

Some Pass By

A Love Story

by Judith Bronte

Hannah Anderson works for one of the ten most wealthy men in America. On her way to work each day, she waits at a stop light on the corner of a busy city, giving spare change to the panhandler who is stationed there. This is Daniel, and what no one knows, is that Daniel is desperately in love with Hannah. He doesn't dare show any sign of emotion, for he is acutely aware of his poverty, and detests the thought of Hannah feeling sorry for him. Under the beard and faded blue jacket, is an attractive, sensitive man, whom everyone passes by. As events unfold, Rebecca must choose between a pauper who can look into her soul, and a king who knows only power and greed.

Note: *Some Pass By* is a short romance, written over ten years 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

The Good Samaritan

"A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. And by chance there came down a certain priest that way: and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side. But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion on him, and went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And on the morrow when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave them to the host, and said unto him, Take care of him; and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee. Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves? And he said, He that showed mercy on him. Then said Jesus unto him, Go, and do thou likewise."

~ Luke 10:30-37 ~

The busy city awoke to Monday morning, ready to face another hectic week of work and life. Like most city dwellers on such a weekday, Hannah Anderson started off on her daily trek to the office. Hannah had spent the weekend with her parents in the country, something she always did, for she was never so happy as when she returned home. The love she felt from her parents, would tide her over to the next weekend. Unlike most people, Hannah never disliked Mondays. It just meant she was one day closer to Saturday, and her parents. It was with these thoughts, that she walked down the sidewalk, on her way to work.

However, when Hannah came to the stoplight, her thoughts changed course. This day had started like most others, but somehow, something felt different. Then it came to her. Hannah looked around for the panhandler who had chosen that place as his spot. She had grown accustomed to his silent presence at the stoplight. She would greet him with a smile and drop loose change into his cup. The man would nod and look down, never saying a word. Hannah had observed his long, unkempt brown hair. She had noticed his beard reached the top of his faded blue jacket. She saw he always wore the same pair of worn sneakers - ones with duct tape wound about them, to keep the soles in place. To her horror, she had even observed he never wore socks, no matter how cold it was outside. Ever since Hannah had moved to the busy city five months ago, her pity grew for the panhandler at the stoplight.

But today, the spot where he always occupied, stood empty. Every day, without fail, he had always been there. Hannah looked at the other people that waited at the stoplight. Most of them she recognized, for they too, made the same route to work, every day. As the light turned green,

Hannah saw none of them had noticed the missing member of their daily gathering. She looked at her watch. Yes, she had a little time before work. For the first time in months, Hannah did not cross the street with the others when the light turned green. Instead, she searched the side walk on either side of the stoplight. It was then, she saw a dark alley separating two tall buildings near the panhandler's spot.

By nature, Hannah was not intrepid. However, her concern for the stoplight panhandler, and her desire to not be late for work, propelled her forward in action not typical of a generally, thoughtful young woman. In her haste, though, she remembered to pray before entering.

"Safety is of the Lord," she reminded herself. She wrinkled her nose, for everything smelled of foul odors, and rotting trash. Cardboard boxes were piled up high against trash cans; a small stream of water ran down the black asphalt. Hannah slowly walked to the end of the alley.

As she turned to leave, Hannah noticed a huddled form crouched between two trash cans. She gave a sudden start, but the form did not move. It did not seem to be aware of her presence at all. Hannah took a step closer, careful not to make any noise. As dark clouds softly parted overhead, a ray of light fell upon the huddled form's face, revealing the stoplight panhandler. His eyes were closed, and his arms were wrapped around his torso. The faded jacket was no longer blue, but soaked in a dark red substance. Alarmed, Hannah knelt down beside him on the damp asphalt. Hannah bent down and put her ear up to his chest. His heart was beating, but it was very faint. This man was dying. Hannah jumped to her feet, and dashed out of the dark alley. She had to find a telephone, quickly.

No one noticed the young woman as she frantically ran down the streaked gray sidewalk, searching for a pay phone. Across the street, she spotted a secondhand bookstore. Hannah quickly crossed the street, forgetting to look before she did so. A yellow taxi screeched to a halt, narrowly missing Hannah. The driver stuck his head out and yelled at her in a language she did not understand.

"Sorry!" Hannah called back. She opened the bookstore door and ran to the counter. "May I use your phone? It's an emergency!" she hurriedly asked an old man sitting by the cash register. The old man looked up sleepily.

"Just so as it's not long distance," he replied grumpily. Hannah nodded as she grabbed the telephone receiver. Her fingers trembled as she dialed 911. To her disbelief, the number was busy.

"Please, God, make them answer!" she urgently pleaded. The old man opened his eyes again, curiously observing her anguish as one would passively watch television. Hannah's heart

pounded loudly in her ears. The sound reminded her that with every passing moment, the stoplight panhandler lost more blood. "Don't let him die, God!" she prayed outloud. After what seemed to Hannah to be an eternity, a voice answered.

"This is 911 emergency. How may I help you?" asked a woman's voice. For a moment, Hannah's tongue glued to the roof of her mouth.

"Please get an ambulance to the corner of Jefferson and Madison right away! There's a man in the alley... he's lost a lot of blood!" Hannah pleaded frantically.

"Stay calm. An ambulance is on it's way," the woman's voice assured.

"Thank God!" exclaimed Hannah. The emergency dispatcher asked who she was, and then hung up when the sirens were within hearing distance. Hannah dashed out of the bookstore, heedless of the oncoming traffic, and stood at the entrance of the alley. An ambulance pulled up beside the curb, it's red lights flashing.

"Over here!" she called. Two men jumped out of the ambulance and followed Hannah down the alley. She watched as they unwound the limp arms of the stoplight panhandler.

"It's a knife wound," she heard one of the men say. When a policeman tapped Hannah on the shoulder, she jumped.

"Were you the one who called 911?" he asked.

"Yes, I was," replied Hannah, nervously.

"Did you know him?" the policeman asked, pointing at the limp form being lifted onto a stretcher.

"No."

"How did you find the body?" he asked. Hannah felt faint. The walls of the alley began to spin around her.

"I was walking..." she began. Suddenly, everything became black.

"[She] that hath pity upon the poor lendeth unto the LORD; and that which [she] hath given will He pay [her] again."

~ Proverbs 19:17 ~

Chapter Two

Open Thine Hand Wide

"He that despiseth his neighbour sinneth: but he that hath mercy on the poor, happy is he."
~ Proverbs 14:21 ~

When Hannah opened her eyes, she found herself lying on a stretcher, with sirens screaming loudly in her ears.

"Do you feel better?" asked a voice. At the foot of her stretcher stood one of the emergency workers who had arrived in the ambulance. The stretcher suddenly bumped against the wall. It was then, Hannah realized she was in an ambulance.

"I'm all right. You can let me out right here," she said pointing to a window.

"I think it would better to have a doctor examine you first," he explained.

"But, I'm late for work," she protested. The man did not hear her, for he was busily engaged with a person in the stretcher beside hers. To Hannah's surprise, it was the stoplight panhandler. A clear hose had been placed over his mouth, pumping oxygen into his still unconscious body. The emergency worker turned his eyes to a little monitor with a jumping green line. Hannah lie quietly on the stretcher. Suddenly, the green line stopped jumping, and a flat line took it's place. The emergency worker grabbed two white discs and placed them on top of the panhandler's chest. His body jolted upward and then slammed back down onto the stretcher. He continued to do this until the green line began to jump again.

"He almost died, didn't he?" asked Hannah.

"His heart stopped beating. But, for now, it's working again," the man said, sitting down. Soon after, they arrived at the hospital. The doors opened, and the stoplight panhandler was lifted out. Hannah climbed down on her own two feet. A rush of activity surrounded her, as nurses rushed the unconscious panhandler into the hospital. Hannah was led inside, and checked over to make sure she was really all right. Then, the police had her answer some questions. She told them what had happened.

"If I were you," warned the police officer who had been asking her the questions, "I would stay out of dark alleys. Especially, if you are alone."

"But, it's Providential I did, this one time," smiled Hannah.

"It's just another transient," shrugged the officer, tucking the clipboard he had been writing on, under his arm. "If this one lives to be discharged, he'll be out on the streets again. Bums like him die everyday." The police officer checked his clipboard one more time, and walked away.

A sick feeling crept over Hannah. She navigated her way to the main exit, and quickly left the hospital. Hannah looked up at the sky. Usually, the air was filled with smog, but a gentle breeze sent out from God's heavenly chamber had carried the man-made poison away. Hannah gratefully thanked God for the safety He had given her that morning.

"Lord, safety does come from You," she prayed thankfully. In spite of the pure air and the warm sunshine, Hannah's heart was crying.

She arrived at work

The policeman's words echoed in her mind.

"Just another transient." A crowd of people exiting a nearby building, shook Hannah from her uneasy solitude.

"Two hours late," she thought, glancing at the time on her watch. With a quick step, Hannah rejoined the route to work she had abandoned earlier that morning.

"There you are!" exclaimed Jenny, her voice betraying relief, as Hannah sat down at her desk. "Mr. Hanley has been asking for you every ten minutes..." Jenny's voice was cut short as the office door beside Hannah's desk, opened. A man glared impatiently at her from the doorway.

"Miss Anderson," he said severely, "I see you have decided to join us, after all." Mr. Hanley ran the back of his right hand over his dry forehead, a habit he practiced often, especially when impatient. "Miss Anderson, did you finish the report? Because, if you did, there is a large room of very busy people, waiting to read it." Mr. Hanley's voice grew louder with every word he spoke.

"I finished typing it last night, Mr. Hanley," she replied calmly, holding out the report, "even though it was not due until Wednesday." Jenny shrank back at Hannah's unintimidated demeanor. Mr. Hanley snatched the four hundred and sixteen page report from Hannah's hand, and walked quickly to the elevator, no doubt, on his way to the large room filled with very busy people. A sigh of relief came from Jenny as the elevator doors closed, leaving them in peace.

"Why doesn't he terrify you, I'll never know," she remarked. Hannah started her computer and immediately went to work. Jenny slowly walked back to her desk on the other side of the room. She knew Hannah hated to talk while working, but her curiosity was building every minute.

"Hannah, why did the police call Mr. Hanley?" Jenny's question startled Hannah from her work.

"I guess, they were checking up on me," she said thoughtfully, more to herself than to Jenny. Upon hearing this, Jenny wheeled her chair from across the room and planted it beside Hannah's desk. Hannah laughed outloud. "There isn't much to tell, Jenny. Someone needed help, so I called the police. I told them who I was, but I guess, they called Mr. Hanley to verify it." Hannah stopped, as if there was nothing more to tell.

"Who needed help?" asked Jenny, curiously.

"There was a panhandler who stood beside the stoplight on the corner of Jefferson and Madison," began Hannah reluctantly. "It appears he was stabbed, or something, so I called the police. When they began to ask me questions, like an idiot, I passed out." Hannah had to admit that it did feel good to talk about it. "Next thing I know," she continued, "I'm in an ambulance with the stoplight panhandler. They said I had to go to the hospital and be examined, and to answer a few questions. Then, half way there, his heart stops!"

"Who's?" asked Jenny, trying to keep up with Hannah's fast paced narration.

"The stoplight panhandler's. The emergency worker got it beating again, but the policeman said it didn't matter." The flood of emotion that had been slowly welling inside Hannah's heart, could no longer be held at bay. She began to cry. Jenny put her arms around her.

"Oh, Jenny! He said 'bums like him die every day!'"

"But, it's not your problem," she comforted. "People like them are on the streets because they refuse to work, or they're alcoholics, or drug addicts." Hannah pushed Jenny's comforting arms away. "Why should it matter to you?" asked Jenny, puzzled by her friend's behavior. "Since when did it matter so much? We pass by people like them on the streets everyday."

"Yes, we do, don't we?" Hannah said in a half-whisper. "Just like the priest and the Levite in the story of the good Samaritan. We look, and pass by on the other side."

"Well, what are we supposed to do?" cried Jenny, growing impatient with Hannah. "People like them are everywhere! We can't very well help all of them!"

"No, we can't. Jesus said, 'ye have the poor with you always.' But, He went on to say, 'whosoever ye will ye may do them good.'"

"People like them deserve what they get, Hannah!"

"We all deserve what we get, except when it comes to mercy. Mercy is something we are not worthy of, and yet receive. Remember Jenny, 'for God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son.' If that's not mercy, I don't know what is." Jenny remained silent. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart... and thy neighbour as thyself," quoted Hannah, thoughtfully.

"And just who is my neighbor?" retorted Jenny sarcastically. Hannah stared at her friend in disbelief.

"Why are you so bitter? I've never known you to act this way before." Jenny groaned, and folded her arms.

"Hannah, you're still new to the city. You've lived here, like what... all of five months? Two years ago, I was walking home from a late night at the office. A panhandler approached me on the street, and asked for any loose change I could spare. I gave him the money, and then he raped me. So, now when I see a homeless man begging for money, I turn the other way. I hope they suffer- every last one!" Hannah sank down into her chair.

"I'm sorry you were hurt, Jenny. But, not every homeless man on the street is a rapist." Jenny turned her head away, but remained beside Hannah's desk. "If only..." began Hannah in a voice brimming with compassion, "if only, you could have seen the man who stood at the corner of Jefferson and Madison. If only you could have seen the thread bare clothes he wore, the absence of happiness in his eyes, and the look of humiliation that crossed his face every time I put money into his cup. When I saw him huddled beside the trash cans, his life slowly ebbing away, I felt sorry for him. God gave me the opportunity to have compassion on someone I pitied." Hannah looked at Jenny. "'For the poor shall never cease out of the land: therefore I command thee, saying, Thou shalt open thine hand wide unto thy brother, to thy poor, and to thy needy, in thy land.' God said that in Deuteronomy, chapter fifteen. Open your hand wide, as well as your heart, Jenny." The tears that were glistening in Hannah's eyes, now also glistened in Jenny's. Jenny reached put her hand, and Hannah took it in her own. Jenny was about to speak, when the elevator doors opened and Mr. Hanley stepped into the room. He saw the tears in both Hannah and Jenny's eyes.

"Ladies," he said in a voice of mock condescension, "well may you both weep, for the office is at a stand still while you gossip!" Mr. Hanley stormed past them, and shut himself up in his office.

Jenny gave Hannah's hand one last squeeze, and wheeled her chair back to the desk across the room. Hannah turned back to her computer, but found that her trembling hands could not type.

"Today would be a good day to organize the files," she thought. So, that's just what she did.

"The LORD maketh poor, and maketh rich: He bringeth low, and lifteth up."

~ 1 Samuel 2:7 ~

Chapter Three
'Throwaway'

"The poor is hated even of his own neighbour: but the rich hath many friends."
~ Proverbs 14:20 ~

"I credit my success to hard work and advice my father gave me. 'Son, the difference between a hero and a fool, is success. A fool takes a chance, and fails. While the hero takes a chance, and succeeds.'" Mr. Hanley leaned back in his chair, and lit a cigar. "Excuse me, would you like one? They're Cuban," he said temptingly. The reporter shook her head politely. "Well," Mr. Hanley shrugged, "you never know, these days."

Hannah quietly shut the door while Mr. Hanley finished his interview. It had been three days since Hannah had last seen the streetlight panhandler. Even though her job demanded so much attention, Hannah found herself wondering how he was doing.

"Why don't you visit him in the hospital?" urged Jenny.

"I would feel awkward," Hannah protested. "I don't know him. I'm not his friend or his family."

"I'll go with you," Jenny offered. The offer was tempting.

"Do you really think it would be all right?"

"You saved his life. It's natural for you to want to know how he's doing," reasoned Jenny.

When lunch break finally arrived, Hannah and Jenny made their way to the hospital.

"I would like to visit the man who was brought here three days ago, with a stab wound," explained Hannah to the nurse at the front desk.

"What's his name?" she asked, mechanically. Hannah looked at Jenny, and Jenny looked at Hannah.

"I don't know," replied Hannah feebly.

"The ambulance picked him up on the corner of Jefferson and Madison," intervened Jenny. The nurse typed something into her computer, and shook her head.

"He was discharged yesterday."

"After two days in the hospital!" cried Hannah.

"It is not this hospital's policy to take in patients who are not covered by life insurance, or no visible means of compensation," replied the nurse. "I'm sorry, but that's the way it is."

"Thank you," said Jenny, tugging on Hannah's arm. "Come on. Let's get out of here," she whispered. Hannah slowly walked through the entrance of the hospital, stunned by what she had just heard. "The hospitals are crowded to overflowing," said Jenny, seating Hannah on a bench. "It was in the newspaper. Hospitals cannot afford it anymore."

"Why couldn't they have transferred him somewhere that could?" asked Hannah.

"I don't know."

"I have got to find him," determined Hannah, "before he dies." Hannah looked at her surroundings. The city was enormous. People passed by Hannah's bench, criss-crossing each other's path, intent on their destination. None of them smiled. Hannah had never noticed that before. She searched the crowd, looking for someone who wore a smile. A siren echoed through the tall skyscrapers, and faded beneath the noise of the city. Sitting there, she felt as if the world were in a dream-like state, desperately fighting to awaken from the nightmare it was living. "God," she said, looking up, "please, don't let him die. 'I am poor and needy; yet the LORD thinketh upon me: Thou art my help and my deliverer; make no tarrying, O my God.'"

"Where do we start?" volunteered Jenny.

Hannah shook her head. "It's too dangerous. I'm sure your husband would protest, and besides, you have your baby to think of." Jenny stroked her stomach. Even though she was not showing, her baby was due next month. "Thanks for the thought, though," said Hannah.

"Are you going alone?" asked Jenny timidly. She had always admired Hannah's bravery, especially when it concerned Mr. Hanley.

"When you return to work, call up Greta. She owes me a favor, and will fill in for me," said Hannah, looking into her friend's concerned eyes, "and pray." Jenny reluctantly left Hannah, and returned to work. "She'll be all right," thought Hannah. "Greta can stand up to Mr. Hanley. Jenny will be fine."

After a few moments of thoughtful prayer, Hannah decided to check the homeless shelters first. 'First Hope Baptist Church Shelter' was the closest one located to the hospital. The small building dwarfed in comparison to the office building where she worked. Pastor Mark, the pastor of 'First Hope,' led Hannah through rows of cots and sleeping bags, each one sheltering a person. In most places, the beds were so crowded together, that it was impossible to pass.

"It's early for bed, isn't it Pastor?" asked Hannah in a low whisper. Pastor Mark nodded.

"Yes, but if they don't claim a bed early, by evening, there's no more room. About how old is your friend?" he inquired.

"I'd say, somewhere in his twenties," replied Hannah, guessing outloud. Pastor mark shook his head sadly.

"He's probably a runaway or a throwaway."

"A throwaway?" repeated Hannah.

"A 'throwaway' is someone who has been literally thrown away by his family, or by an institution." Pastor Mark led Hannah outside. "If you really want to save your friend, get him off the streets. I have seen it many times before. At first, they fight with both hands to survive. But, as the years go by, the will to live slowly fades." Hannah thanked him gratefully. Pastor Mark watched as Hannah walked away, continuing her search elsewhere.

"The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity; but a wounded spirit who can bear?"
~ Proverbs 18:14 ~

Chapter Four
Safe Refuge

"He that oppresseth the poor reproacheth his Maker: but he that honoureth Him hath mercy on the poor."

~ Proverbs 14:31 ~

As the day wore on, Hannah searched dozens of shelters with no success. No one had seen any one fitting the streetlight panhandler's description. Weary of walking, Hannah rested on a park bench.

"Are you looking for Daniel?" asked a voice. Hannah looked up and saw a young teenage boy standing before her. His hair and clothing was styled after the fashion of the homeless youth that Hannah had seen so frequently that day. Contrary to his tough, adult manner and expression, Hannah was amazed to hear the voice of a child. He scratched his arm, squinting intently at her, as if to impress her of how important he was.

"Who is Daniel?" she asked. For one split second, her question took him by surprise. His face relaxed, and Hannah saw a little boy.

"You want to see him or not?" he replied impatiently.

"Yes, thank you," said Hannah. Even though this person might not be the streetlight panhandler, this was the first person she had met all day that claimed to know him. The boy led her down a street or two, and then made his way to a tall underpass. Hannah slowed her pace when she saw other homeless youth, mostly comprising of young adults, come forward to meet her guide. Hannah quietly looked at the young group. Three men stood talking with her guide, while the others just stared back. A blonde headed woman with a tattoo on her arm, stepped forward and looked Hannah over. Unlike the boy, she glared at Hannah with an intense hatred.

"Never mind her," said the boy, grabbing her by the arm, and walking her to the dark side of the underpass. While a strong stench greeted her nose, Hannah's eyes adjusted to the darkness. Before her lie the streetlight panhandler. His eyes were closed, and his chest was slowly rising and descending. Hannah immediately knelt down beside him and inspected the wound, careful not to remove the dressing the hospital had applied. The doctors had sewn the wound shut, but some of the seams were not holding. No doubt, because he had been forced to move before it had sufficiently healed.

"Will he live?" asked the boy, standing over her, his voice betraying a twinge of concern.

"He needs to go to the hospital," Hannah replied, thoughtfully.

"But they were the ones who kicked him out!" yelled the boy, indigantly. Daniel's eyes slowly opened, and looked about. When he saw Hannah sitting beside him, he froze.

"Look, he's awake," observed the boy. Hannah looked down. When her eyes met his, he quickly looked away.

"Are you in much pain?" she asked gently. Daniel did not respond.

"He can't hear you," spoke up the boy. "Daniel's deaf. He can read lips, though." Hannah looked sadly at the face who tried so hard to turn away.

"Mikey!" shouted one of the men. The boy left Hannah and Daniel, and talked again to the three men. Hannah watched as Mikey returned, shaking his head.

"Spider says Daniel must go," said Mikey, relaying the message.

"But," protested Hannah, "he shouldn't be moved right now. He could die!" Mikey glanced nervously over his shoulder.

"Lady, if you don't get Daniel out of here right now, he could die anyway." Mikey squatted down and whispered, "Daniel tried to break up a fight, and someone stabbed him. If that person finds he didn't die, he'll finish the job!" Mikey looked at Daniel's still averted face. "I told him not to butt into other people's problems. Look at the thanks he gets for trying to help someone!"

"I'll need your help, Mikey," said Hannah, making a makeshift bandage to apply pressure to Daniel's wound. Hannah slowly sat Daniel up, and placed his arm around her neck. Mikey followed her example, and gingerly stood Daniel up on his feet. By the weight that she had to support, Hannah could tell Daniel was very weak. The three slowly made their way through the crowd, and away from the underpass.

"Where are we going?" asked Mikey. Hannah had been wondering that herself. Mikey's question made up her mind.

"To my apartment. I'm afraid if I take him back to the hospital, they'll discharge him again," replied Hannah. The sky was quickly growing black, and Daniel's steps were becoming smaller and smaller.

"Hold on, Daniel, we're almost there," encouraged Hannah, momentarily forgetting that he was deaf.

After what seemed to Hannah, an eternity, they reached their destination. Hannah unlocked the door and turned on a light. Mikey helped Daniel inside.

"Close the door!" he warned. Hannah quickly obeyed. "Where do you want him?" he grunted, buckling under the weight of supporting Daniel all by himself.

"Over there, in the bedroom," directed Hannah. Daniel collapsed on the bed, and immediately passed out. Mikey sat down on the bed beside Daniel, trying to recover his breath. Hannah went into the bathroom, and opened the medicine cabinet. Mikey stuck his head in.

"I'm going," he said. As he turned to leave, Hannah caught hold of his arm.

"Don't you want off the streets, too?" she asked. Mikey wrenched his arm free.

"I choose to live the way I do. On the street, I'm free!" Mikey's face was sincere.

"Perhaps," thought Hannah, "because he hasn't known anything else." The boy looked at Daniel. "He is such a fool. Look what happens when you care!" Before Hannah could stop him, Mikey disappeared angrily through the door, and back to the streets he called home. The boy had left the door open, swaying in the night air. Hannah shut it, and made sure the locks worked. She could not help remembering what she had heard Mr. Hanley say that very morning, in an interview. "The only difference between a hero and a fool, is success. A fool takes a chance, and fails. While the hero takes a chance, and succeeds." Hannah shook her head in disagreement. "A hero is a hero because he cared enough to try," she reasoned. "After all, 'Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.'"

Hannah returned to the bedroom, and found Daniel still unconscious. Whether he was sleeping or not, she could not tell. Hannah grabbed the first aid book her mother had given to her, upon learning that Hannah was going to work in the city. She could hear her mother saying, "I told you so," as she opened the heavy volume. Since a doctor had already treated the wound, the only thing she could find to do was to keep him warm. Hannah picked up a warm blanket, and covered Daniel up.

She felt uncomfortable about being left alone with a stranger. Especially one bigger than she was. After some thought, she decided to sleep over at Mrs. Weinberg's apartment, one door down the corridor from her own. From there, she could come and check up on Daniel every hour or so and make sure he was all right. With that settled in her mind, Hannah picked up the

telephone and called Mrs. Weinberg. She asked her if she could sleep over that night, without explaining the reason why, for it was not her intention to scare the elderly woman by the events of the day. Mrs. Weinberg was happy for the company, and insisted that she stay as long as she wanted.

There are people in this world that I refer to as tender-hearts. Mrs. Weinberg was one such person. She had experienced the joy of a newlywed, only to experience the sadness of a widow, three weeks after her wedding. She never remarried. Now, at the age of sixty-two, she made her living by baby-sitting other people's children while they worked.

Hannah checked Daniel one more time, and then left her apartment, making sure the door was locked. Before Hannah fell asleep, she petitioned God to help all the people who had aided her that day.

"Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy."
~ Matthew 5:7 ~

Chapter Five

Exodus

"Blessed is [she] that considereth the poor: the LORD will deliver [her] in time of trouble."
~ Psalm 41:1 ~

Every hour, Hannah would wake up, and check Daniel. This act of mercy was made even more amazing by the fact she woke up on her own, unaided by an alarm clock. All night, Daniel slept fitfully, first tossing to one side, then to the other. Hannah was very alarmed he would loosen his stitches. Many times, she would say a prayer for Daniel, and remind God of His promises. For one so weak, Daniel amazed Hannah how often he could kick off his blanket. But every time, Hannah faithfully covered him again. Finally, the sun's rays peered between the skyscrapers and announced to the city dwellers that a new day had begun.

Hannah stretched out on Mrs. Weinberg's sofa. It had been a long night. Providentially, the elderly woman had remained fast asleep the entire night, and did not hear Hannah coming and going. Hannah got up and returned to her apartment. Since the night had been bitterly cold, Hannah made some oatmeal and sat down to eat at the small table in the kitchen.

It had not occurred to her, however, that the enticing smell had awaken her guest. A small noise made Hannah look up from her breakfast. Daniel stood in the bedroom doorway gazing at her. But, the minute her eyes met his, they immediately looked down. Hannah got up from her chair. She held out her hand, so that they might shake hands.

"Hello, Daniel," said Hannah. Daniel did not look at her, so he could not tell she was speaking to him. Hannah, realizing this, stepped into his eyesight. "Hello," she repeated. Instead of responding, he turned his head away. Not to be deterred, Hannah gently took his arm and helped him in the direction of the table. Daniel reluctantly allowed her to guide him. Hannah dished up another bowl of hot oatmeal and placed it upon the table before Daniel's eyes. The look of humiliation that she had witnessed on his face so many times before, returned. Instead of eating, he just sat there. Finally, hunger became too hard to resist. Daniel picked up his spoon and began eating. Hannah solemnly observed he didn't thank God before eating his meal. Before Daniel could finish his breakfast, the room began to swirl around him. Hannah saw this, and helped him back to the bedroom. After he lay down, she covered him up, and left the room, closing the bedroom door behind her.

During the night, and especially upon seeing him stand up, Hannah had made a few observations. Daniel's hair had been washed when he stayed at the hospital, but his long beard remained. Also, she had observed that the faded blue jacket he always wore, was missing.

Suddenly, she remembered that the emergency workers had cut it off trying to inspect his wound. Hannah glanced at the time. In a half hour, she would be late for work. Hannah washed her face in the kitchen sink, for the bathroom was in the bedroom, and she did not want to disturb Daniel by her presence.

"Why doesn't he look at me when I'm trying to speak to him?" she wondered. "I guess it's because I'm a stranger, or maybe he just doesn't like accepting help from a woman." At any rate, she was going to help, whether he liked it or not. Hannah had worked too long and hard to help him, to be dissuaded so easily. She smoothed out her hair, and made her clothing look as if she had not slept in them. Before Hannah left, she wrote a small note and placed it on the table. It read: "Help yourself to anything in the refrigerator. You are welcome here." She signed it, and then quietly left the apartment, making doubly sure that the door was indeed locked.

When she arrived at work, Jenny took her aside and asked a million questions at once. Then she noticed Hannah's tired face.

"Hannah, what happened?" her voice filled with concern. Mr. Hanley opened the office door, and demanded they get to work. Jenny immediately obeyed. Her questions would have to be answered later.

"Miss Anderson, please step into my office," ordered Mr. Hanley. Hannah obeyed. Mr. Hanley's office walls were crowded with plaques honoring him for his sizable donations to various charitable organizations. Hannah grimly noted this as she sat down in the chair he offered. "Miss Anderson, I received a telephone from a Pastor Mark of 'First Hope Baptist Shelter.' He said you had been searching for a friend of yours, and mentioned in passing, that you were my secretary. That's how he knew to look up this number," explained Mr. Hanley. "This Pastor Mark expressed concern upon your wandering about from shelter to shelter, an opinion with which I agree." Hannah was mildly surprised by Mr. Hanley's show of concern for her safety. He lit another Cuban cigar and leaned back in his chair. "Just who is this friend of yours, that you would risk life and limb for?" The personal nature of the question angered Hannah.

"Mr. Hanley," she said getting up from the chair, "I do willingly answer any questions you have that are pertinent to my job here. Anything else, I refuse to answer," she replied evenly. Mr. Hanley's mouth formed a wide smile. He rolled his Cuban cigar between his fingers.

"Very well said, Miss Anderson. That's what I like about you. You don't take it from anyone, including me." The look on his face chilled Hannah to her very core.

"May I go now?" she asked.

"Not just yet, Miss Anderson. Don't worry, I will not molest your tender senses," he added with his usual voice of mock condescension. "I have a business proposition for you. As you know, our company has reinvented its image. 'Family values' is our new motto. However, if I am to sell it, I must look the part. In short, I need a wife. You're good looking enough to fill the part and bold enough to stand beside me and hold your head up with Hanley pride! What do you say? Is it a deal?" Hannah stood riveted to the expensive carpet lining his office. "I know what you're thinking," he reasoned. "What's in it for me? Right? Well, that's easy. Not only will you be the most envied woman in America, you can also be one of the wealthiest. You've seen my financial situation. I'm one of the ten wealthiest men in America. You can have anything!" Mr. Hanley's voice resonated with greed. "Whatever you want, whenever you want, I always say!" He took another puff of his cigar. The sick smell emanating from his cigar nauseated Hannah. For a brief second, she knew how Jesus must have felt when Satan offered him the riches of the world, if only, He would bow down and worship him.

"Never," came her reply. Hannah quickly exited his office and gathered her belongings from her desk. Mr. Hanley stood in the doorway, livid with anger.

"How dare you refuse me!" he shouted. Jenny shrank back. "Do you know who I am? I know women who would KILL to have the opportunity that you so effortlessly rejected!"

"Then ask one of them, Mr. Hanley, for I shall not." Hannah turned to leave. "I'm sorry to leave you alone, Jenny, but I quit."

"You're fired!" screamed Mr. Hanley at the top of his lungs, unknowingly dropping ash from his expensive cigar onto his expensive carpet, and burning an expensive hole. Jenny was too timid to remain in the office alone with Mr. Hanley. She quickly grabbed her purse and ran after Hannah.

"Hannah! Please wait!" she called. Her friend looked up, surprised to see shy Jenny standing beside her. "I was going to quit when the baby was born anyway," she smiled. When they hugged, Jenny could feel Hannah tremble. "Poor thing," she whispered. Hannah and Jenny left Mr. Hanley's office building as quickly as they could. Even though the sun felt warm on her face, Hannah could not stop trembling.

"Oh, Jenny, I'm going home. I am so tired," she confided. Jenny glanced at her friend as they walked.

"Did you ever find the streetlight panhandler, Hannah?" As they strolled down the street, Hannah confided yesterday's events to her friend. Jenny's eyes grew wide. "What will happen to Daniel when you leave?"

"I've already thought of that. I'll take him with me. It's not exactly safe for him to stay in the city right now. Besides, he will be able to recover more peacefully at my parents' house in the country. They have a spare room. They won't mind." Hannah looked at her watch. "It's a three hour drive. If I get started before eleven, I'll be home late this afternoon." The busy crowds pushed past the two somber friends.

"Be careful," warned Jenny. "I sincerely doubt Mr. Hanley will do anything, for he would hate the media catching wind of his rejection. All the same, 'my Father worketh hitherto, and I work.' Don't take any unnecessary risks. Stay off the side roads. Stick to the main highways. And keep Daniel out of sight. Which reminds me, if he's as hurt as you say, how will you get him there?"

"I'll make a bed in the back seat of my car. That way, no one can see him from the windows," replied Hannah, showing that she had been reasoning along the same lines.

"Leave as soon as you can, Hannah. Before Mr. Hanley has time to recover from your insult." Hannah nodded in approval. "I'll miss you. May God's angels guard you both." Jenny hugged her friend, and then watched as Hannah disappeared into the crowd. "Lord God," Jenny prayed silently, "protect the tiny exodus."

"I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt... unto a land flowing with milk and honey."
~ Exodus 3:17 ~

"And the devil, taking Him up into an high mountain, showed unto Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. And the devil said unto Him, All this power will I give Thee, and the glory of them: for that is delivered unto me; and to whomsoever I will I give it. If Thou therefore wilt worship me, all shall be Thine. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Get thee behind me, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve."

~ Luke 4:5-8 ~

Chapter Six
A Stranger's Shame

"The shame of my face hath covered me."
~ Psalm 44:15 ~

Hannah did not remember walking back to her apartment that morning. She only knew when she finally reached it. The door was still locked, and Daniel still lay asleep on the bed. Silently, Hannah began to pack her belongings into her suitcases. Then she piled them into the trunk of her car. One more thought occurred to her. It would not do to have her parents see the wild looking man asleep in the next room. She ran down the street and bought Daniel some new clothes. She made it a point to get him socks.

When she returned home a half hour later, Hannah looked inside the bedroom. Daniel lay flat on his back, his head turned towards the window. Hannah stood there for a moment and watched as he gazed out the window. It was true he could not hear sound, but his eyes seemed to listen for him. He could feel the quiet and stillness surrounding him. Hannah stepped inside the room. Daniel caught her movement and looked up. She placed the new clothes on the foot of the bed, along with a razor.

"These are for you," she said hesitatingly. Daniel refused to look at her. She stepped into his eyesight once more. "We're going to leave here as soon as you get cleaned up, Daniel." He turned his eyes away, but not before he had read her lips. Not knowing this, Hannah left the room, closing the door behind her. She sat down on the sofa, her arms hugging her knees to stop them from trembling. Even though she felt it might be dangerous to stay, Hannah refused to leave without Daniel. He was still too weak. She prayed to God and pleaded for courage. She soon fell fast asleep, for the hard night had only added to her exhaustion.

In the bedroom, Daniel was feeling ashamed of himself-- a feeling that he often had. He hated pity, but it stung even more to have her feel sorry for him. Every time he looked into her eyes, he became acutely aware of his shame. Daniel closed his eyes and tried to remember his parents. His memory of them had dimmed over the years. When he was seven, his vivid memories of them were all he had left. Now that he was older, very few of them had survived. However, he could remember the grave look on his teacher's face when she told him that his parents had been in an accident. Daniel could remember the nurse carrying him away when the doctor had told him they died. A tear rolled down his cheek and disappeared into his long brown beard.

When Daniel was eight, the system failed to place him in a foster home. Therefore, he was left in the care of a state run institution. Maybe it was because he was deaf, or maybe, it was just

because the system that had been placed there to educate him for a productive roll in society, was too bogged down by the sheer number of abandoned and abused children. When Daniel turned eighteen, he was discharged from the institution that had been his only refuge for ten years. Ever since, his home had been the streets. He looked at the pile of clothing Hannah had placed at the foot of the bed.

"She was always kind," Daniel thought to himself.

Hannah slept peacefully on the sofa, until someone tapped her on the arm. A handsome stranger stood towering over her. She quickly grabbed a lamp from off the stand beside the sofa.

"Who are you?" she shouted, brandishing the light fixture over her head. Daniel took a step back, surprised by her reaction. When their eyes met, he quickly looked away. "Daniel, is that you?" asked Hannah in disbelief. Since he had not looked at her to read her lips, the question went unanswered. It's no wonder Hannah was so surprised. Without his long brown beard, and the dirty smell she had grown so accustomed to, Daniel looked nothing like the streetlight panhandler she had pitied every day for five months. She observed, however, that the expression in his eyes and his reaction to her remained unchanged. His aversion to her eyes was making it very difficult to communicate. "I feel like an internet connection," she laughed outloud, knowing Daniel could not see her. "We're always communicating at an unknown rate!" Hannah shook her head, "I know-- lame joke," she muttered, but smiling nonetheless. Suddenly, Hannah remembered the time, and looked at her watch. It was a little after eleven.

"Come on, Daniel," she said, taking him by the arm. She helped him outside to the car, and opened the door to the backseat, motioning for him to get in. Daniel carefully did as he was told. He soon made use of the pillow and blanket she had placed there. Next, Hannah returned to her apartment and locked the door. Then, she went next door to Mrs. Weinberg's apartment and said goodbye. Daniel waited in the car, feeling very much like a dependent, helpless baby. It was near the truth, however, for he was still very weak. When Hannah returned, she started the car and followed Jenny's advice by staying on the main highway.

While Daniel slept in the back seat, Hannah tried to imagine what her parents' reaction would be when they saw her passenger. She knew she had to tell them the truth, but how was she to go about it, without frightening her parents? The closer they came to her home, the more uncomfortable Hannah became.

"At least he cleaned up nicely," she consoled herself. Her parents would not have to see Daniel looking like the streetlight panhandler. As she drove, Hannah tried to imagine the questions that would undoubtedly follow her unexpected arrival. "Please, God," she prayed, "HELP!"

"The heart of the righteous studieth to answer."
~ Proverbs 15:28 ~

Chapter Seven
Still Waters

"He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: He leadeth me beside the still waters."
~ Psalm 23:2 ~

At two o'clock, Hannah pulled up to her parents' driveway. She looked in the back seat. Daniel had slept for the entire car trip. After saying another prayer, Hannah quietly opened the car door. Since Daniel was asleep, she decided it would be best if she prepared her parents before waking him up. The white, two-story farmhouse sat serenely atop a small hill, as if it had climbed up there, just to be nearer to the sky. Around the farmhouse, Mrs. Anderson had planted large flower beds, splashing the green hill with vibrant colors of the rainbow. Hannah breathed in the pure air, and took in the beauty of the surrounding green pastures. In the distance, she saw the old cattle fence, now broken down and unused, but looking very picturesque, nonetheless. Every weekend, Hannah would drive here to be with her parents.

Hannah realized that she was stalling, so she gathered up her courage, and went inside. Mrs. Anderson looked up from her easel when Hannah entered the living room.

"Sweetie! You're a little early this week, aren't you?" she asked, quickly glancing at the calendar to confirm the day of the week, lest she was mistaken.

"Where's Dad? I need to talk to you both," she asked, kissing her mother on the cheek. Mrs. Anderson looked at her daughter seriously.

"Is anything wrong, Dear?"

"No, Mom. I'm fine. It's just..." Hannah paused, unsure what to say. "I'll go get Dad," she broke off, running to the back of the house. Mr. Anderson was in his small workshop, as Hannah guessed, working on a rocking chair for his wife. He greeted his daughter with pleasant surprise, also repeating the same questions Mrs. Anderson had asked. "Dad, could you come into the house? I need to talk to you and Mom together." Sensing the urgency in her voice, Mr. Anderson followed Hannah back to the house.

"Well, Mother, it looks like Hannah Elizabeth is about to break some bad news," he said, sitting down on the sofa beside his wife.

"I don't think it's very bad news, Father," Mrs. Anderson replied, patting her husband's knee. Hannah stood in front of the couch, facing her parents.

"First of all," she began, careful of how she chose her words, "I am all right. I don't want to alarm you two by the story I'm going to tell. God has been with me every step of the way. When I moved to the city five months ago..." and from there, she told her parents Daniel's story. For now, she left out Mr. Hanley. They remained silent until she finally sat down. Mr. Anderson was the first to break the silence.

"You say he's outside, asleep in the back of your car?" he asked, half unbelievably. Hannah nodded.

"He slept all the way here. I'd like to put him in the guest room downstairs, until he's well. Then, maybe I can find him a job."

"Is that all you know about him, Beth? That he's been on the streets for an unknown period of time?" Mr. Anderson got up from his seat on the sofa. "How did you know he wasn't going to hurt you? I'm sorry, but that was a foolhardy thing to do." He placed his hands on his hips and shook his head.

"I know how all this sounds," said Hannah. "If I were you, I'd say the same thing. In fact, I'd probably lock my daughter in her room until she had better sense. But, if you were in my place, and had seen what I saw, I cannot help thinking you wouldn't have done something similar to what I did. Daniel isn't dangerous. He is a kind person, who's lived in a cruel world."

"He did try to break up a fight, Father," reminded Mrs. Anderson.

"True enough," he sighed, "I want to be fair to the man, but we must judge him by his fruit. Did you really follow that boy... what was his name again? Mikey? did you really follow Mikey under a dark underpass?" Mr. Anderson asked, hoping that maybe he had misunderstood his daughter. Hannah nodded, wondering herself, how she could do something so dangerous. Mr. Anderson ran his fingers through his hair, and sat back down on the sofa. "Mother, we taught our kids to act upon the leading of the Holy Spirit. While I would not encourage everyone to follow strangers under dark underpasses, if you are led of God to do it, then so be it!"

"You've always been a good girl, Hannah," smiled her mother. "When you were a child, you always brought home the oddest hurt animals." Mr. Anderson laughed heartily.

"I think we should thank God for protecting our daughter, Father," suggested Mrs. Anderson. Together, they bowed their heads and thanked Jehovah for His protection and peace. Afterward, Mrs. Anderson helped Hannah prepare the downstairs guest room.

The downstairs guest room had two windows, one facing North, and the other facing East. When the house was originally built, a door was added under the stairway that opened to the guest room. When Hannah was a little girl, this room had always been a favorite place to play during rainy days.

"Hannah," asked her mother, as they left the guest room, "do you know if Daniel is a Christian?"

"I don't think so, Mom."

"Then you are not in love with him, I hope?" Hannah was surprised by her mother's frankness.

"No, I am not. Did something I say or do, make you think otherwise?" asked Hannah, curiously.

"You don't act like you are in love, no. But, there is something that you haven't told us yet. Am I correct, Hannah?" Hannah smiled in amazement at her mother's perception.

"There is something, yes. But, it has nothing to do with Daniel." Mother and daughter sat down together on one of the bottom steps of the staircase. Hannah then told her mother about Mr. Hanley.

"I'm glad you turned him down, Honey," smiled Mrs. Anderson. "So, you are home to stay?" she asked, hopefully.

"For now, Mom."

"Well, that answer will do... for now," replied Mrs. Anderson.

"I don't see Daniel in the back of your car, Beth," announced Mr. Anderson from the front door.

"Don't worry," replied Hannah, getting up from her seat on the staircase, "he couldn't have gone far." She stepped onto the porch beside her father and scanned the countryside.

"Why do you think he walked off, Beth?" asked Mr. Anderson.

"I never know why he does anything. I'll go look for him," she said, stepping down from the porch, "he shouldn't be walking around."

"Do you want any help, Beth?" Mr. Anderson called out after her. But Hannah did not hear her father's question. She was too busy scolding herself for leaving Daniel alone. The pasture surrounding the small hill, revealed for miles, that it was empty. However, there was a pond a

few feet away from the base of the hill. Thick foliage crowded around it, drinking up the abundant water supply. It was the only place Daniel could be. Hannah followed the little path that led to the water's edge. There, she found Daniel, silently standing beside the still water. His eyes were fixed upon the fish that would occasionally disturb the glassy surface, creating soft ripples. Hannah let out a sigh of relief, and stepped forward to look into the pond also. Daniel saw Hannah's reflection on the water, and turned to leave. But, as he did so, he winced with pain. Hannah looked at his shirt. Blood soaked the area around his wound.

"You shouldn't be walking around, Daniel," scolded Hannah, taking no notice of whether he read her lips or not. "Come on, we need to get you to the house." Daniel slowly made his way to the front door of the farmhouse, pushing aside Hannah's offer of assistance. He was determined to make it on his own power. Mr. Anderson welcomed him on the porch.

"Hello, Daniel," Mr. Anderson greeted, holding out his hand. To Hannah's surprise, Daniel accepted her father's hand, shaking it politely. "You are welcome here," Mr. Anderson added, showing him inside the living room. Mrs. Anderson appeared from the kitchen and smiled warmly. The safe atmosphere of the house was in stark contrast to the violent streets he had been so accustomed to. For the first time, Hannah saw Daniel smile. Hannah also observed that when her parents spoke to him, he looked directly at them, not averting his eyes like he so frequently did with her. She was happy he was treating her parents so nicely, but Daniel's double standard annoyed her.

Hannah went to the medicine cabinet in the bathroom and retrieved more bandages. When she returned, Daniel was seated on the couch, while her parents sat in their armchairs facing him. Hannah sat down beside Daniel and unfolded some bandages.

"That little walk he took, opened the wound again," Hannah said, directing her comment to her parents. They watched as Hannah lifted the edge of Daniel's shirt to apply more gauze. He immediately stood up, refusing her help. "Fine," said Hannah, throwing down the gauze, "bleed to death. See if I care." Upon witnessing this, Mrs. Anderson got up from her armchair and picked up the gauze from Hannah's lap. She lifted Daniel's shirt and applied it over his preexisting bandage. Daniel did not protest, but patiently waited until Mrs. Anderson had finished.

"Did you two eat lunch?" she asked, looking directly at Hannah for a reply, her expression revealing displeasure. Ashamed of her words, Hannah looked down and shook her head. Mrs. Anderson returned to the kitchen to fix them lunch.

"Don't you think you owe Daniel an apology, Beth?" asked Mr. Anderson, solemnly.

"He doesn't read my lips when I speak, anyway." As she said this, Hannah looked in Daniel's direction. He had silently been following the conversation, but now that Hannah was looking directly at him, he quickly turned his head. "See what I mean, Dad?"

"Whether Daniel listens to you or not, is his choice. Treat him the way Jesus would do, and set a good example, Beth," admonished Mr. Anderson. Hannah looked at Daniel.

"I apologize," she said. The apology went unheard, for his head was still turned. Hannah sighed.

"Patience, Beth," smiled Mr. Anderson. Hannah smiled in return, and went to the kitchen to help her mother. Mrs. Anderson looked up as her daughter walked into the kitchen.

"I apologized, Mom," said Hannah penitently.

"Be gentle with him, Hannah," warned her mother. "I believe Daniel can be hurt more easily than you think."

"The servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient... if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth."

~ 2 Timothy 2:24-25 ~

Chapter Eight

One of Life's Surprises

"The proud have hid a snare for me, and cords; they have spread a net by the wayside."
~ Psalm 140:5 ~

At nine o' clock in the morning, the next day, Hannah was awakened by her mother.

"Sweetie, I know you wanted to sleep in, but there's a reporter downstairs, asking for you."
Hannah immediately woke up.

"A reporter?" she repeated. She began to search her mind for a reason. Mr. Hanley was the only reason she could think of. Hannah put on her terry robe, and followed her mother downstairs. Mr. Anderson was sitting in his favorite armchair, and reading the morning newspaper. Daniel was resting on the sofa, where Mrs. Anderson had made a kind of makeshift bed for him, so he would not have to stay in his room all the time. When she walked down the steps, everyone, including Daniel, looked up. A smartly-dressed woman got up from Mrs. Anderson's armchair and approached Hannah.

"Hannah Anderson?" she asked, holding out her hand, in a friendly like manner.

"Yes?" replied Hannah, shaking the offered hand.

"I'm Victoria Jackson of the 'Daily Report.' Are you familiar with the 'Daily Report,' Hannah?" she asked, taking out a tape recorder.

"I don't read tabloids," replied Hannah, evenly.

"Well, then," she smiled, "good thing for me five million other people do. You don't mind if I record this interview, do you? Of course you don't," she replied, answering her own question. "Would you prefer to sit, or stand?" Hannah could not help comparing that question to an executioner asking his victim if he would rather be blindfolded or not.

"I'll stand." She could feel the eyes of everyone in the room on her.

"Hannah," began Victoria, "did you, by any chance, read the newspaper this morning?"

"No, I did not. As you can see," said Hannah, referring to her terry robe, "I just woke up."

"Then you did not hear of Tom Hanley's marriage?"

"So that's what this is about," Hannah thought. "I thought just as much."

"No, Victoria, I did not."

"Does this come as a surprise?" asked Victoria. Hannah looked into her eyes. She saw the ease with which Victoria tried to entrap her in her own words.

"Life is just full of surprises," replied Hannah.

"Doesn't this come less than a day after you turned down a proposal of marriage from Tom Hanley?" she asked. Mr. Anderson looked at his daughter in surprise.

"Is that so?" replied Hannah, raising her eyebrows. Victoria saw that she was not going to cooperate.

"If you want it the hard way, Hannah, you're going to get it," she warned. Daniel's face tightened. "There's a rumor going around that a bug was placed in the office of Tom Hanley, taping both him and his private secretary," she said, pointing at Hannah. "I already know everything," she smiled.

"Then why ask me these questions?" asked Hannah, gripping the banister.

"We like to confirm our stories, firsthand," Victoria explained.

"Since when?" retorted Hannah. "I don't believe you are here to confirm anything. If what you say is true, then to publish anything that was recorded without knowledge of the parties concerned would be breaking the law, am I right, Victoria? You can't use the tape-- if there really is one." Victoria's jaw grew tense.

"If you talk, we could make it worth your while," she said temptingly.

"I'm not interested," answered Hannah, entering the living room and accepting a cup of hot tea from her mother.

"Not even half a million dollars?" she asked. Hannah looked at Victoria over the rim of her cup.

"If you really believe I rejected a proposal of marriage from one of the ten wealthiest men in America, why do you think I would accept your offer?" Victoria shut off her recorder.

"I think you know the way out, Miss Jackson," said Mr. Anderson sternly. She grabbed her coat, and walked to the door. But, before leaving, she swung around sharply.

"Don't think you've won!" she threatened, "Not by a long shot!" Hannah listened as Victoria drove away, and took another sip of tea. In spite of her bravado, Daniel saw the cup tremble. Mr. Anderson looked at his daughter, incredulously.

"Did you really turn down THE Tom Hanley? The one we see on all those commercials? Was he very mad?" asked Mr. Anderson.

"He didn't exactly click his heels for joy, if that's what you mean," replied Hannah, setting down the cup, for her hands could not hang on to it any longer.

"Sounds like there's going to be trouble," observed Mrs. Anderson.

"I'm sorry I brought you into this mess," Hannah said, verging on tears. Mrs. Anderson opened her arms and hugged Hannah lovingly.

"It's in God's hands," Mrs. Anderson reassured. Daniel got up from his bed on the sofa, and returned to his room. The picture of a mother comforting her child, brought back a flood of memories Daniel thought he had forgotten. He hugged the bed and wept. Hannah noticed Daniel's abrupt departure and walked over to his shut door.

"It sounds like he's crying," she said, surprisingly. Mr. Anderson motioned for her to come away from his door.

"Beth, sit down," he instructed. Hannah sat down on the sofa. "You are surprised to discover that Daniel has feelings, Beth? I think I know why he does not look at you when you speak to him." Hannah leaned forward. "To you, Daniel is someone you rescued from the streets. You saved his life by taking him in. I am proud of you for that. It shows a merciful heart, and God delights in mercy. But," he went on, "you treat him like a child. Daniel knows that he owes you more than he can ever repay. By your attitude towards him, you remind him of his own shame." Mr. Anderson paused, "There is one thing more I think you should be aware of. Your mother and I saw it the first time we saw Daniel, but you, apparently, have not noticed it. That poor man is in love with you, Beth." Hannah shook her head, disbelievingly.

"You have to be mistaken. Daniel doesn't even like me," said Hannah.

"Beth, I have been married for forty years. I could recognize the love in his eyes when he looks at you, a mile away! But," he continued solemnly, "this is a dangerous situation. A man, who as far as I know, is not a Christian, is in love with you. It would be very easy for you to love him in return. That is why, your mother and I think it would be best if you went away." Hannah looked up at her mother, who was standing beside her husband's armchair.

"I'm sorry to send you away, especially with all the media trouble, but it is the right thing to do," exhorted Mrs. Anderson.

"But I don't love Daniel," replied Hannah.

"This is best, Hannah," said Mrs. Anderson. Hannah accepted her parents' advice. After all, she had been the one who took the job with Mr. Hanley's office. Look at the trouble she was in now!

"I'll go back to my apartment. It's probably best that I leave anyway. I don't want any more reporters bothering you guys again. Besides," she added on a happier note, "Jenny's baby is due soon. I think her husband will appreciate my keeping her company while he's at work." Hannah got up from the sofa. "It's strange," she observed outloud, "I feel like the whole world has changed in one morning."

"Discretion shall preserve thee, understanding shall keep thee."

~ Proverbs 2:11 ~

Chapter Nine
The Open Hand
(Epilogue)

"I command thee, saying, Thou shalt open thine hand wide unto thy brother, to thy poor, and to thy needy, in thy land."

~ Deuteronomy 15:11 ~

It was Providential that Hannah had not yet unpacked her luggage. Mr. Anderson helped carry it back out to Hannah's car. Mrs. Anderson hugged her daughter.

"May God keep you safe, Sweetie," Mrs. Anderson prayed.

"Are you sure you don't want to wait until Daniel wakes up, and let him know you're leaving, Beth?" asked Mr. Anderson, closing the trunk of the car.

"If what you told me about him is true, then it's best I leave now," Hannah replied. Mr. Anderson hugged his daughter. As she got into the car, Hannah saw Daniel looking at her from one of the guest room windows. "Good bye, Daniel," she whispered. "I hope I haven't hurt you." She started the car, and drove away.

For the next three hours, she followed the ribbon of highway back to the city. Her apartment had remained exactly as she left it the day before. Hannah picked up the lamp she had threatened to throw at Daniel, and put it back on the stand. When she went into the bathroom, Hannah found his old clothes, neatly folded, on the floor by the trash can. Tears came to her eyes.

"Please, God," she pleaded, "don't let me hurt him!" Hannah wiped the tears from her eyes. The whole apartment reminded her of the quiet streetlight panhandler. Hannah left the apartment complex, on her way to visit Jenny. When she neared the corner of Jefferson and Madison, Hannah noticed her father standing beside his car. He didn't see her. As Hannah was about to get his attention, she saw Daniel standing beside the streetlight, just as if he had never left. Hannah stood, frozen to the sidewalk. Daniel saw her and came near, his face solemn.

Daniel began to speak, his voice slow, and undefined, but very understandable. "When I was eight, my parents both died in a car accident. They both were Christians. That day, I cursed God. For many years, I hated Him for what He did to me. I was slow, and could not hear. Everyone cast me away, or passed me by, as if I were trash." Hannah opened her mouth to say something, but Daniel motioned for her to stop. "Then, five months ago, you started stopping at this

stoplight. You always had a smile for me. I fought to survive each day, just to see you." Daniel's voice was wavering, but he continued anyway. "When I was dying in the alley, I knew it was my last chance to get right with God. That day, He forgave me," said Daniel, quickly brushing aside his tears.

Tears began to run down Hannah's cheeks. She tried to stop, but could not.

"I made you cry," said Daniel, rebuking himself, thinking he had frightened her. "You go back to your family, where it's safe. It's your home, not mine." Her tears fell even faster. Daniel looked for help from Mr. Anderson, but He only smiled, and turned away.

"Why didn't you speak to me before now?" she asked. Daniel looked down at the pavement.

"I was ashamed of my voice. Someone told me once that it sounded like a monster. I didn't want to scare you."

"You have a very pleasant voice, Daniel," she reassured. But, Daniel had not heard her, for his eyes still looked downward. Hannah tapped him on the shoulder, and repeated herself. For the first time, he did not avert his eyes from hers. And then, Hannah understood why. The look of love in his eyes was unmistakable. His eyes spoke so much more than his words could express. A surge of hope flooded Daniel's heart.

"I am nothing, and I have nothing to give you, Hannah. The only thing I can offer you is my heart, and you have that already. I don't suppose you could ever love me?" he asked, not allowing himself to hope too strong. As Hannah listened to Daniel, she could feel herself falling. Hannah held out her hand to Daniel.

"Open your hand wide, Daniel. I'm falling in love, and I need you to catch me." Daniel grabbed her hand and held onto it tightly.

"I won't let go, Hannah," he said firmly, "by the grace of God, I won't let you go." Mr. Anderson smiled widely as he saw Hannah and Daniel walk towards him.

"Just after you left, Beth," Mr. Anderson explained, happily, "Daniel came to me and began to speak what God had put in his heart. While he talked, your Mother jammed me into my coat and insisted that he and I drive after you. And," Mr. Anderson smiled, "by the look of you two, I guess there will be a happy ending after all." Hannah kissed her father on the cheek.

Just as the happy trio was about to get inside the car, to return home, a limousine pulled up. A black tinted window rolled down, and Mr. Hanley's face appeared.

"I was just on my way to see you, Miss Anderson," he said, climbing out of his limousine. "I understand Victoria Jackson tried to interview you!" he laughed. "That woman is dangerous! She could make my pastor confess to the assassination of President Lincoln, if she had the mind." Mr. Hanley lit a Cuban cigar. "I like to keep my enemies in front of me, and not behind, Miss Anderson. It's harder to stab someone in the back that way." Daniel held on to Hannah's hand tightly, lending her his strength.

"I don't carry a knife," replied Hannah, evenly.

"I am glad to hear that, Miss Anderson. The story will never be published. I didn't want a public lawsuit, so I bought the 'Daily Report.'" Mr. Hanley inspected the handsome man holding Hannah's hand so devotedly. "So, this is the bum you turned me down for. I pass by no-accounts like him everyday. What on earth could he give you that I could not?" he asked.

"A pure heart," she promptly replied.

Mr. Hanley smugly rolled the Cuban cigar between his fingers. "Miss Anderson, you are a fool." With that, Mr. Hanley climbed back into his limousine and drove away.

*"Better is the poor that walketh in his integrity, than he that is perverse in his lips, and is a fool."
~ Proverbs 19:1 ~*

Hannah looked up into Daniel's loving face. The clouds overhead parted, shining down a ray of pure sunlight. Daniel looked up.

"Hannah," he said, his voice filled with wonder, "God is smiling!"

"I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread."
~ Psalm 37:25 ~

"The King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me."
~ Matthew 25:40 ~

"Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves?
And he said, He that showed mercy on him. Then said Jesus unto him, Go, and do thou
likewise."

~ Luke 10:36-37 ~

End of Book.

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