, pacing the floor once more, "until he saw you." Izumi sank to the floor, stunned by what her mother had just said.

Yoichi had, on several occasions, made advances toward Izumi that were unnatural for a father to feel for his daughter. Izumi had successfully discouraged him, however, by sleeping in front of the window, in the moonlight. Her father did not like the light, for it was too revealing. As long as she stayed there, she remained safe. Izumi had always thought it lucky that none of her father's attempts were successful. But as she sat on the floor, listening to her mother's wickedness, she realized that God had not forgotten her, even then. She opened her hand, and read the card that John had shoved into it, before sending her inside. "He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love. ~ 1 John 4:8 ~", and "If God be for us, who can be against us? ~ Romans 8:31 ~" They were only a few of the many verses that John had crammed onto the card, but these two stood out from the rest. When Izumi turned the card over, it said, in bold letters, "COURAGE." A flood of peace rushed into Izumi's heart. She looked at her mother. It was time for her to speak. Anna was shocked to see her daughter get up from the floor, and look straight into her face.

"All my life, I have been fighting for your love. I thought I could not live without it. But, I was wrong. I have learned what true love is, and you have shown me what it is not. This family has never loved, for we have never known God. 'He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love,'" she quoted. "Yesterday, I asked God to never forget me. Today, I discovered that He never forgot, even before I became a Christian." Anna slapped Izumi when she heard the word "Christian." The slap stung her face, but Izumi was glad she had spoken when she did. When Anna saw that her daughter was no longer afraid of her, she began to gather their luggage.

Izumi quickly opened the front door, fleeing from the house as if it were on fire. She raced to John's home, praying he would be there. As she neared his gate, Izumi saw someone suddenly get up from the porch swing, causing it to rock violently. John appeared from the shadows, running to meet her at the gate. He quickly inspected her, making sure she was all right.

"Thank God," she heard him say, in a low voice. Before she could open her mouth, John had her by the hand. "I'm never letting you out of my sight, again!" Izumi smiled in amazement.

"Where are we going?" she asked, as he strode rapidly down the walk, dragging her behind.

"We're getting married," he stated, matter-of-factly. John suddenly swerved, facing Izumi.

"Unless, you don't want to marry me. I can't offer you very much... except myself."

"I wouldn't marry you for anything less. Oh John, I love you so much," she whispered. "God knew what He was doing, when he brought us together." Izumi could read the consolation on John's face.

"I've always said you knew how to break my heart."

"Get used to it," teased Izumi, smiling through her tears. John quickly resumed his brisk walk, for the sooner they were married, the better.

"God setteth the solitary in families: He bringeth out those which are bound with chains: but the rebellious dwell in a dry land."

~ Psalm 68:6 ~

Chapter Fourteen

My Little Dove

"Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other."

~ Psalm 85:10 ~

John quickly found his way to the justice of the peace, who lived in a small room adjoining the church. John knocked at the church door, until the old man appeared, obviously being disturbed from a good night's rest. Upon seeing the young couple at the door, he nodded knowingly.

"You want to get married," he said, pretending to be surprised. The old man guided them to the back of the church, leading them to a small desk.

"I need you two to fill out these papers." The old man looked at Izumi. "Young lady, are you an American citizen?" Izumi turned around, with her back to the two men, for only a moment. When she again faced them, she was holding a very small bundle of documents.

"Mother gave these for me to carry, on the airplane," she explained, more for John's sake than the old man's. She unfolded her birth certificate and handed it to the justice of the peace. He examined it with an experienced eye.

"It says here, that you were born in Tokyo, Japan, making you an alien," he pronounced, authoritatively.

"What does that mean?" asked John, in a concerned voice.

"It means, young man, that you must fill out these papers, also." He handed John another stack of forms. The old man walked away, chuckling to himself.

Izumi gave John her passport, along with the other certificates Anna had entrusted her with. Anna had known her daughter hardly ever lost anything, so Izumi was the most logical person to carry such important documents. She never would have done that, however, if she had known how they were to be used against her. John asked her questions, and Izumi answered them, nervously watching the church door for her mother. When they had completed the task, the old man inspected each form, pronouncing that they were in order.

The old man led them to the pulpit, placing John on the right, and Izumi on the left. He started to begin, but noticed he had no witnesses. "Wait here," he said, hurrying to another room. He soon reappeared, with his wife, and the janitor. Both looked like they had just been awoken from

their sleep. John and Izumi watched nervously, as the two new participants took their places. The old man took his place on a small step and began:

"Dearly beloved, we are gathered together here in the sight of God, and in the face of this congregation, to join together this man and this woman in holy matrimony; which is an honourable estate, instituted of God in the time of man's innocency, signifying unto us the mystical union that is betwixt Christ and His Church; therefore is not by any to be enterprised, nor taken in hand, unadvisedly, lightly, or wantonly, to satisfy men's carnal lusts and appetites, like brute beasts that have no understanding; but reverently, discreetly, advisedly, soberly, and in the fear of God; duly considering the causes for which matrimony was ordained.

First, it was ordained for the procreation of children, to be brought up in the fear and nurture of the Lord, and to the praise of His holy Name. Secondly, It was ordained for a remedy against sin, and to avoid fornication; that such persons as have not the gift of continency might marry, and keep themselves undefiled members of Christ's body. Thirdly, It was ordained for the mutual society, help, and comfort, that the one ought to have of the other, both in prosperity and adversity. Into which holy estate these two persons present come now to be joined. Therefore if any man can shew any just cause, why they may not lawfully be joined together, let him now speak, or else hereafter for ever hold his peace." Izumi nervously glanced around the room, praying that no one would speak. Satisfied that he had waited long enough, the old man continued, unhindered.

"John James Johannes, wilt thou have this woman to thy wedded wife, to live together after God's ordinance in the holy estate of matrimony? Wilt thou love her, comfort her, honour, and keep her in sickness and in health; and, forsaking all other, keep thee only unto her, so long as ye both shall live?" John looked into Izumi's shimmering eyes.

"I will."

The old man turned to Izumi. "Izumi Mizukiyo, wilt thou have this man to thy wedded husband, to live together after God's ordinance in the holy estate of matrimony? Wilt thou obey him, and serve him, love, honour, and keep him in sickness and in health; and, forsaking all other, keep thee only unto him, so long as ye both shall live?" Izumi felt faint, but when she looked into John's eyes, her consciousness returned.

"I will."

"Who gives this woman to be married to this man?" The janitor stepped forward.

"I do."

"Take her right hand," said the old man to John, "and repeat after me." John carefully held Izumi's hand, feeling her rapid pulse. He gave it a squeeze, and smiled.

"I, John James Johannes, take thee, Izumi Mizukiyo, to my wedded Wife, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death us do part, according to God's holy ordinance; and thereto I plight thee my troth." John repeated the words soberly, fully comprehending the promise he was making.

"Take his right hand," said the old man to Izumi, "and repeat after me." Izumi held John's big hand in hers.

"I, Izumi Mizukiyo, take thee, John James Johannes, to my wedded husband, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love, cherish, and to obey, till death us do part, according to God's holy ordinance; and thereto I give thee my troth." Izumi gazed at John, happily.

"May I have the ring?" the old man asked John. John leaned over, whispering something in his ear. "It's all right, young man," he said. "I have a ring here for just such emergencies." The old man procured a gold band from his pocket. He handed the ring to John. "Place the ring on the fourth finger of her left hand, and repeat after me." John took Izumi's left hand, and placed the ring on her finger.

"With this ring, I thee wed: In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen."

"Let us pray. O Eternal God, Creator and Preserver of all mankind, Giver of all spiritual grace, the Author of everlasting life; Send thy blessing upon these thy servants, this man and this woman, whom we bless in Thy Name; that, as Isaac and Rebecca lived faithfully together, so these persons may surely perform and keep the vow and covenant betwixt them made, whereof this ring given and received is a token and pledge, and may ever remain in perfect love and peace together, and live according to Thy laws; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen." The old man joined their hands, saying,

"Those whom God hath joined together let no man put asunder. Forasmuch as John James Johannes and Izumi Mizukiyo have consented together in holy wedlock, and have witnessed the same before God and this company, and thereto have given and pledged their troth either to other, and have declared the same by giving and receiving of a ring, and by joining of hands; I

pronounce that they be man and wife together, in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen." The old man looked at them kindly.

"God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Ghost, bless, preserve, and keep you; the Lord mercifully with His favour look upon you; and so fill you with all spiritual benediction and grace, that ye may so live together in this life, that in the world to come ye may have life everlasting. Amen." The old man stood there, near tears, again.

"You may kiss the bride," he added, smiling ear to ear. John bent over and kissed Izumi.

After receiving their marriage certificate, Mr. and Mrs. John Johannes stepped out into the cool night air. The moon was shining brightly in the dark sky, gently illuminating Three Mile Bay.

"You are all mine, Little Dove. I'll never let you go," he whispered, embracing Izumi tightly. "All my love, all my life." Izumi closed her eyes, resting her head on John's shoulder. Never had she experienced a love so pure, and so tender as she was feeling now.

"Thank you, God," was all she could say. They quietly walked off into the night, rejoicing in the precious gift God had given them. As John rejoiced with his bride, so Christ waits to rejoice with us. Oh, let the Spirit and the Bride say "Come!" Even so, come quickly, Lord Jesus.

"As a young man marrieth a virgin ... and as the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride, so shall thy God rejoice over thee."

~ Isaiah 62:5 ~

"What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder."

~ Mark 10:9 ~

Chapter Fifteen

From This Day Forward

"How fair is thy love, My sister, My spouse! how much better is thy love than wine! and the smell of thine ointments than all spices!"

~ Song of Solomon 4:10 ~

The cold night air enfolded John and Izumi Johannes as they slowly walked back to the little yellow house. Chaumont Bay reflected the moonlight, giving the appearance of two moons. Izumi rested her head on John's shoulder. The peacefulness of the night mirrored her heart. Was it possible that she was really Mrs. John Johannes? She remembered the vows of the marriage ceremony, that had taken place a little while ago.

"I, John James Johannes, take thee, Izumi Mizukiyo, to my wedded wife, to have and to hold from this day forward..." Izumi stood still.

"What's the matter, Little Dove?" John stood beside her, gently smiling into her face.

"John, I'm scared."

"What time I am afraid, I will trust in Thee," he reminded. Izumi smiled when she heard the familiar words.

"So that was the magic," she thought outloud.

"Magic?"

"Don't you remember? On the bus ride here, you said those very same words. They gave me such peace, for the darkness outside the bus was no longer terrifying."

"I will always remember that," he said quietly. "When I saw the little-scared-rabbit-look on your face, I HAD to say something." John paused. "Does the darkness usually have that effect on you?" Izumi stared at the ground, trying hard to think of a reply. "No secrets, Dove. Whatever is in your heart, will spill over into mine."

"My father," she slowly began, "would try to hurt me in the dark. He never succeeded, though," she quickly added, seeing John's alarmed face. "God always sent the moon's light to my rescue. As long as I stayed in the light, I was safe." John looked at the bay thoughtfully.

"Thank God, that part of your life is forever over." He put an arm around his wife. "Just now, when you said you were frightened, what were you frightened of? Not me, I hope," John added jokingly. A shy smile parted Izumi's lips.

"No, not you. Tonight, you said 'to have and to hold from this day forward.'"

"That's what I intend to do," said John seriously.

"Are you sure you want to spend 'from this day forward' with me?" The years of neglect from her parents made Izumi incredulous that anyone could possibly want HER. It was just too good to be true.

"With God's grace, I will have and hold you from this day forward... forever. Never doubt that," he said firmly.

"It's too good to be true," she said, repeating her thought. John shook his head in disagreement.

"With God, all things are possible." Izumi hugged John, as they resumed their walking. When her grandparents' home was in sight, John quickened the pace. After reaching the little yellow house, he placed her on the porch swing.

"Stay here. I must go speak to your mother." Izumi looked up into John's steady face.

"Why? Let's not spoil this night," she pleaded.

"Nothing your mother can say or do, could spoil what has happened today. I must tell her. I don't want the police to show up at our doorstep, searching for you." John squeezed Izumi's hand reassuringly. "She must know." Izumi remained silent. Her mother had always extinguished any happiness she had ever tried to share. Since today was the happiest day of her life, the threat was even greater. John watched in silence, as his wife struggled with her emotions. It pained him to see how much Izumi dreaded her mother, but it was growing late.

"I must go, Little Dove. Stay here, and keep quiet. I'll be back soon." He kissed her, then quickly made his way down the walk. Izumi hid in the screened porch, John's sweet kiss still on her lips. She pulled out the card he had given her earlier that evening. She read Romans chapter eight, verses thirty-eight and thirty-nine.

"I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to

separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." These words, coupled with John's confidence, gave her courage.

"Thy lips, O my Spouse, drop as the honeycomb: honey and milk are under Thy tongue; and the smell of Thy garments is like the smell of Lebanon."

~ Song of Solomon 4:11 ~

Chapter Sixteen
She Must Know

"Speak not in the ears of a fool: for [she] will despise the wisdom of thy words."
~ Proverbs 23:9 ~

John hurried down the walk, preparing his thoughts. When he reached Mrs. Mizukiyo's door, he paused.

"God, give me wisdom." John rang the door bell. A tall blonde headed woman opened the door.

"What do you want?" Anna's voice sounded as cold as her stare.

"Are you Mrs. Mizukiyo?" asked John, full knowing that it was her.

"That's my name."

"I have come to tell you that your daughter, Izumi, was married tonight." John spoke without any hesitation. If he was nervous, he did not let it show.

She clenched her jaw. It was not Izumi's nature to go against her. Someone had put her daughter up to this. "Who did she marry?" Anna demanded.

"She married me." Mrs. Mizukiyo looked him over. His grey eyes had an intensity which she could not avoid.

"Aren't you the one who spoke to me on the bus? Yes," she remembered, "you wouldn't shut up about God. So that's where she got this 'Christian' business! You bring her home immediately!" Anna's eyes flared. "She is MY daughter!" John met her fiery glare with a calm that Anna found unnerving.

"Izumi is home, Mrs. Mizukiyo. She is my wife - I will not let her go." John continued, "I have come for her things." Anna could not stop him from entering. He saw Izumi's shopping bag beside the door, the blue dress still inside. He picked it up, and walked over to the pile of suitcases on the couch.

"What did she tell you about me?" questioned Anna. John remained silent as he opened each suitcase, trying to locate Izumi's.

"Did she tell you her father jumped off a bridge? Did she tell you..."

"Mrs. Mizukiyo," John interrupted, "if you have something to tell me, please come out and say it." He spotted a small doll in one of the suitcases. Content that the bag was Izumi's, he picked it up, ready to leave. Anna stood in the doorway, blocking his exit.

"If you refuse to bring her home, don't ever send her back."

"I don't intend to."

Anna despised her daughter more than ever. Why should her child, who gave her nothing but trouble, have such a refuge? Yoichi never protected her as this young man was protecting Izumi. Anna moved aside, realizing that he would not be stopped. John stepped back into the cold night air, relieved that his errand was over. As he walked away, he could hear footsteps following his. He came to a dead stop, and turned to see Anna standing close behind him.

"I want to see my daughter! If I can't force you to bring her home, I'll do it myself! Where is she?"

"Go home, Mrs. Mizukiyo. There is nothing for you here." Why was she fighting this change? Here was a chance to be rid of her curse.

"You want her? Then take her!" she shouted, quickly returning to the house. John shook his head sadly.

"God, cause her wickedness to correct her, and her backslidings to reprove her, so that she may know and see that it is an evil thing and bitter, that she has forsaken the LORD." (Jeremiah 2:19) As he turned to resume his walk, John saw Mrs. Mizukiyo leave her childhood home, carrying her luggage. He watched her tall frame disappear into the night.

She didn't look back.

"For my Little Dove's sake, I'm glad to see her go," he gratefully thanked God. Soon after, Izumi saw John come up the walk, her bags in his hands. She ran down the steps and threw herself into John's outstretched arms.

"She knows," he whispered. Any sadness Izumi felt over her mother, was eclipsed by the fact that John had returned, unshaken. As John carried his bride over the threshold, the crickets began to chirp merrily, as if listening to Izumi's heart.

"A man hath joy by the answer of his mouth: and a word spoken in due season, how good is it!"
~ Proverbs 15:23 ~

Chapter Seventeen

Wildflower

"I am my Beloved's, and my Beloved is mine."

~ Song of Solomon 6:3 ~

Izumi had never before experienced what it was like to be loved and cared for by someone unselfishly. She was safe, and protected. As a little wildflower, who was wind-blown and burnt with the sun, abused by this world, she found shade, at last, from a tall green tree who took notice of something so tiny and insignificant. And instead of ignoring the flower's pain, (which it could do very easily from so high a vantage), the tree sheltered it, and tended it. To be content with a discarded bloom, and find in it beauty and fragrance, everything to be desired - only true love can perform such a transformation. So Izumi found refuge in John, and her rest was sweet.

As morning dawned through the window of the little yellow house, Izumi opened her eyes. Careful not to awaken John, she quietly got out of bed and tiptoed to the kitchen. With a quick glance at the bare cupboards and empty refrigerator, came the realization that John was not used to eating at home. She shook her head sadly. With determination, and very little experience, she made up her mind to go to the grocery store. Izumi changed into her new blue dress (the only article of clothing she had, except her school uniforms) and opened John's wallet that lay upon the dresser. It took every ounce of courage she had in her small frame to do something so bold, "But," she reasoned to herself, "he must eat!"

The cool wind from Three Mile Bay perfumed her face as she stepped out into the sunlight. She looked upward, and witnessed several small clouds scudding across the sky, as if bent on a happy errand as she was herself. The path from the little yellow house led to a street teeming with trucks and cars pulling boats much bigger than themselves. Izumi looked about her. People were walking down the sides of the road, fishing poles in one hand, and a tackle box in the other. Izumi followed the road, keeping a lookout for anything resembling a supermarket. The busy street did not bother her. In fact, she was glad to see so many people. It reminded her of Tokyo. Before she had gone very far, she saw a large parking lot packed with cars. People were pushing grocery carts, and unloading them into their cars.

"So this is what a supermarket looks like in America," she mused. In Japan, there are many large stores, but it is rare to find one with a parking lot. Most people carried their groceries, or came prepared with their own carts.

The store doors slid open as she walked through, and a gust of cold air chilled her face. The huge store clamored with the sounds of music playing over the loud speakers, and the sounds of

squeaky carts slowly making their way down the aisles. She walked to the closest aisle and scanned the shelves. For the first time that morning, she felt out of place. Unfamiliar labels proclaimed the virtues of unfamiliar products. For a second or two, she felt like retreating. But, her desire to help John, made her stand fast.

"God, please help me," she silently pleaded.

"May I help you, miss?" asked a short portly man with a balding head. He wore a white coat with a name tag that read, "Store Manager." His short stubby fingers clutched a brown clipboard as he waited for her reply.

"Do you sell Japanese food here?" she asked, her voice betraying her confusion. The short man smiled widely, "Of course!"

A loud speaker crackled as it interrupted the music with, "Manager at checkout five. Manager at checkout five." He motioned to a man who was busy stocking the shelves.

"Show this woman to aisle six." The manager walked away without waiting for a reply. The man obeyed, and Izumi soon found herself on more familiar ground.

"Thank you," she said, as he left. Izumi picked up the items she felt were necessary, and made her way to the checkout. The clock on the wall warned her that the morning was growing late. She sighed as she looked at the several people in line ahead of her.

"I wish they would hurry," she thought. By the time she left the busy store, the sun was burning hotly in the sky. Cars sped by her, as she picked her way through the crowd on the side of the street, her mind bent on getting back home before John awoke. After she had walked some distance, she realized that none of the surroundings around her were familiar.

"I must have went in the wrong direction," she thought, making an effort not to panic. "Help me, God!" she again pleaded.

A young man wearing a white T-shirt passed by her and then abruptly stopped.

"Excuse me, but is your name Izumi?" With a surprised face, she nodded. "John has been looking everywhere for you! You better follow me." He motioned to her to follow him, as he turned in the opposite direction from which she was headed. "I never thought John would get married," he said, shaking his head. "I don't think he's ever looked twice at a girl in his life, let alone get up the courage to ask one to marry him!" He turned to look at Izumi as they walked. Her head was bent, and she remained silent. The young man was obviously curious, but refrained from asking

any questions. The walk that led to the little yellow house, soon told Izumi that she was near home.

"Hey! John! Get out here, I got your wife!" he shouted. Izumi became even more embarrassed than before. When no one came out to meet them, the young man sat down on the porch swing. Izumi ran into the house, and quickly found the bedroom, locking the door behind her. Izumi buried her face in a pillow and let the tears she had been holding back, burst through. John soon made his way up the walk, confident that, wherever his Little Dove was, God was watching out for her.

"So you lost her on the first day," the man on the porch swing joked.

"Did you find her, Terry?" asked John.

"Sure did." He descended the steps, and whispered in John's ear, "I think she was embarrassed. I mean, after all, to go the wrong direction when there were only two directions in the first place! There's only one main road in all of Three..."

"Thank you, Terry," interrupted John.

"Sure, just don't lose her again," said Terry, grinning ear to ear. "Aren't you going to go in?" he teased.

"Aren't you ever going to leave?" asked John, half-jokingly. Terry threw his arms up in the air.

"I know when I'm not wanted!" he exclaimed, sauntering down the walk, mimicking someone who just had his feelings hurt.

"Terry!"

"Yeah?"

"Thanks."

He smiled, and left.

John opened the door, and looked about for Izumi. He saw the grocery bags resting on the table.

"So," he muttered to himself, "that's what my Little Dove was up to." John soon discovered the locked bedroom door.

"Dove, open the door," he said gently. "Please." The heartfelt tone in his voice did not fall on deaf ears. The door opened, and a tear-streaked face met his. John embraced her, and all was well again.

"As the apple tree among the trees of the wood, so is my Beloved among the sons. I sat down under His shadow with great delight, and His fruit was sweet to my taste."

~ Song of Solomon 2:3 ~

Chapter Eighteen
Childhood Friends

"Turn away thine eyes from me, for they have overcome me: thy hair is as a flock of goats that appear from Gilead."

~ Song of Solomon 6:5 ~

Izumi began to prepare their first meal at home, as she busily rushed around the kitchen, setting things in order. John sat at the table, his eyes fixed on her.

"I can't cook while you stare at me!" exclaimed Izumi, who was becoming unnerved by his observation.

"Get used to it, Mrs. Johannes," he replied. However, much to her relief, he got up and left the kitchen. At eleven o' clock, they sat down to breakfast. After John asked God's blessing on the food, he took a bite. Izumi anxiously awaited the verdict. She had prepared a Japanese meal, though more elaborate than the ones she usually made for her parents in Japan. John raised his eyebrows,

"Not bad."

"Then... you like it?" she cautiously asked.

"I'd be hard to please if I didn't," he assured. Satisfied that he was not simply trying to spare her feelings, she relaxed.

"How long have you lived here?" she asked, after she had taken a few bites.

"A few years. Why? Don't you like it here?"

"I'd be hard to please if I didn't."

"Little parrot," he smiled.

"Who was that man who brought me home, John?" She had been wondering all morning, but was too ashamed to ask.

"Oh, you mean Terry? We've been friends since we were kids. He and I are partners. That's right... I never told you what I do, have I?" Izumi shook her head. "Terry and I are independent

contractors, specializing in computer consulting. That's why I was in Japan. A bank wanted us to make their network Y2K compliant. If God hadn't set up that job, we never would have met."

"He knew I needed you," said Izumi. John shook his head.

"No, He knew we needed each other. 'God setteth the solitary in families.'" (Psalm 68:6) They continued the rest of the meal in silence, grateful that the Creator of all, took time to notice the pain and loneliness of someone so small as themselves. Had not King David felt the same in Psalm chapter eight, verse four?

"What is man, that Thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that Thou visitest him?"

For the next week, John and Izumi remained home, enjoying their new found happiness. Terry wisely let the newlyweds alone, with the somewhat sad realization that his buddy now had a new interest.

With your permission, reader, I would like to properly introduce Terry, and provide a brief background, while the newlyweds enjoy their honeymoon. John first met Terry on a playground in elementary school, surrounded by a crowd of noisy children. The children knew he was a foster child that mostly kept to himself, and since he never fought back, he was a prime candidate to torment. Children can be cruel, especially to those who are different from themselves.

John had seen this group of children gather around a boy his own age, calling him names and making fun of him. Indignant, John pushed his way through the small crowd. Terry was sitting on the ground, his arms wrapped around his knees, as if expecting a blow. None of the children had touched him, but experience had taught him at an early age to expect worse. To resist your tormentor, meant worse treatment, and to Terry, this theology applied to everything in life.

"Pick on someone your own size!" shouted John.

"We were just having some fun!" someone retorted.

"Have your fun somewhere else." John always had a look that could penetrate rock, and today was no exception. One by one, the children dispersed. John held out his hand to Terry,

"My name's John. What's yours?"

They have been close friends ever since - sharing everything from their love of God, to their fascination with computers. In fact, even though Terry had an apartment, he would spend most of his nights on John's couch. With this in mind, it is easy to see how Izumi's presence could be considered as an intrusion. However, the more he thought of Izumi, the happier he became for John, and the less sorry he felt for himself. With a sigh, he patiently waited for the honeymoon to end.

"A man that hath friends must show himself friendly: and there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother."

~ Proverbs 18:24 ~

Chapter Nineteen

Closer Than A Brother

"Ointment and perfume rejoice the heart: so doth the sweetness of a man's friend by hearty counsel."

~ Proverbs 27:9 ~

To Terry's joy, he received a phone call from John a little over a week later, inviting him to dinner, so that he could meet Izumi. He was eager for things to return to normal - however normal things can be when your best friend gets married. Upon the appointed day, he knocked on John's door, (something very uncharacteristic for him), and was greeted by his friend.

"You don't have to knock on the door, Terry," said John, noting the strange change in him.

Izumi came from the kitchen looking much happier than the last time he had seen her. The house smelled of - he could'nt recognize the aroma coming from the kitchen - but it smelled good. Terry remained riveted to the floor, and didn't move until John pushed him forward.

"Nice to meet you!" he exclaimed, surprised by John's nudge. He threw John a "why-did-you-do-that?" look. Izumi smiled. She could tell Terry felt out of place.

"Hello, again," she said pleasantly. "I never thanked you for helping me last week. (silence) Thank you, Terry."

"Sure," said Terry, "anytime."

"Sit down. You never needed an invitation before," prodded John.

"You never got married before," Terry said in a half-whisper, tilting his head in John's direction. "Which reminds me," he said, his voice getting louder, "why didn't I get to be best man at your wedding? It's not like I wouldn't have come!"

"We were in a hurry. I guess it just slipped my mind," said John.

"Yeah, I guess it did," said Terry in a hurt tone. Izumi sat quietly as she watched this sad exchange between best friends. She had winced when John used the words "just slipped my mind." The silence that followed was painful to all those present.

"Dinner is ready," she said, trying to be cheerful. John got up and slowly walked to the table in the kitchen, with Terry following behind. Izumi sat down in the chair John pulled out for her. He was just about to pray, when Izumi sprang up and ran to the bathroom. From the sounds coming from the bathroom, they could tell that whatever had been in her stomach, was not there anymore. Concerned for his wife, John jumped up from the table and stood by the bathroom door, unsure what to do.

"Ask her if she's OK," urged Terry, getting up and standing on the other side of the door. John nodded.

"Dove, are you all right?" Leave it to a man to ask the obvious! When he received no response, John turned the door handle. Terry stood back, as he entered.

"She's fainted!" exclaimed John. Terry rushed in to find Izumi in a small heap on the bathroom floor.

"Rub her hands," he said taking Izumi's small hand and rubbing it between his own. She slowly became conscious, and sat up, embarrassed that she had created the concern she saw in their faces.

"I'm all right. I'm sorry for acting so silly."

Terry glanced at John. "I'm the one who's sorry," he said, leaving the bathroom.

John helped Izumi to her feet, and followed Terry to the porch. The cool evening air soothed Izumi. John carefully helped her onto the porch swing.

"I'm all right," she assured. "I just got a little excited." John kissed her and walked to the other end of the porch where Terry stood, gazing at the bay. He heard John's footsteps and spoke without turning his face.

"I'm sorry, John," he said quietly. The wind whistled softly through the screen surrounding the porch.

"There's nothing to forgive," said John tenderly. He put his right hand on Terry's shoulder. "When my Dad passed away, I was alone in this world - except for you. For many years, we were the only family each other had. Now... look over at the porch swing." Surprised by his friend's request, he turned. Izumi had curled up on the swing, and fallen asleep. Terry smiled.

"We're not by ourselves anymore, Terry. She has been a great blessing to me, and I thank God hourly, for her." Terry turned to leave. "Where are you going?"

"I don't belong here, anymore, John. You have always been a good friend to me, and now I'm returning the favor."

"Returning the favor'?" repeated John. "Do you think I'm your friend because I'm doing you a favor? Is that what you think?" Terry turned to face his friend.

"No, but you have given me more than I have given you, whether you realize it or not."

"Have you forgotten the time when my Dad died?" John's voice cracked with emotion. Terry stood by the screen door, fighting to retain his composure.

"I remember," he said, his voice betraying the tears he felt inside. "That sure was a tough time."

"Do you still want to talk of favors?" asked John, opening the screen door, and sitting down on the top step. Terry soon joined him.

"God knew I needed a friend, and you pulled me out of it, Terry." John looked up into the darkening sky. "Ever since I got married, I have been pleading with God everyday to give me courage. I look at her and think, 'She trusts me. Please, don't let me fail her.'"

"From the end of the earth will I cry unto Thee, when my heart is overwhelmed: lead me to the Rock that is higher than I," quoted Terry. (Psalm 61:2)

"Amen," said John quietly, "Amen." The moon set over the little yellow house, casting the silvery blanket that Izumi had clung to so many times before. If we had our eyes opened like Elisha's servant had, you would have seen many angels encamped about the house, prepared to defend the small group of friends.

"And when the servant of the man of God was risen early, and gone forth, behold, an host compassed the city both with horses and chariots. And his servant said unto him, Alas, my master! how shall we do? And he answered, Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them. And Elisha prayed, and said, LORD, I pray Thee, open his eyes, that he may see. And the LORD opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha."

~ 2 Kings 6:15-17 ~

"For Thou, LORD, wilt bless the righteous; with favour wilt Thou compass him as with a shield."

~ Psalm 5:12 ~

Chapter Twenty

Five Minutes

"My soul, wait thou only upon God; for my expectation is from Him."

~ Psalm 62:5 ~

Izumi awoke the next morning, to find herself in bed. John lie fast asleep beside her, snoring softly. Izumi smiled, and put on her robe. When she opened the door, she saw Terry sitting at the kitchen table, eating some of last night's dinner.

"Good morning, Izumi!" he greeted, pulling out a chair for her to sit in.

"Thank you," she smiled, happy to find that the clouds had parted.

"Feeling any better?"

"Yes, much. Do you like it?" Izumi asked, pointing to his plate.

"I'd be hard to please if I didn't," Terry said. Izumi was just about to comment that she had heard John say the same thing before, when the urge to run to the bathroom returned. She left hurriedly, and without explanation. Terry ran to the bedroom, and pulled John out of bed.

"John, John! Wake up!" John stood up, sleepily. "It's Izzy! She's doing it again!" John quickly ran to the bathroom and opened the door. Izumi sat on the floor, as white as a sheet, but still conscious.

"I don't understand," she whimpered. John picked her up and carried her to the bedroom. Terry stood in the doorway with a strange look on his face.

"John, I'll be right back." John turned to say something, but he had already disappeared. Six minutes later, Terry returned with a grocery bag, breathless from his morning jog. John got up from the bed to meet him, puzzled by his friend's odd behavior.

"Do you think she has stomach flu?" asked John, expecting to see Terry pull out cold medicine from the bag.

"Not exactly," he smiled, handing John a small pink box.

"What's this for?" he asked.

"Read the label, silly," Terry chuckled. It read "Home Pregnancy Kit" in big black letters. "I had the oddest looks in the checkout," he laughed. John sat down on the kitchen chair, his mouth hanging wide open.

"Do really you think that's what it is?" he asked seriously.

"I hear it's a common enough condition," Terry laughed, slapping him on the back. "I wouldn't start picking out names now, but I wouldn't be surprised!" John suddenly felt dizzy. "Put your head between your legs," directed Terry, suddenly realizing that his friend was about to pass out. After a few moments, John recovered himself. Without thinking, he handed the pink box back to Terry. Terry put out his hand and pushed it away. "Don't give it to me, I don't need it!"

"Right. Right. I give this to Izumi," he said shakily, trying to collect his thoughts.

"Here, give this to her while you're at it," said Terry, handing him a box of saltines.

"Right," John said, decidedly, "this will help." He opened the box and ate a cracker. Terry doubled over with laughter.

"For Izzy. Those are for Izzy!"

John suddenly became pale.

"Terry! What do I tell her?" John began to pace back and forth.

"Just hand her the pink box. I think she'll get the idea." John nodded, biting another cracker.

"I'll do that. Thanks Terry." As John disappeared behind the bedroom door, Terry grinned. He had never seen his friend so nervous in all his life!

John sat on the bed beside Izumi, and stroked her hand.

"What's wrong with me, John? This has never happened before."

"Little Dove, I think you better take this," he said seriously, handing her the box.

"Saltine crackers. Thank you, John. I think I could keep this down." John looked at the box he had handed her.

"Oh, wrong one." John handed Izumi the pink package. Her eyes grew wide.

"Dear God," she exclaimed, "make it to be so!" She eagerly jumped from the bed and ran to the bathroom. Terry stuck his head in, when he saw Izumi fly by.

"Well, how did she take it? Did she understand what the kit was for? How long before we know?" asked Terry, anxiously.

"I don't know," said John as he walked to the bathroom door.

"Dove, how long before we know?"

"The box said five minutes," she called back. John turned to Terry, who was standing beside him.

"She said five minutes," he repeated. Terry nodded.

"So I hear," he laughed. "Sit down and relax. You've already done your part. The rest is up to God and Izzy." The minutes slowly ticked away. John checked the clock every ten seconds, and anxiously paced the floor.

"She should know by now," John said, pointing to the clock. The bathroom door opened. Izumi stepped out with a beaming face.

"I'm so happy!" she exclaimed, as John hugged her tightly. "No one in the world can be happier than me!"

"No one, Little Dove?" John asked as he looked into her blue eyes. A flood of happiness swept through husband and wife as they stood there. Terry left the house, so they could enjoy the news by themselves.

"If anyone deserves it, God, they do," he prayed thankfully.

"Lo, children are an heritage of the LORD: and the fruit of the womb is His reward."

~ Psalm 127:3 ~

Chapter Twenty-one

Love Endureth All Things

"A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches, and loving favour rather than silver and gold."

~ Proverbs 22:1 ~

Almost immediately after Izumi had discovered that she was to be a mother, she set about, as John put it, "feathering her nest." Izumi was determined to make a good mother. She tacked two lists upon the inside of her closet door. One was for every promise in the Bible that concerned children, and parenting. The other, was an ever growing list of baby names. Everyone had their favorite name for the baby. Izumi's favorites, for now at least, were "John Jr." if a boy, and "Sabrina" (the name of John's mother), if a girl. John, however, had suggestions of his own.

"How about 'Jonathan' or 'Izumi'?" suggested John, hiding a smile. Izumi shook her head,

"One 'Izumi' in this house is enough."

"If you think that, then promise me not to name the baby 'John Jr.'" Izumi conceded. Even Terry had a few suggestions.

"How about 'Abigail,' after King David's wife, and 'Caleb,' after Joshua's good friend in the Bible?"

"I think you are on the right track," said John hopefully.

From that day on, whenever they read their Bibles, more names were added to the list. Everyday the list grew longer and longer. The baby's name was not the only thing that Izumi worked at. She reorganized the bedroom, to make room for a crib. John offered to clear out his computer room for the baby, but Izumi was set against it.

"I want the baby nearby at all times," she insisted, "not in another room."

"You might change your mind when it won't sleep at night," warned Terry. Nevertheless, Izumi stood firm. She also got John to put childproof latches on all the cupboards that a small child might reach.

"Dove, it's too early to think of things like this. The baby hasn't even been born!"

"I want to get everything I can, done now, before my second trimester," explained Izumi. "Dr. Chambers said since this is my first pregnancy, I shouldn't take chances. Please, John, do it now?"

"Only for you," he smiled. While John and Terry worked in the computer room at their computers, Izumi made new white curtains for the bedroom windows. She bought maternity clothes and laid in a supply of diapers. She eagerly awaited her ninth week, for the doctor had said, that with an ultra sound, they could determine the sex of the baby. On the appointed day, Izumi brought John to the doctor with her, and together, they watched the small monitor that could see inside her womb.

"Congratulations," said Dr. Chambers happily, "it's a girl!" Izumi beamed with delight, as John gently squeezed her hand.

"Now I'll have two doves," he whispered in her ear. The next morning, before even saying 'Good morning' to John, Izumi ran to the bathroom.

"Don't worry," said Terry. "If I can't whip something up, John and I will eat out. We've done it before," he assured, for she could not look at food, let alone make breakfast. Izumi's days were becoming very predictable. In the morning, she would usually have morning sickness so bad, that saltines were the only thing she could keep down. Afternoons were much better. At the direction of John and Terry, who had, since the news of the baby, been reading books on pregnancy, ate very healthy lunches. Evenings were not so nice, however, for the cramping was always worse at night - not to mention the heartburn that kept her awake! If you could ask John what his least favorite symptom was, though, it would easily be her mood swings.

"Would you like me to get you a drink, Dove?" asked John, getting up from the couch one evening.

"No, thank you," came Izumi's reply. Five minutes later,

"John, could you get me a drink of water? I'm so thirsty!"

"Sure." He left, and soon brought her a glass of water.

"Oh, John, I forgot to tell you, Dr. Chambers said I was to drink plenty of milk."

"OK," he said, dumping out the glass of water into the sink. "Here's your milk, Dove."

"Thank you, John." Izumi set the glass on the table and continued her sewing.

"I thought you were thirsty," he commented, after noticing she hadn't touched it.

"I know, but I changed my mind." John shrugged, and went back to work. This mood swing was very mild, and John soon learned to appreciate them. The hard-to-be-around-her mood swings were worse.

"Would you like me to get you a drink, Dove?" asked John, one evening later.

"No." came her abrupt reply.

"Are you sure? It's no trouble."

"Please leave me alone John. I'm trying to sew. I don't feel like talking now." End of discussion - for the rest of the evening. The moods that hurt John the most, however, were the ones that hurt Izumi the most.

"Would you like me to get you a drink, Dove?" No response. "Are you OK? What's the matter?" Izumi held up the fabric she had been trying to fashion into a baby dress, and burst into tears. The dress looked fine to him, but that was not the point. John held her in his arms until the storm passed. Unexplained grief was definitely no picnic, but when you truly love someone, it can be endured. For love, "beareth all things... endureth all things."

Thus passed Izumi's first trimester.

"Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning."
~ Psalm 30:5 ~

"Charity suffereth long, and is kind; Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Charity never faileth."
~ 1 Corinthians 13:4-8 ~

Chapter Twenty-two

All Things Are Possible

"Let, I pray Thee, Thy merciful kindness be for my comfort."

~ Psalm 119:76 ~

Izumi stretched out on the couch, and propped her feet upon the coffee table. Since she had been standing all morning, her feet became swollen. With a satisfied smile, she stroked her stomach gently.

"Sweet akambo (Japanese for 'baby'), I dreamt of you last night. In my dream, I could feel your hands grasping my finger, and hear your voice cooing." She closed her eyes, trying to remember the sweet vision again, when she gave a sudden start.

"John! Come here quick!" she called. John and Terry came running from the computer room.

"What's wrong, Dove? You're not going to have the baby now, are you?" asked John, excitedly.

"Of course not," said Izumi laughingly. John let out a sigh of relief.

"Then why were you yelling?" asked Terry, wiping his forehead.

"John, give me your hand," said Izumi, placing his hand to her stomach.

"Was that the baby?" he asked, his eyes opening wide.

"What's going on?" asked Terry excitedly.

"That was our daughter, John. I can feel her moving inside of me," replied Izumi tenderly. Terry ran to go get one of his "So You Are Pregnant" books, and quickly flipped through the pages.

"How much longer?" asked John, sitting down on the couch beside his wife.

"I'm almost halfway there," sighed Izumi happily, snuggling close to John.

"It's Ok," Terry called out, "it's normal for the baby to move at this stage!" He put the book down and smiled, more relieved than he was willing to admit.

"Isn't that sweet?" Izumi whispered in John's ear.

"Did you hear that, Terry? Dove just called you 'sweet'!" he teased. Izumi swatted John playfully. Terry laughed.

"What are friends for?" Suddenly, their merriment was interrupted by a knock at the door. "I'll get it," volunteered Terry, getting up from his seat, and walking to the door.

"Is this where Izumi lives?" asked a familiar voice. Izumi jumped up from the couch and ran to the door.

"Uncle Shunji!" she exclaimed. She opened the door, and showed him in. "It's good to see you!" The man stood looking at her in awe.

"Mei," (Japanese for 'my niece') he said, "I would not have recognized you." He nodded his head in approval, "You have grown into a woman. That is good." Izumi introduced her husband.

"Uncle, this is my husband, John Johannes. John, this is my father's younger brother, Shunji Mizukiyo." John shook hands. "Uncle Shunji, this is our good friend, Terry Davis." Terry smiled and nodded his greeting. "Please Uncle, please sit down," Izumi motioned to the couch. Uncle Shunji sat down and looked about the small house. It was obviously not new, but very well cared for.

"It is good to see you are well," he said, when they all sat down. "When my older brother died, my first thoughts were of you and your mother."

"That was kind of you, Uncle," said Izumi. "As you can see, I am very happy now. God has been very good to me." Uncle Shunji nodded, surprised to hear her mention God.

"Yes... I have never seen you happier," he commented. "I have traveled from Japan to make sure my older brother's daughter and her mother are well. It is my responsibility, as head of the Mizukiyo family, to make sure."

"Thank you, Uncle," replied Izumi, concealing her disappointment. She had hoped he had come out of genuine concern, not family obligation.

"I would have come sooner, but you were hard to find. I trust your mother is well?"

John spoke up, "She was here for a few days, and then left. When I last saw her, she was in good health."

"Good," nodded Uncle Shunji, getting up from the couch. "I must leave now." After he said "good bye" to everyone, Izumi got up and showed her uncle to the door.

"Thank you for coming, Uncle," she said quietly. He nodded again,

"Good bye, mei." He turned and left. Izumi slowly closed the door behind him. John and Terry remained silent. They knew the reason why her uncle's first thought was of Izumi and her mother. He did not want to be the one to support his disgraced brother's family. John got up and put his arms around Izumi.

"He didn't even ask about the baby," she commented sadly, burying her face in John's embrace. John could feel something jumping up and down as he hugged Izumi.

"Little Dove, what is that?" he asked.

"Our daughter has the hiccups," she smiled.

"Imagine that!" exclaimed Terry.

That night, Izumi could not get comfortable in bed. She reorganized her pillows and blankets, but to no lasting effect.

"Dove, what's wrong?" asked John, glancing at the clock.

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean to wake you up." John sat up, and untangled the covers from Izumi's legs.

"Remember, when I told you that whatever is in your heart, will spill over into mine, Dove?"

"Yes, I remember."

"Ever since your uncle left, your sorrow has been spilling over into me. Do you want to talk about it?"

"Uncle Shunji used to be really nice," began Izumi. "He was always my favorite relative. He's changed so much. He didn't even want to stay in our house longer than he had to, so my disgrace would not rub off onto him!" Izumi wiped a few stray tears from her eyes.

"Pray for him, Dove. Wealth and responsibility have changed him. By the hand of God, it can change him again! This time to God's praise!" said John, fluffing her pillow. "Christ said it was

harder for a rich man to get into Heaven than for a camel to pass through the eye of an needle. But, He also said, "With God all things are possible." Izumi closed her eyes, and yawned. The sleep that had seemed so elusive, had finally come. John kissed her on the forehead, and lay back down.

"Thank you," he silently prayed, "for giving Izumi to me, and not to Uncle Shunji, Lord." He communed with his Friend a while longer, then, he too, fell asleep.

Thus ended Izumi's second trimester.

"When thou liest down, thou shalt not be afraid: yea, thou shalt lie down, and thy sleep shall be sweet."

~ Proverbs 3:24 ~

"He that winneth souls is wise."

~ Proverbs 11:30 ~

Chapter Twenty-three

Laughter and Tears

"By the grace of God I am what I am: and His grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me."

~ 1 Corinthians 15:10 ~

Izumi's third trimester promised to be quite eventful. The anticipation in the little yellow house grew with each day. John found it impossible to keep his mind on work. Every so often, he would poke his head in, and check on Izumi.

"Everything all right?" he would ask. Izumi would look up, and smile patiently,

"Yes, John."

He sighed. "You WILL let me know, won't you? I'm just in the next room," he explained, as if she would deliver the baby on her own without telling him.

"Of course," she laughed.

"I've never seen John so nervous, Izzy," commented Terry. "By the way, did you two ever decide on a name yet?"

"I wanted to name the baby 'Sabrina,' after John's mother, but John doesn't like it. What was your mother's name, Terry?" asked Izumi inquisitively. Terry shook off the question nonchalantly, and changed the subject. Izumi noticed he was being evasive, but remained silent.

Later that night, when Terry had taken his place on the living room sofa, Izumi probed John for anything he knew about Terry's mother.

"Why all the curiosity, Dove?" asked John.

"It's more than curiosity. Terry was really hurt when I asked about his mother." John stared at the floor sadly, biting his bottom lip.

"By the time Terry was eight, he had been repeatedly raped and beaten by his stepfather. When social workers came to place him in foster care, his mom held a knife to his throat, threatening to kill her son, rather than let him go. They wrestled the knife from her, and placed Terry in the

first of a series of foster homes." John looked at Izumi. Tears were streaming from her eyes. John drew her close, "When I remember what happened to Terry, I am so thankful that you did not have to endure what he has had to." Unfortunately, stories such as Terry's, are very common. But for the grace of God, go we. John helped Izumi into bed, and tucked her in. The memories of her own father came rushing back to her. Izumi's tears would not stop coming.

"Dove, please don't cry. Everything is all right, now," he comforted. Suddenly, Izumi sat up straight in bed.

"John! It's time!" she whispered excitedly. John's eyes opened wide.

"Now? But you're two weeks ahead of the due date! Can't you wait?" he asked nervously.

"Dr. Chambers said I could deliver early," she reminded, scanning the room for her suitcase. John ran into the livingroom, and shook Terry awake.

"Terry! She's going to have a baby!" he shouted excitedly.

"Of course she is," he yawned.

"Now, Terry! NOW!"

"Now?!" shouted Terry, jumping up from the couch.

"John, call the doctor, and tell him we are on our way to the hospital," directed Izumi, from the bedroom. "Terry, would you get my suitcase?" After making the phone call, John ran to the small garage behind the house and got the car started. Terry carefully helped Izumi down the steps as John pulled up. Izumi got in the back seat.

"Get in, Terry. We're not going without you," she said calmly, noticing his hesitation. He smiled, and climbed in beside John. The three mile drive into Chaumont was over with before Izumi had a chance to find the one position that did not give discomfort.

"You go in with Izzy," said Terry, as John stopped in front of the hospital. "I'll park the car." Terry watched as John and Izumi slowly walked into the hospital.

After checking in at the main desk, Dr. Chambers directed them to their LDR (labor, delivery, recovery) suite.

"May my friend come in?" asked John, when he saw Terry standing in the hallway.

"Is he a part of your wife's support team?" asked the nurse.

"Yes," interjected Izumi, who had been following the conversation from her bed. The nurse nodded for him to come in, and shut the door.

"Your wife's cervix is dilating, Mr. Johannes," said Dr. Chambers. "The closer she comes to delivery, the stronger her contractions will become. Try to keep her relaxed, and do the deep breathing exercises I told you about. I'll check back in a few minutes." John sat down in a chair beside Izumi's bed, while Terry stood in the corner, not noticing the chair that sat empty beside him.

"Dove," said John, taking Izumi's hand, "you are almost there." Izumi smiled weakly. Her back tightened and relaxed with every contraction. Though she did not say so, Izumi was becoming frightened. "You are breaking my heart," whispered John, tightening his grip on her hand. "Remember, 'What time I am afraid, I will trust in Thee'?" he asked.

"The magic words," said Izumi. She recalled John's unwavering voice as he spoke to her mother that night on the bus ride to Three Mile Bay. She could even hear the thunder pounding the air, and the lightning stretching its thin fingers through the night sky. Even though John had not known her, he endured her mother's cold remarks, and encouraged a wildflower to hope. "Trust in His Providence," he had said.

"I love you, John," said Izumi, between her labor pains. John winced as the next wave of contractions took hold.

"I love you too."

Dr. Chambers returned and examined Izumi, as Terry sat down, placing his head between his legs.

"The baby is moving into position," he announced. Izumi was sweating profusely. She had never felt so exhausted before in all her life. John felt a tap on his shoulder, and turned to see Terry, white as a sheet, standing behind him.

"Does she need me here?" he asked quietly.

"It's all right, Terry. You can go now," said John sympathetically, patting him on the back. Terry took one more look at Izumi, and quickly decided to get some air... outside. As Izumi's labor pains came quicker, Dr. Chambers administered the epidural anesthesia.

"Your wife will remain alert, but will not feel pain," he explained. A smile crossed Izumi's face. The pain had disappeared, though her contractions were stronger than ever.

"Oh, thank You!" she exclaimed.

"You're welcome, Mrs. Johannes," said Dr. Chambers, not realizing that her thanks were offered to Someone else.

After fifty minutes of "PUSH!" and "Deep breath!", the doctor announced he could see the head crowning.

"You are almost there, Little Dove," said John, clutching his wife's hand. Izumi had no time to think of her exhaustion. The urge to push was too strong to ignore. Soon she heard a loud "Slap!" and then the first cries of her daughter.

The nurses all clapped, and Dr. Chambers smiled widely, as he placed a tiny baby in Izumi's arms. Izumi could not believe this little person had just come from her. Her happiness was beyond words. She looked up into John's beaming face. He was somewhere in between laughter and tears. Finding no words, he kissed her.

"A woman when she is in travail hath sorrow, because her hour is come: but as soon as she is delivered of the child, she remembereth no more the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world."

~ John 16:21 ~

Chapter Twenty-four

He is Able

"She was a woman of good understanding, and of a beautiful countenance."

~ 1 Samuel 25:3 ~

Izumi gazed into her daughter's blue eyes. She caressed the tiny head, and marveled at the profusion of black hair.

"Look!" she cried to John, "Look at her tiny fingers!" John was grinning ear to ear. He was pleased to find that the baby looked so much like his Dove. A nurse had went to find Terry, and soon, he too was admiring the tiny bundle.

"Congratulations, John and Izzy!" he exclaimed, peering at the baby. "What's her name?" John smiled broadly,

"Abigail Dove Johannes." Terry's eyes widened.

"Hey! You used my suggestion!" John and Izumi HAD used Terry's suggestion. Abigail, King David's wife, was described as "a woman of good understanding, and of a beautiful countenance." They both wished their daughter to be "a woman of good understanding," and the baby already had a "beautiful countenance." John had insisted on the middle name. Abigail was the image of his wife.

"Now I have two doves," he said tenderly, looking at his small family.

"I can't believe you used my suggestion," repeated Terry, still amazed. Two days later, John brought Izumi and Abigail home from the hospital.

"John," said Izumi, "you haven't held Abby yet." John backed away,

"No, I would break her."

"She's your daughter. You won't break her," replied Izumi confidently. "Here, take her. Make sure you support her head." John gingerly held his daughter.

"She's so light," he observed. Everyone was cooing and laughing, when they were interrupted by a knock at the front door.

"I'll get it," said Terry, tearing himself away from the small group. Terry opened the door to find a tall blonde-headed woman.

"Does Izumi live here?" she asked.

"Yes," said Terry, "I'll get her." He turned to call Izumi to the door, but the woman pushed her way through, and soon stood in the small livingroom. Izumi looked up in surprise.

"Mother!" she exclaimed. John got up, and stood beside Izumi, lending her strength by being close by.

"I won't say I'm happy to see you again," began Anna, "after the abrupt way you left. So," she said, staring at the baby from her side of the room, "that's how you kept your husband. I was not so fortunate, I had a girl." Izumi sat still, stunned by her mother's cruelty.

"Mrs. Mizukiyo, this is Abigail, my daughter," announced John calmly. He was angry, but determined not to let it show. Her teeth clenched, at the thought that her daughter's husband would not treat Izumi the same way Yoichi had treated her.

"I am going to sell the house. Sign this deed," she demanded, holding out a sheet of white paper to Izumi. John stepped forward and took the paper from her hand. After he glanced at the form, he handed it to his wife. Izumi looked at him, half hoping he would speak for her.

"Dove, it's your house. You make the decision." Izumi gathered her courage.

"I always wondered why your parents left me the house, and not you. Now that I'm a parent, I think I know. I want my daughter to obey God, and be safe. My grandparents must have wanted the same for me." Izumi held Abby close, as her mother glared at her only child.

"I hate you!" Anna said under her breath. Terry stepped forward and opened the door, showing her the way out. She departed as abruptly as she had come, still consumed in her bitterness. Izumi burst into tears as soon as the door was shut. John picked up Izumi and lay her on the bed, placing Abigail in the crib beside her.

"Try to rest, Dove. One day, your mother WILL repent, God has promised you. He is able. He never forgot you in the past, and He will never forget you in the future. Try to be happy." Izumi grabbed John's hand.

"I am happy. When I remember how father treated my mother, I realize how blessed I am to have you for my husband. You are kind and gentle and good. God gave me refuge through you. I

wish my mother had understood. But, when you don't know God, you can't understand love." John squeezed her hand. "Stay with me," she pleaded. John lay down beside her, and soon, Izumi fell asleep. Terry looked in through the open door.

"Everything all right?" he whispered. John's peaceful face was answer enough. Terry sighed contentedly, and quietly shut the door.

Seven years later, when Abigail's laughter filled the house her great-grandparents had given her, an important letter arrived. Inside, Izumi found a letter from Anna. It read:

"My dearest Izumi,

By the time this letter reaches you, my soul will no longer be on this earth, but in Heaven. When I last left you - it seems so much longer than seven years - I knew in my heart that I was kicking against the pricks. As Paul said, 'I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.' (Acts 9:5) For most of my life, that verse has fit me. I pray you will find a place in your heart to forgive me. The cancer that is killing my body, mirrors the many years my bitterness has been eating inside me. 'This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I AM CHIEF!' (1 Timothy 1:15) Please forgive me, Izumi.

Oh, God! hasten the day when I will be with You! But, even from Heaven, my most fervent desire will be, 'Come quickly!' 'That be far from Thee to do after this manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked: and that the righteous should be as the wicked, that be far from Thee: Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?' (Genesis 18:25) Lord, deliver my daughter and her family from the wrath to come. Come quickly! Amen and amen.

I love you. I'll see you soon, Izumi." Tears of thanksgiving and praise flooded Izumi and John. And, as Terry remarked, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus."

"Now I Nebuchadnezzar praise and extol and honour the King of Heaven, all Whose works are truth, and His ways judgment: and those that walk in pride He is able to abase."

~ Daniel 4:37 ~

"Wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come."

~ 1 Thessalonians 1:10 ~

End of Book.

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http://judithbronte.com/abigail/A_1.html

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'**Terry's Journey**' - a sequel to Abigail's Journey

http://judithbronte.com/terry/T_1.html