

Chapter 3

The massive bell that was mounted in the battlement-like tower of St. Stephen's Cathedral clanged out its solemn and ponderous message of accusation against penitent Catholics to come to church and confess their sins and be forgiven. Close to the downtown area, it had to compete with the busy sounds of morning traffic, seeking the attention of men more concerned about laying up treasures on earth than being reconciled to the God of Heaven. But from the front room on the seventh floor of the Roosevelt Hotel, across the street from St. Stephen's, where I stood looking out the window, it was impossible to shut out the sound. It had interrupted the reading aloud I had been doing at Corrine's request as she reclined on the bed behind me, munching on the carry-out breakfast I had brought for her.

"CLANG-g-g!"

The volume and resonance of the sound caused the very window in front of me to rattle from the vibrations. Ten blocks to the west, busy with the weekly washing, Florence probably could not hear the sound above the combined noise emanating from the washing machine and the television set. Even if she had heard, I mused, it probably would not have interrupted her grim devotion to duty.

"Aren't you going to read anymore, sweetheart?" Corrine's voice asked plaintively from behind me. In my right hand I held a book which I had given to

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Corrine as a gift several months before and from which I had been reading aloud before the sound of the cathedral bell across the street had begun to pour into the room. It contained an edited collection of quotations, poems, and excerpts that had been written on the subject of love between man and woman. As I had read fragments of what a particular woman's love had meant to such great men as Victor Hugo, Alexander Hamilton, Beethoven, and even Napoleon Bonaparte, I had been impressed anew with what a powerful influence a woman's love could be in the life of a man great or obscure.

"Let's wait until the church bell stops," I suggested, without turning from the window.

My proposal met with no protest from Corrine. The sounds she made, breaking up pieces of food and masticating food, was interspersed at regular intervals with the mournful "clang" of the giant bell. It was not the usual "ding-dong" church bell sound, in which a bell is pulled so that the clapper inside strikes first one side of the bell, then falls against the other side. It was pulled in such a way that the clapper struck only one side of the bell with a single, reverberating "clang." Then there was a mathematically precise interval of silence, of about fifteen seconds' duration, followed by another "clang."

As I stood looking out the window, listening to the bell and gazing idly at the medieval hulk of the great church where pigeons wheeled about the bell tower, the words from the book I had been reading recurred in my mind.

"O never, never take the priceless gift of love for granted! Hold it close, its magic touch will make each hour enchanted!"

There had indeed been enchantment with Corrine, here in this room, last night. This morning, some of the enchantment was gone. It had been banished from my mind in the aftermath of Florence's uncomforted crying in the night. And it seemed to have been driven from the room this morning, as Adam and Eve had been expelled from the Garden of Eden, by the ponderous pounding of the giant bell across the street. "Guilty-y-y" it seemed to clang, "Guilty-y-y!"

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Between bites of food, Corrine was able to inject a running flow of comments and questions into the fifteen-second intervals between the “guilty” clangs of the bell. “I hope you slept as well as I did, sweetheart.”

The words spewed up out of her like a geyser, pushed up from some deep, vibrant deposit of contentment which had been implanted within her the night before.

“Yes,” I lied, “I slept alright.”

“Good!” she sighed, “we always seem to sleep better after we've had our love fulfillment, don't we?”

“At least I do,” she added, using the pause in which I hesitated to answer for a comment that contained both a question and a subtle rebuke.

“Yes, darling I guess we do.”

“You guess?” she queried, in a tone of hurt surprise. “Aren't you certain, darling?”

“Yes, I'm certain, sweetheart.”

The tone of my voice was evidently not convincing enough for Corrine.

“Darling, turn around and look at me,” she pleaded.

I turned and looked into her eyes that reflected the troubled question in her mind. I was aware at the same time, in my area of peripheral vision, that she was a sexually enticing sight in the transparent black negligee that revealed more than it concealed.

“Now tell me, darling,” she demanded plaintively, “is something wrong?”

“No,” I shrugged, “why do you ask?”

“Because you sounded so sad when you were reading, and you look so weary. Did you really sleep well last night?”

In the hidden recesses of my mind I could still hear the sounds of Florence's muffled sobbing in the night. But of what avail to tell Corrine of it? I questioned myself silently. She would only feel hurt by the disclosure that I could be affected by any woman's tears except her own.

“Yes,” I repeated the lie, shifting my gaze to look at the autumn scene on the wall above her head, “I slept alright.”

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Corrine suddenly thought of a practical test to apply to me to check the truthfulness of my answer.

“Darling,” she pouted, “I've only had one kiss from you this morning.”

I laid down the book on the window sill and walked over to the bed. I picked up the breakfast tray from off her lap and set it down carefully on the bed beside her, then swept her into my embrace. I kissed her hard upon her upturned mouth, at once attracted by her soft, perfumed femininity and at the same time repelled by a sudden impulse of moral nausea that arose within me. It kept me from plunging my tongue into her mouth in a kiss of sexual arousal.

“GUILTY-y-y!” Clanged the bell, reinforcing the surge of self-loathing that had flooded through me.

“My darling's so smooth this morning,” Corrine murmured, rubbing her forehead against my cheek.

“Did you miss me, darling?” she asked, looking up into my eyes hopefully.

“Yes, I missed you, and I love you and adore you.”

I spoke the words I knew she wanted to hear then tried to gently disengage myself from her encircling arms.

“Now why don't you finish your breakfast?”

“One more kiss first,” she begged.

I leaned toward her and pressed my lips against her own in repetition of the kiss I had just given her, and like the first one I had given her when I had stepped into the room an hour before.

“Why don't you kiss me the way you did last night?” she reproached gently.

I sighed, caught in an emotional vise. I could never explain to Corrine that what I had been through with Florence had put a damper upon my sexual ardor for her, Corrine. And to avoid having to explain, I tried to hide the truth behind a facade of playacting. I embraced her again and pressed my lips to hers, this time pushing my tongue in between her hungrily parted lips, rolling my tongue against hers, and then against the insides of her mouth.

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“That's more like it!” she gasped as I drew back. “U-m-m, you get me excited. Do I get you excited?”

“Certainly you do; now finish your breakfast.”

Getting up from the bed, I walked back to the window, suddenly aware that the huge bell across the street had finally ceased its slow, doleful clanging. I picked up the book from the window sill, sat down facing Corrine and opened it at random to continue reading to Corrine while she finished her scrambled eggs, toast and tea. As I read aloud the never-before encountered opening lines of “The Woman Who Understands” by Everard Jack Appleton, the lines seemed suddenly reminiscent of the circumstances under which I had first met Corrine. For that reason perhaps, my voice contained something of my own spontaneous reaction of pathos and feeling as I read the words for the first time.

As the tide went out she found him
Lashed to a spar of Despair,
The wreck of his ship around him-
The wreck of his dreams in the air;
Found him, and loved him, and gathered
The soul of him close to her heart-
The soul that had sailed an uncharted sea,
The soul that had sought to win and be free-
The soul of which she was part!
And there in the dusk, she cried to the man,
"Win your battle-you can, you can!"

Somewhere she waits to make you win your soul
In her firm, white hands-
Somewhere, the gods have made for you,
The woman who understands!

Corrine broke into my reading. “Am I the woman you're reading about, Garfield? Am I the woman who understands you better than any other woman ever has?”

“Of course, darling,” I replied, glancing across the room at her.

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My affirmative answer was given without thought or reflection, almost as an automatic reflex, knowing it was the answer she needed to hear.

"Then there's just one change we'd have to make in those lines to make them really fit you and me," she continued. "I'm the woman God has made for you, not the gods. We both know there's only one true God."

"You're right, darling."

As I bent my gaze to the remaining stanzas of the poem, the quick answer I had given to Corrine's question continued to revolve in my mind, deterring me from continued reading aloud. There was no doubt in my mind I reflected, that Corrine was indeed the woman who understood in a wonderful way my needs and desires in the areas of sexual love. But would she also understand the grief I felt over the unhappy encounters with Florence last night and this morning? Could she understand and sympathetically accept the feelings of guilt and self-recrimination that pointed accusing fingers at me? The anguished memory of that scene, called forth by the very question Corrine had innocently asked, suddenly killed my taste for the book in my hands. I closed it, set it back on the windowsill behind me, then stood up and turned to face the window again, my back to Corrine. My action revoked an immediate response from her.

"There is something wrong isn't there, Garfield?"

"Maybe," I conceded, weary of holding back the truth.

"Why don't you tell me?" she pleaded. "We shouldn't keep things from each other."

I replied factually, without feeling, as I watched the pigeons roosting upon the battlements of St. Stephen's medieval towers.

"Florence wanted some affection last night."

"Did you give her any?" Corrine asked in a tight voice which told me that her insides were being squeezed together in an agony of suspense.

"No," I answered flatly, objectively, with my back still turned to her. "She just cried. I slept downstairs on the couch while she stayed upstairs."

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"Darling, turn around and look at me," Corrine pleaded.

I complied with her request but continued standing where I was by the window the length of the room separating us.

"I know it's hard on you, darling," she sympathized, balancing the half-emptied cup of tea on her lap, "but don't forget how I feel. Don't forget how I felt last night when you left me to sleep in a bed with another woman, when it's me that you love."

"I know."

Before her sobering gaze I dropped my eyes to study the design of the carpet; white flowers, now faded to a dull gray upon a background of drab crimson.

"So that's why you're so depressed this morning?"

"Partly," I acknowledged, looking up at her.

"Is something else wrong?"

"Yes, but there's no use talking about it," I replied with a feeling of hopelessness probably evident in my voice, as I turned and looked out the window again. In the vast, semi-darkened, candle-flickered interior of St. Stephen's Cathedral across the street, the eyes of my mind pierced the concealing walls and I saw the figure of Jesus Christ upon the cross above the altar. Imagination touched that immobile, lifeless figure of bronze and changed it to a living form of flesh and blood, twisting turning from the pain of nail-pierced hands and feet, the cruel crown of thorns, the dried blood caked in the corners of the eyes, the parched lips, the shameful indignity of hanging nearly stark naked before a crowd of caviling strangers and taunting enemies, writhing from the pain of being pinioned to the rough wooden cross by iron spikes. I thought of the act of adultery that had been committed in this very room the night before and of how that very act was one of the sins for which the Son of God had writhed in torment upon that cross . . . to save me from the eternal penalty of that single act of sin, as if there had been or would be no others; the punishment of everlasting separation from the presence of God and all the promised bliss that could be found only in His presence. In the love-fevered actions that had taken place in this room last night, I had pounded the

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nails deeper into the palms of his hands; I had pressed down the jagged crown of thorns deeper into his head.

“Garfield, please turn around and talk to me,” Corrine pleaded again.

I turned back to meet her hurt, inquiring gaze.

“What do you mean by saying there's no use talking about it? No use talking about what?”

Then fear, the fear that was ever crouched within her, ready to spring to life at the slightest provocation, seized her again.

“Do you mean that you want to go back to her, that you're going to leave me? Is that what you're trying to say, Garfield?”

“No, Corrine,” I sighed, sensing her anguish at such a prospect, “that's not what I'm trying to say at all”

“Then tell me what it is,” she pleaded.

She set aside the breakfast tray, a few crusts of toast left, her tea unfinished, and stared at me with a stricken expression, apprehensive about what I was going to say.

“Some time ago,” I began gazing steadfastly into her eyes from across the room, “you complained that I no longer wrote such long love letters to you as I used to do when we first came back together after being apart five years. It's because the joy and peace I used to feel in pouring out my heart to you has been slowly dying away. I feel that I'm dying spiritually because of a grievous sin in my life that I don't seem to have the power to overcome. That's what's wrong.”

“Corrine's eyes registered pain and perplexity. She gripped the bed sheet into a sudden, frenzied knot as she thought she grasped the import of my words.

“Have you been going to sexy movies behind my back again or reading those filthy magazines and books like you used to do before we met?”

I suppressed a groan of weariness at her spiritual short-sightedness that could see bygone evils afar off, but could not see the evil occurring under her very nose in the present, in her life and mine.

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“No, Corrine, that's not what's wrong. Do you mind if I read you a verse from the Bible to explain what I'm talking about?”

“Of course not, darling. You know I always enjoy having you do that. We should probably do it more when we're together, but it seems like our time together is always so short.”

I stepped over to the small nightstand beside the bed, pulled open a drawer and extracted a Gideon Bible. I sat down beside Corrine on the edge of the bed and opened the Bible to the Old Testament book of Leviticus.

“Here's a verse in the 20th chapter of Leviticus, the 10th verse,” I said, raising my eyes to hers, “that explains what's been bothering me lately.” I proceeded to read the verse aloud to her.

“And the man that committeth adultery with another man's wife, even he that committeth adultery with his neighbor's wife, the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death.”

I closed the Bible, replaced it in the nightstand drawer, and looked at Corrine, whose troubled expression had grown more apprehensive under the impact of the harsh words of condemnation I had read.

“Even though I've stopped talking about our sex relationship as adultery as I once did, Corrine,” I said solemnly, looking deep into her eyes, “I still believe it's wrong. Regardless of how wonderful an experience it seems to us, the verse I read shows what God thought of it in Old Testament times, and still does. And because of our continuing disobedience to His word in this area, I'm beginning to doubt that God will ever use my life for anything. That is what's been bothering me the most.”

“Are you blaming me for what happened last night?” she queried. Her lower lip trembled as she hovered precariously on the edge of tears, where any hint of criticism on my part pushed her. Then, defensively, she added, “You wanted it as much as I did.”

“There's never been any question about my wanting you

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sexually as much as you have wanted me," I acknowledged, "but I still never thought it was right."

"But you've said yourself that our sexual relationship was good and even beautiful, because we love each other. I've heard you say it, and you've written it to me in letters."

I bent toward her and took her nervously twisting hands in mine. I gazed into her eyes, my face inches from hers, trying to convey the love which I felt, to soften the seeming harshness of the words I felt compelled to speak.

"What I have said, my beloved, I still say. There is a sense in which our sexual relationship has been good and beautiful because we love each other and because God intended love and sex to go together. Inwardly, emotionally, psychologically, in regard to our feelings for each other, our sexual relationship has been all that I've said."

"Then how can you call it something evil?" she implored, "a sin, something that's bringing you death instead of life?"

"Because," I explained gently, "the Word of God does not take account of inner feelings, whether a man and a woman love each other or not. Adultery is based solely on the outward physical act, not on the inward feelings. Therefore, even though our sexual relationship may be good and beautiful in our eyes, in the sight of God it is sinful. It is still adultery a violation of the Seventh Commandment."

I stopped talking and drew Corrine into my arms, unable to explain to her this strange dichotomy in my experience, how that inwardly, this relationship to her, including sex, was the most beautiful thing I had ever known; and yet, judged outwardly as the language of Scripture judged, and as God and other Christians would judge, it was ugly; not beautiful. It was adultery. It was sin.

"I love you, Corrine," I whispered into the ear that was close to my mouth, screened over lightly by several wisps of golden hair.

She pulled back out of my arms a moment to look into my face, her eyes shining while drops of moisture glistened in the corners of her emerald green eyes.

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“That's what I've been wanting to hear since you got here, darling, just 'I love you, I love you.’”

She came back into my embrace, holding me close, and I let one hand wander lovingly down the smooth curve of her back, the silken fabric of her negligee failing to conceal the delicate bumps of her spinal column. I inhaled deeply of the perfumed fragrance of her hair and rubbed my cheek against her ear. But closeness to her, I realized in that moment of intimacy, was not just a matter of physical proximity. It was also a spiritual matter. And because I wanted to be close to her completely, spiritually as well as physically, it was necessary to talk, to communicate what I believed was involved in our relationship to God that affected our relationship to each other. I pulled away from her and looked into her eyes.

“Darling, I want you to understand what I believe God says in His Word about our relationship.”

“I know,” she assented softly, and a little sadly, seeing that I was going to continue with the unpleasant subject that had brought her to the verge of tears.

“Sweetheart,” I began gently, “do you remember the place in the New Testament where they dragged a woman before Jesus and were ready to stone her for adultery?”

“Yes.”

“Do you remember what Jesus said to her?”

“Go and sin no more,” she answered meekly.

“That's right,” I concurred, “but what I want you to see is that there was no consideration given by the Lord as to how this woman felt about the man with whom she had been caught in a sexual involvement, and nothing was said about how the man might have felt about her. Maybe they loved each other as much as we do, but Jesus based his judgment wholly on the outward, bodily act that had evidently been seen by witnesses. Regardless of how they may have loved each other, He still called it adultery. That's the only way God could have given a commandment against adultery, based on the outward physical actions because no man could tell what is in the heart of a man and a woman for each other. So regardless

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of how much we love each other, still our sexual relationship in the sight of God is adultery and it's sin, and God cannot go contrary to His written word. He cannot approve in our lives what He condemns in His word.”

Corrine bent her head dejectedly, anticipating the end to which my line of reasoning was leading.

“But it's wrong to try to put sex out of our life when we love each other, “she protested. “We need this expression of love, seeing you just once a week, coming to you after being handled by other men and propositioned to go to bed with them. No, Garfield, my darling the wrong is in your living under another roof with another woman that you don't love, when you should be married to me. Is it right to go on lying to the woman you're living with, lying to the whole world by letting the world believe you love her and you sleep with her and have sex with her, because they see you going in and out of the same house together? Is it right to go on living a lie, Garfield?”

There was desperation in her tone, and her lower lip was trembling.

“No, it isn't right, Corrine,” I conceded, my head bent to avoid her accusing stare.

“Then when are you going to do what I have been pleading with you to do for months?” she demanded desperately. “When are you going to leave that household and put an end to this deception?”

“I've told you, darling,” I said, raising my head to look into her eyes, “that I can't just go to Florence and ask for a divorce. When I married her, it was a contract ‘until death do us part.’ I have no right to break that agreement unless she is willing to break it too. The most I can do is to tell her what has happened in my relationship to you. Then, if she decides she wants to terminate our marriage because I can no longer live up to the terms, she has a right to do so. If she wants to continue with the marriage, then I guess you and I would just have to separate, even though I don't think it would work, and I'd have to tell her that.”

Corrine was revived somewhat by my admission. She reached up and put

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one hand on each side of my face, lifting my head until I was looking directly into her eyes.

“But when are you going to tell her about us, Garfield? When? And why haven't you told her long before now?”

“Because I know what it's going to do to her” I answered. I had to look away from Corrine's steadfast gaze, trying to keep a tremor out of my voice that swept through my frame as I contemplated the prospect of telling Florence the truth.

“It will be like putting a knife in her back.”

“Do you care more about hurting her than you do about hurting me?”

“There's a difference,” I protested, putting one hand down on the bed beside the outline of her blanket-covered feet. “My relationship to you is one of love; my tie to her is one of moral obligation.”

“Then which comes first,” she persisted, “your love for me or your moral obligation to her?”

“In the sight of God, my moral obligation to her should come first, but I'm not able to live up to it. I tried for five years while we were separated; there's no use trying any longer.”

“Then when are you going to tell her?”

Corrine's question was less a request for information than it was an appeal to act.

“I'm going to start this afternoon,” I told her divulging to her for the first time the course I had decided upon.

“Darling!”

Her cry was a mixture of startled unbelief and a sudden delirium of joy. I looked away from the shining jubilation on her face. My pain was equal to her burst of gladness. It was I who was about to strike the match to the dynamite that would blow another person's life to pieces. It was I who was to be the agent of destruction, not Corrine. She would only learn secondhand from a distance the consequences of the explosion. But I would be there on the scene. I would hear the cries of pain, the blazing indictment of my betrayal. Corrine threw her arms around my neck while my own arms hung limply by my side. The same announcement which had brought new life

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and hope to her, only overwhelmed me with darkness and depression.

“Why didn't you tell me?” she burst out, moving back from me, her hands on my shoulders and her eyes now shining with joy. “I know you wanted to save the good news for last, you darling you!”

She took my face in her hands and leaned forward and pressed her lips against mine, forcing my lips open with her tongue and moving her tongue around and back and forth in the moist cavity of my mouth. In that moment, I would rather she had urged me to fall on my knees beside the bed, to pray for the one who would soon feel the sharp point of the assassin's knife pressed into her heart, with what tragic results I could not foresee. Corrine had misunderstood my words.

“Let me explain, beloved,” I said, as she drew back from me, her face flushed with happiness.

Her sudden exuberance was subdued as she took in the sobering expression which must have been etched upon my face as I contemplated what lay ahead of me in the course to which I had committed myself.

“Sweetheart, I didn't mean that I was going to actually tell Florence about us this afternoon.”

Abruptly, the luminous look of happiness on Corrine's face vanished, to be replaced by a sudden show of bewilderment.

“Darling, I have to look ahead,” I began to explain. “When Florence does learn about this, it's going to be like a bombshell. She'll be so emotionally wrought up that she won't know what she's doing. It will be impossible to discuss what to do in a calm, rational manner as to what will be best for the children and for all of us. For that reason, I want to have available, before I tell her, the opinion of one or two experts, marriage counselors, for example, so that she can listen to them and know what they think. I think that's important because she probably won't listen to a word I'll say after she knows the truth.

“Who do you mean by experts?” she asked, suddenly suspicious

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of this strange, new twist which my conversation had taken. "Someone whose opinion in the matter she'll respect. I'm thinking of a minister who's had a lot of experience in marriage counseling."

"Who?"

"It's someone you probably never heard of; his name is Geoffrey Golden. He's a pastor in California."

"How in the world can he be of any help if he's in California?"

"By mailing tapes back and forth. I'm going to send him a tape telling him about the situation, and then he'll send one back more than one if necessary."

"How did you ever get acquainted with him?"

I got up and walked over to the chair by the window and picked up the brown leather briefcase I had brought with me in anticipation of the question which Corrine had asked. From the briefcase I pulled out a book and returned to the bed and handed it to Corrine.

"I got acquainted with him through reading this book." I sat down on the edge of the bed beside Corrine as she started to thumb through the book which bore the title on the jacket, *Manual for Modern Marriage*.

"I have another book by the same author," I continued, "which said that he was a pastor in California. So I wrote him a letter, not knowing if he still lived in California, or if he was even alive yet."

"What church is he a pastor of?" Corrine asked suspiciously, looking up from her perusal of chapter headings.

"It's called the Pentecost Covenant Church in Redwood City, California."

To meet the look of skepticism on Corrine's face about inviting a total stranger into our lives to arbitrate our future, I suggested a practical test in support of my decision.

"Why don't you let me read you something from the introduction," I suggested, reaching for the book. She handed it back to me, and I took it over to the chair by

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the window, extracting my reading glasses from my inside coat pocket as I sat down. I opened the book to the opening chapter where a particular passage had impressed itself upon my mind, and read aloud to Corrine.

“The pathology of marriage must be a serious concern in the face of mounting divorce statistics. Marriage counseling centers and pastors are sounding an urgent alarm. And the more appalling picture still is of those countless numbers who have not divorced, but are living a lie, whose...”

“Darling, that's just what I said to you a few minutes ago,” Corrine broke in, “in almost my exact words. You're living a lie, Garfield, and it isn't right.”

“I know it isn't right, my love,” I conceded. “That's why I'm trying to do something about it. Just let me finish this paragraph.”

I backed up to the beginning of the sentence that Corrine had interrupted and continued reading.

“And the more appalling picture still is of those countless numbers who have not divorced, but are living a lie, whose marriage is only an empty shell, a grotesque caricature of the real thing. Disillusioned and apathetic, a seeming majority do little to remedy the situation. Indeed, few seem to know where to turn for help.”

I closed the book and laid it down on the nearby end table.

“Now would you like to hear the letter I wrote to Pastor Golden, and his answer?”

“When did you hear from him, darling?”

“Just this week.”

I reached into my inside coat pocket and pulled out two letters, both in long, business-size envelopes.

“And you wanted to wait until today to tell me about it in person instead of telling me on the phone?”

“I was afraid there would have been too much explaining” I answered, “and you might have misunderstood, and long distance calls cost money.”

“You're right, darling. I understand, and I'm just so glad you're finally doing something about it.”

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I unfolded a carbon copy of the letter I had written to Pastor Golden from the office several weeks before and began to read it aloud. "Dear Pastor Golden . . ."

"Darling," Corrine interrupted.

I looked over at her inquiringly.

"I can't decide," she murmured as she gazed at me adoringly, "whether my darling looks handsomer with glasses or without them. They make you look so dignified and mature like a college professor."

"Thank you, darling."

I pushed the gray plastic frames back on my nose to the position from which they had a tendency to slip and continued reading.

"In your excellent book, *Manual for Modern Marriage*, you write of countless numbers whose marriage is only 'an empty shell.' I find myself in this class, although the woman to whom I am married is not aware that I feel this way. I am, however, without her knowledge, trying to remedy the situation and am turning to you for help."

I paused and looked across the room at Corrine to see if my letter was holding her interest. She was leaning back against the headboard of the bed, regarding me intently, one bare leg swinging idly over the side of the bed.

"Want to hear more?" I asked.

"Certainly, darling," she replied with obvious enthusiasm,

"I want to hear all of it."

I continued reading.

"One of the problems people often face, and one seldom dealt with in the church, is that a person may sometimes be caught in the crossfire between two clashing commandments from the Bible, and may not have grounds for determining which commandment should be kept and which one should be broken. In my case, there is a commandment to love the woman I am married to even as Christ loves the church. This would mean that I should willingly die for her, inwardly as well as outwardly. It means that I should set aside my personal needs and feelings, suppress

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them, ignore them, crucify them, die to them, as much as I can. But there is also the counsel to 'speak the truth to one another.' In the 51st Psalm, David cries to God, 'thou desirest truth in the inward parts.' But the truth can hurt. It can sometimes hurt terribly, cruelly, even when it is spoken in love, leaving wounds that may never heal, leaving scars upon the personality for life.

"So my dilemma is this. Should I follow the command to love the woman to whom I am married, and keep silent about my real feelings to avoid hurting her, or should I tell her the truth? Should I tell her that I married her, not out of love, although I used these words at the time, but as a means to an end, of stabilizing my life, so I thought, so I could be of greater usefulness to God? This insight, of course, has come to me only through the twelve years we have been married. I didn't know myself fully at the time, nor my real underlying motive in getting married. Shall I also tell my wife the cruel and cutting truth, that for the last seven years of our twelve years of marriage, I have loved another woman-who she doesn't know exists-and still do?"

I paused, my throat dry from reading.

"Excuse me while I get a drink of water, sweetheart."

"I'll excuse you if you'll stop and give me a kiss on the way," she answered, as I put the letters down with my glasses on top of them.

I stepped to the bedside and bent down as she reached up to encircle my neck in a loving embrace.

"My lover," she whispered, her eyes shining as she continued holding me around the neck, "here I've been having nightmares that you never really intended to marry me, and you've been working hard on it already without my knowing it."

I gently disengaged her hands from around my neck and held them in mine as I stood beside the bed, looking down at her.

"Darling" I chided gently, "I can't say that I'm definitely going to marry you. All that I can do is try to be honest with Florence. What happens after that is in the hands of God."

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I looked deeply into her eyes for a moment, trying to emphasize the seriousness and the significance of my statement.

“I Know” she breathed pensively.

I stood there looking down at her, and watched the bluebird of happiness that had started to spread its wings in anticipated flight fold them again and huddle down in its hidden nest within her heart. It was not yet time to fly. I lingered beside her a moment, holding her hands tightly, wanting to speak some word of comfort that would assure her that one day we would indeed be married. But I could not. I did not dare attempt to violently wrest the outcome of the matter out of the hands of God in an attempt to resolve it according to my own desires or Corrine's needs.

I released her hands then and stepped into the bathroom. After taking a long drink, I filled a glass to take back with me, then returned to the chair by the window where I had been sitting. I replaced my glasses and resumed reading from my letter to the California marriage counselor.

“I realize that it is not the function of a marriage counselor to give out the right answers, but only to help clarify the issues so that people can arrive at their own answers. But in order to understand the issues, the counselor must be informed of all that's involved, including the history of the situation. In this case, there's a problem of distance. If you are still located in California, it would prove too costly to drop in for a once-a-week counseling session. Therefore, I have wondered if the same results could be achieved by sending you a tape describing the situation and then yourself sending a tape back with any pertinent questions or comments.

“You may wonder,” I continued reading, “why I do not approach the pastor of the church where Florence, my wife, and I regularly attend. The answer is that he has impressed me as being unapproachable because he is so busy. Shall I send you the first tape, attempting to provide you with a history of my marital situation as it has developed?”

I folded the carbon copy of my letter to Pastor Golden, laid

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it down on the table beside me, then picked up the single typewritten sheet which had been sent to me in reply. Before proceeding to read it, I looked over at Corrine, who was regarding me soberly.

“Would you like to hear his answer?”

“Of course, darling,” she replied, “but can't you come and sit beside me on the bed? You seem so far away over there. I can turn on this lamp over the bed if you need it.”

I got up and walked over to the bed while she reached up and switched on the lamp attached to the wall just above her head. It splashed a soft, yellow spotlight over her, highlighting the golden waves of her hair and lightly accentuating the straight Grecian line of her nose and her high cheekbones, adding a lustrous shine to her invitingly crimsoned lips. I sat down on the bed beside her, gave her a quick kiss, and unfolded the letter from the pastor-author-counselor in California.

“Dear Mister Roby,” I read aloud. “Yes, I'm very much in California, my native state, and have just reread your letter with interest and concern. I feel that your suggestion is an excellent one that you send me a tape giving me the history of your situation so that I can try to share some personal evaluation with you. I have done this on previous occasions and find it very convenient to use a tape for reply, and certainly this means that I can convey my thoughts to you in an easy, efficient way without, perhaps, a lengthy, dictated letter through my secretary. So for now, let me say that I will keep your letter in my active file and wait for the tape that will give me a detailed insight into the developing situation particularly over the past seven years. Cordially yours, Geoffrey H. Golden.”

I folded the letter laid it down in my lap, and looked at Corrine for her response.

“I hope he understands our situation,” she sighed, with some air of misgiving.

Then, abruptly, a new and fearful possibility occurred to her, and panic lighted up her green eyes as they darted about my face.

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“What if he says that you ought to leave me and stay with her?”

“I’d have to tell him,” I assured her quickly, “that I think that would be foolish advice because I already tried it for five years and it didn't work, so why try it again?”

Corrine looked at me in bewilderment.

“But since you know that's what he might say, I don't know why you want to bother to talk with him at all, if you don't intend to follow his advice.”

“Like I already told you, darling,” I repeated, “I’m doing this primarily for Florence's benefit not mine. When she learns about this, she won't be able to think straight. It will help her to have someone standing by whose opinion she can trust, who will be able to give her some counsel as to what she ought to do. But regardless of what any expert may say, I’m sure that she won't want to stay married to me once she knows that I love you, and have loved you for the past seven years.”

“Are you sure, Garfield? Do you know her that well?”

“I'm fairly certain that's how she'll react but I can't be positive. She might decide that it would be better for the children if we stayed married, but I'm doubtful.”

“Why do you say that, darling?”

Anxiety was etched in deep lines upon Corrine's face, and shadows of apprehension darkened her eyes, as she realized that our future was dependent, not upon my decision alone, but upon whatever Florence might decide, with the possibility of her being influenced in some unforeseeable way by the interference of God.

“Florence would know,” I tried to reassure her “that the atmosphere in the home would be too unpleasant. That in itself wouldn't be good for the children or for her. I’m sure she'll want me to get out of the house once she knows the truth. As to whether she'll want to go through with a divorce or not, I can't be certain. We'll just have to leave that in God's hands, to work out what will be best for all of us; for you, for me, for Florence and the children.”

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“Yes,” she capitulated, “you're right, darling. And now I've got a confession to make.”

“What is it?”

“It's about our sexual relationship. It's bothered me as much as it has you, but until now I've been afraid that each time I see you might be the last time; that you'd leave me and go back to her.”

“I can never go back to her in a sexual way, darling, even if it turns out to be God's will to stay married to her.”

The relief Corrine felt at my admission broke through upon her face in a smile.

“Thank you, darling for saying that. Now that I know that because you're actually doing something about separating from the household, I'm willing to try even harder to get back to being virgins, the way we were when we first met seven years ago; remember?”

“Yes, I remember beloved.”

I nuzzled my nose against the silken warmth of her cheek, my burden of guilt in this area of our relationship somewhat lifted by her impetuous resolution.

“But let me be practical for a moment, darling” I counseled. “If we're going to really carry this out, we have to agree as to a stopping point in our caressing. There is a point of no return, you know. If you get me too excited like you did last night, it's too late to stop, then afterwards my conscience begins to work on me.”

“Let's do what you suggested once before,” she proposed, brightening at the prospect of victory. “No more taking off our clothes when we're together.”

“That would help,” I agreed, then glanced at my watch. “It's a quarter of ten, sweetheart. I've got to be going pretty quick.”

“If you'll get the things on top of the dresser and out of the bathroom and put them in the suitcase, I'll start getting dressed now.”

“Don't you want to stay here and rest a while longer?” I asked, thrusting the letter from Pastor Golden into my coat

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pocket and getting up. "It's still a couple of hours before your bus leaves for Detroit."

"No darling, it's too lonesome here after you go."

Her voice was tinged with melancholy as if I were already gone. I bent to brush her lips with mine sympathetically, then turned away to help her pack. I set the feminine, pastel blue overnight case on the chair by the window and began to pick up the collection of little items she had brought along to make my visit seem more like I was coming to a familiar home rather than just to a hotel room. As Corrine sat on the edge of the bed in bra and panties, fastening black sheer nylons to her garter belt, I paused a moment to drink in the exotic sight of her.

"Do you know one way I can tell that my feeling for you is love and not lust?" I asked.

"How?"

My question had sufficiently provoked her interest that she paused in dressing, one garter clasp held in her right hand still unfastened while the fingers of her left hand held the edge of her nylon stocking pinched together.

"When a man only likes to watch a woman undress, that's usually lust," I proposed. "But when a man gets just as excited watching her dress as undress, that's love. And I don't know which I enjoy most—watching you take your clothes off or put them on."

"I love you for that, darling," she smiled. Corrine continued dressing while I finished putting things into her suitcase. Fifteen minutes later, having skirted the downtown shopping district to reduce the chance of being seen with Corrine, I pulled into a parking space at the rear of the Greyhound bus terminal at the south end of the business district. Leaving the engine running I retrieved Corrine's suitcase from the back seat and walked with her to a somewhat secluded alcove near the rear entrance. The glass in the double doors had been covered with plywood to stave off break-ins, but also providing a somewhat semi-private nook. I set the suitcase

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down and we reached for each other with a hunger that we both knew would not be slaked again for another week or two. Then I stepped back from the long passionate parting kiss for a last, all-inclusive look at her gold and green loveliness.

"I love you, darling," I said tenderly, and with a new intensity born of her recently expressed resolution to help keep our sexual desires within boundaries prescribed by conscience and the approval of God. "I'll be seeing you."

"And I'll be seeing you, my beloved, in my dreams until I'm in your arms again. Don't forget to write, and call me when you can."

"I will," I promised.

I waved to Corrine and turned to leave, aware of the danger of lingering in a public place where I might be recognized by someone. I got into the car and pulled out just ahead of a bus that was turning into the wide asphalt drive that circled the terminal. Corrine, standing by her suitcase near the back entrance, waved again as I drove away, down an alley that led onto a side street.

It was approaching eleven o'clock when I pulled into the driveway at home. I looked quickly into the rear-view mirror to be sure that Corrine had erased all the lipstick traces, then wiped my lips with the back of my hand to be doubly sure. As I stepped through the front door, at least one person was glad to see me.

"Daddy!" Philip yelled out happily, and ran to me from where he had been sprawled out on the living room floor in front of the TV set.

Philip grabbed me around the legs in a bear hug as Paul remained seated on the floor cross-legged, too engrossed in the magical exploits of Superman to get excited about my arrival.

"Hi, Dad," he called, and turned his attention back to the TV set.

"Sorry I'm late," I apologized to Florence, who appeared in the kitchen doorway, disconsolate and disheveled from grappling with the weekly wash while attending the needs of three energetic boys.

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"I let the boys go ahead and eat to save time. Do you want yours on the table now?"

"That's what I've been looking forward to all morning. You make the best scrambled eggs in town."

I sat down at the dinette table as Philip sidled up onto a chair beside me to share my brief giving of thanks.

"No more for you, Philip," Florence scolded, when I had finished, as she put a plate of scrambled eggs in front of me.

A moment later, as she returned with buttered toast and coffee, Paul rushed in from the living room to make good use of a brief intermission for commercials.

"Dad," he cried excitedly, standing by the table, "can you go with us to Grandma's today and take us fishing?"

I sighed inwardly at the need to fight over again an emotional battle which I had been through with the boys the night before.

"Paul," I said firmly, looking at him, "I told you last night I've got to work overtime at the office today."

"See, Philip," he said to his younger brother, sitting submissively beside me, "I told you Dad wouldn't change his mind." Dejectedly, he turned away to go back to the TV set.

"Paul," I called to his retreating back. He stopped in his tracks to hear what I had to say.

"If it's any help to you, I can assure you that I'd enjoy going fishing with you and Philip much more than I will doing what I have to do at the office today.

"Paul, evidently unconvinced, made no reply but returned to his place in front of the TV set. Sitting quietly beside me at the table, Philip had evidently taken my statement at face value as being the truth.

"I know why you have to work at the office so much, Dad," he ventured as I continued eating. He looked at me with wide eyes and a knowing grin, excited at being able to display some mystic knowledge of his father's strange behavior.

"Why," I asked, eyeing him, with a forkful of scrambled eggs on the way to my mouth.

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“So you'll have enough money to take us to a drive-in for hamburgers and french fries and Cokes.”

Philip had remembered the essence of a simple lecture on economics that I had given to Paul and him several weeks before; that if they were to have enjoyable experiences like eating out or going for rides at carnivals or an occasional movie, then Daddy would have to work to earn the money.

“You're right, Philip,” I praised him, “I'm glad you remembered what I told you.”

With my pleasure at his having taken to heart what I had said earlier in trying to convey to the boys the elementary truth that money doesn't grow on trees, was mixed an element of anguish because I had to hold back from Philip an accompanying explanation of the fact that there were expenses which I couldn't tell him about; helping Corrine with bus fare each time she came to Lansing, hotel rooms, sometimes taxi fares, occasional gifts of flowers or candy, and greeting cards. Neither could I tell him the whole truth that on many of the occasions I had said that I had to work overtime at the office, I had no intention of going there. Today it was true. I was indeed going to the office, and I was going to work overtime; but not the kind of work I did on my job during the week, and not a kind of work for which I would be reimbursed by the state.

“Paul,” Florence called from the kitchen as I finished my breakfast, “will you go upstairs and get Korah?”

There was only silence from the living room where Paul sat engrossed in a television program. From the kitchen came the rustling sound of empty egg cartons being put into a paper sack in which Florence would bring back five or six dozen farm-fresh eggs from the country. Finally, Paul responded to his mother's request.

“Wait till this cartoon's over.”

“You turn that TV set off this minute and get upstairs and get your brother,” blazed Florence from the kitchen, “or I'll be in there with the strap.”

“Get moving, Paul,” I called sternly, “Or I'll be in there with a strap before your mother.”

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Philip looked at me, eyebrows raised in suspense, as Paul's outraged "Darn it!" came from the living room, followed by his angry stomping up the stairs to the second-floor bedroom. Finished with breakfast, I pushed back my chair and walked out to the kitchen, hoping to relieve Florence's agitated state of mind.

"I'll take these out to the car" I said, picking up the bulky sack of empty egg cartons.

"You don't need to bother," she snapped. "I can do it myself."

It was her way of reacting to my diminishing displays of affection, especially in the area of sexual ardor, in the past few months. She no longer asked me to help her with anything around the house, and seldom accepted my help when freely offered. But in spite of her protest, I carried the empty egg cartons out to the station wagon, and there, opening the back door, made room for the usual necessary equipment that Florence took along on the weekly trips. Then I made two more trips into the house and back to the station wagon; one for a gallon of milk and a diaper bag, and another for the stroller which folded up and laid flat on the bed of the station wagon.

Then, in the bustling confusion of everyone getting ready for the weekly trip to Charlotte, I waited anxiously for a chance to put something else in the back end of the station wagon without being observed. Finally, my chance came. Philip was upstairs looking for a lost shoe; Paul was again on his belly on the living room floor, held captive by a TV cartoon and Korah was in the bathroom, having the breakfast washed from his face by his mother. Quietly and quickly, unnoticed by Paul, I retrieved the heavy, portable tape recorder from the living room, walked briskly with it out to the driveway, and lifted it carefully into the space I had reserved beside the folded stroller as far from the back seat as I could get it. Then I covered it with a blanket that was always kept in the back end in case one of the boys wanted to make a bed there on their weekly excursions.

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Looking ahead to removing the tape recorder from the back end of the station wagon when we got downtown where I expected to get out, I shrank from the necessity of telling the lie I had manufactured to conceal the use I expected to make of it, an intended use known only to Corrine and an unknown pastor in California.

The station wagon loaded at last, with Paul and Korah in the back seat and Philip sitting between Florence and me in front, I backed the station wagon out of the drive and drove east toward downtown Lansing. Ten minutes later on a wide, busy, downtown thoroughfare, I pulled into a parking area in front of the picturesque State Capitol.

"I'll get out here," I said, turning to Florence as I shut off the engine and pulled keys out of the ignition.

"What are you taking the keys out for?" she asked.

Florence slid across the seat, squeezing behind Philip to take my place behind the wheel as I got out.

"I've got something to get out of the back end," I said as I closed the door, staving off as long as I could the additional questions that would follow as soon as she and the boys saw what it was I had hidden in the back. I stepped quickly back to the rear of the station wagon, unlocked the door, swung it open, and lifted down the heavy tape recorder aware as I did of the watching eyes of Paul and Korah from the back seat. Returning to the driver's side of the car to hand the keys back to Florence, she saw what I was carrying.

"What in the world are you going to do with the tape recorder?"

"Yeah, Dad," echoed Paul accusingly from the back seat, "I thought you said you were going to work at the office."

Standing close to the car, out of the traffic lane as cars zoomed past, and feeling the weight of the tape recorder, I delivered the lie I had prepared in answer to the questions I had anticipated.

"When I get tired of my regular work at the office," I said, alternating my glances between Florence and Paul, "just for a break I'm going to practice doing some commercials. In case a

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job offer as an announcer comes through from some radio station, I don't want to be too rusty."

Florence eyed me skeptically.

"You really think something might still turn up?"

"You never can tell," I replied with counterfeit optimism.

"Hey, Dad," Paul asked, as Florence started the engine, "how come you're getting out here if you're going to work at the office?"

The Gray office building, where I worked, was three blocks to the west on the other side of the Capitol building that loomed in the background, overshadowing the downtown business district.

I was glad to answer that question at least with a measure of truth.

"I've got to stop at the bank first before I go to the office, Paul."

"I'll bet you're going to be taking some money out, not putting any in,"

Florence speculated in a tone of rebuke.

She was right, but I couldn't justify my action. I had expenses which I couldn't tell her about.

"How about a goodbye kiss for your Dad?" I said to the boys, ignoring Florence's veiled probe about my financial affairs.

Philip, the most eager to respond to my request, leaned over behind Florence as she bent forward against the steering wheel and gave me an exuberant peck on the cheek. Then, stepping to the back window which Paul had rolled down, I stuck my head through the window to see Paul sitting with bent head and dejected expression, while on the opposite side of the wide seat, Korah sat regarding me with wide-eyed, happy expectations.

"Got a kiss for your Dad, Paul?" I asked.

"No," he objected crossly, glancing up at me accusingly, "I'm mad because you won't take us fishing at Grandma's like you promised."

"Why don't you stop bugging your Dad, Paul," Florence rebuked angrily. "He told you he's got more important things to do."

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I sighed, too pressed for time to go over the same argument with Paul that I had been through the night before, and a few minutes earlier at home.

“Korah,” I said, looking across at him, “have you got a goodbye kiss for Daddy?”

Responding immediately to my invitation, he crowded over against Paul and leaned toward me. I kissed him on the cheek, then stood up for a final word to Florence, who had waited with obvious impatience while I went through the familiar farewell ritual with my sons.

“Have a good trip,” I said to Florence, who neither offered nor expected a parting kiss.

I stepped behind the station wagon and up onto the curb as Florence pulled the station wagon out into the flow of southbound traffic. Standing on the sidewalk with the tape recorder, I returned the farewell waves of Philip and Korah through the rear window and watched until their bobbing heads became dwindling spheres. Watching the car out of sight, I lifted up a silent appeal to God for His protecting mercy to surround my sons and the woman who was still my wife in the eyes of God and society.

It was a spontaneous prayer prompted, perhaps, by an apprehensive shiver of guilt at the prospect that something might happen to them on the way to or from Charlotte just because I wasn't going along to drive the car as I usually did. But I had work to do that couldn't be postponed. Surely, I reasoned, as I stood there a moment, oblivious of the traffic sounds and reflecting on my situation, since God favors honesty and truth, and since I am taking steps to end the deception in my marriage, He will watch over my family in my absence.

Standing at the pedestrian crosswalk, waiting for the traffic light to change so I could cross and make a stop at the bank, I glanced at my watch. It was 11:15. Corrine was already on her way back to Detroit on a Greyhound bus, back to another night as a taxi-dancer at the Hollywood Ballroom on Woodward Avenue; back to another night of being held in the arms of other men; pawed, propositioned, offered money to go to bed

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with them, while Florence and my three sons were on their way to the little town of Charlotte. Inwardly, I was torn in two directions-between the love that followed Corrine, and the moral obligation as a husband and father that followed Florence and the children.

Crossing the street finally, I was more than ever aware of the weight of the heavy tape recorder that kept me off balance. If Florence but knew, I reflected sadly, all there was to know about this tape recorder that had been used lately to encourage Paul in his piano practice; if she but knew that my original reason for buying it six long years before had been the mad dream of telling the world about my love for Corrine and her love for me. And if she had but an inkling of the use to which that tape recorder was going to be put today, in the deserted seclusion of the great empty office building where I worked during the week if she but knew all that was in my heart, that was going to be poured out on that tape for the ears of a total stranger in far-away California; yes, if she but knew, she would feel the very ground trembling beneath her feet and splitting apart as if torn by a devastating earthquake. But she didn't know. Not yet. Inevitably, she would have to know. Soon, perhaps. And as I looked ahead to the dawn of that approaching day, walking down the sidewalk with the tape recorder to the bank, I trembled inwardly at the thought of the havoc it was going to wreak in other lives. It would be Doomsday for a family, a home, a marriage; my home, my family, my marriage.

I hurried on to the bank at the end of the block and completed the necessary task of bolstering my depleted cash reserves. Then, back to the sidewalk in the warmth of an Indian Summer Saturday in early October I recrossed the wide shopper-plied street down which my wife and three sons had driven a few minutes before. They could never have guessed that I was on my way to the vast, dreary emptiness of the Gray office building to prepare a charge of dynamite that would shake their lives to the very foundations.

Moments later, winded from my three-block walk in the near noontime heat with the heavy tape recorder, I stepped off

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the elevator on the fifth floor of the Gray office building “prison.” There was a marked difference to forcibly remind me that this was not a regular working day. There were no signs of life. Today, the whole building was like a vast tomb, darkened and devoid of life except for me. The similarity to a mausoleum was appropriate. I had come here in the role of a marital archeologist, to dig among the ruins of the past for relics that would help me to explain to someone else how my present marital impasse had come to be built up; layer upon layer. My own footsteps echoed my progress down the hallway to the far end of the west wing where the Right of Way Engineering section was located.

Stepping through the open doorway of the deserted Engineering section, I plunked down the heavy tape recorder by my desk. In the huge, empty room that seemed now like a deserted battlefield, with the skinny elbows of drafting table lamps sticking up in the air at odd angles, I opened several windows to let some fresh air drive out the stuffiness. Then I returned to the front of the room, hung up coat and necktie on the rack by my desk, and began to assemble the equipment I would need to embark upon an expedition into the past; there to review the scenes of my deteriorating marriage to Florence and my initial meeting with Corrine.

From beneath a spare drafting table by the window at the front of the long room where I sometimes worked, I stooped down above a black metal G.I. footlocker. It was sufficiently hidden there to avoid curious questions from my fellow workers. With a small key on my key ring, I unlocked it and raised the lid. First, I removed a small, table-model radio which had lightened some of the long lonely hours I had actually done overtime work through the years of getting a college degree. I took the radio to my desk, plugged it in and turned the dial to my favorite good-music station. As the haunting beauty of a Percy Faith rendering of “Autumn Leaves” chased away some of the dreary atmosphere that accumulates in a great, empty office building on a weekend, I continued assembling the rest of the equipment I would need.

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I lugged the tape recorder from beside my own desk back to the last row of drafting tables and set it down on the clean top of Elwood Jassey's table. I didn't dare use my own desk adjacent to the doorway leading into the hall lest someone walk by and hear some damaging disclosure about my marital situation. From Elwood's table I would have a clear view of the rest of the room in case anyone else walked in unexpectedly. Even though it was only a remote possibility that anyone else would show up, I didn't want to take a chance on having my crumbling marriage become a subject of office gossip by having some damning phrase or sentence picked up by unauthorized ears and passed on to others.

Returning to the open footlocker, I bent down and passed over its most priceless contents—several stacks of bulky letters, all addressed to me in Corrine's flourishing handwriting, which I had received at a post office box, unknown to Florence, in preceding months. They provided painful proof of my infidelity to Florence; too precious to me, and too dangerous to her, to risk keeping in some secret place at home. My hands brushed reverently over the love letters, to pull out a seven-inch reel of recording tape I had purchased the week before, besides a microphone and microphone table stand. Then I rummaged carefully beneath the letters to extract one other item I needed; a gilt-framed photograph of Corrine.

I carried these essential items to the back of the room where the tape recorder was set up. Then, quickly, I spliced leader tape onto the seven-inch reel of recording tape that would allow me three hours of recording time on one side, if I needed that much, connected the microphone and threaded the tape onto the recorder. I set up the photo of Corrine in its delicate wrought-gold frame on one corner of the table to give me strength and inspiration as I recorded the story of the beginning and blossoming of my hidden love for her.

Then, surveying the items spread out on the table before me to be sure I had everything I needed, I remembered to get other essential items.

I walked back to the coat rack near my desk in the front of

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the room and dug from an inside coat pocket the letter from Pastor Geoffrey Golden in California, that I had read to Corrine earlier that morning at the Roosevelt. With the letter in my hand, I got a coffee cup from my desk drawer and filled it with water from the hallway fountain in case my throat got dry while talking at length into the microphone.

As I stepped back through the doorway into the Engineering section, the music emanating from the radio on my desk was interrupted for a public service announcement which caught my attention.

“The future of America depends upon the education of its youth,” the male voice asserted authoritatively. “A college education is the key to success . . .”

I paused by my desk, waiting for the rest of the announcement.

“. . . To help young people get a college education” the announcer continued in a pleading tone, “send a contribution today to ‘Dollars for Scholars,’ Box 419, Newberry, Connecticut.”

“Yeah, I’ll send you a contribution—a lump on the head, you big fat liar,” I muttered aloud, as I set the cup of water down on the desk and savagely switched off the radio.

As I returned to Elwood's drafting table in the back of the room, with a cup of water in one hand and Pastor Golden's letter in the other, I felt within me a surge of indignation at the radio announcement. It made me feel like sending a heated letter of protest to the Federal Communications Commission in Washington, D.C. for allowing such misleading propaganda to be sent over the airwaves, which made it appear that the acquisition of a college degree was almost a certain guarantee of a better job and a better income. But then I wondered, was it reasonable to use my own experience as a measuring stick of what the average college graduate might expect? After all, it suddenly struck me forcibly, most young people could expect to graduate from college at a far younger age than 42, as I had. As I set the cup of water and the letter down on Elwood's drafting table, my angry impulse to send the FCC a

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bitter broadside of protest was quashed as quickly as it had erupted.

I hoisted myself up onto the bar-stool-type drafting chair to begin recording. But first, I turned my gaze for a needed nudge of inspiration, to the color photo of Corrine which she had given me some months before. I looked into the green, gold-flecked eyes, enhanced with eye shadow. Her half-closed eyes suggested the rapture of sexual bliss. Her head was tilted back and her lips slightly parted, a “come hither” expression of erotic invitation. I remembered her telling me how some of her male admirers at the Hollywood Ballroom had started calling her the “Marilyn Monroe of the Hollywood,” due to the striking similarity in face and form. I noted again the term of endearment scrawled across the lower corner of the photo, in the elaborate scroll that bespoke Corrine's artistic talent and temperament, “Eternally yours, Corrine.”

Then, reluctant to begin the work of destruction that lay before me, I turned my attention to the letter from Dr. Geoffrey Golden spread out on the table before me. I took a drink of water, then reached out and switched on the tape recorder. With elbows leaning against the edge of the drafting table, I began to speak into the microphone on the upright mike stand before me as the reels of tape began turning slowly.

“Dear Pastor Golden. In my first letter to you, written several weeks ago, I confessed that I have been married for twelve years, and that the last seven years of that time I have secretly loved another woman other than my wife, Florence. Since I will be referring often to that other woman, you should know her first name at least. It is . . . Corrine.

“In your gracious reply to my letter, you asked me to begin this history of my marriage dating from the time of my first meeting with Corrine, seven years ago. But as I have thought about it, I have believed that the starting point should be a little farther back than that. As an instructor in a course on marriage at Michigan State University said, ‘Our preparation for marriage begins in infancy.’ Nevertheless, for the sake of brevity I will begin much closer than that to the point you suggested,

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and then if you have questions about developments prior to that time, I will attempt to answer them as they arise.

“I think that it may be helpful to begin at a point several months prior to my meeting with Corrine for this reason. As a marriage counselor, one of the possible solutions that will doubtless occur to you first is that of healing the breach that has developed between Florence, my wife, and myself. Therefore, I think it would be wise to start at the point where I first began to turn away from Florence. For I did not turn away from Florence because of meeting Corrine. The opening wedge of alienation from Florence came first. If it had not, I might never have met Corrine. So let me begin with an attempt to answer this question: Why did I begin to turn away from Florence after five years of marriage? Or did she turn away from me first?”

I stopped speaking and shut off the tape recorder. The slowly turning reels came to a stop as I paused and sifted through the events of the past, dating to a time seven years earlier, prior to my first meeting with Corrine, when my marriage to Florence had begun its slow but certain disintegration. Looking back one dramatic event stood out towering like a mountain peak above the rest. It had been called forth in that moment, perhaps, because the turning reels of the tape recorder had brought to mind the wheels of the automobile in which Florence and I had almost had a near fatal accident one night on our way home from work in Lansing to our home in Charlotte, a small town eighteen miles southwest of Lansing. The almost fatal accident, I recalled, had been brought on by an angry, totally unexpected announcement from Florence that was to have a shattering effect upon the foundations of our marriage. With this starting point firmly fixed in my mind, I reached out and turned on the tape recorder again. I began speaking into the microphone the fateful words that would soon be entering into the ears of a total stranger, even though a concerned one, in far-away California.