

## Chapter 1

Early autumn hung golden and scarlet over the higher elevations of Portland. Fog hugged the river, and fir trees filled the slopes with a heady fragrance. In all the yards surrounding Portland Adventist Hospital chrysanthemums flanked the driveways. The first fall rains had greened up the lawns. Throughout the city the supper-hour hush had ended, and again streets hummed with traffic. An ambulance wailed down Southeast Market Street toward the hospital.

Students and faculty together in the nurses' home worship room paused in their practice to listen to the sound. As much as tragedy had been a part of their daily life, they could not ignore the fact that another one had occurred - another patient demanding immediate attention now sped to their hospital for help.

"I solemnly pledge myself before God and in the presence of this assembly to pass my life in purity and to practice my profession faithfully..." Sue Packard dropped her eyes an instant from Mrs. Hunter to the others in her class. The boys looked uncomfortable here, she thought. Capping was a woman's ritual. Yet tomorrow evening they all would take the vows. And then they would find nursing a reality at last, a dream come true. She faltered in the pledge. Linda nudged her vigorously.

Almost impish in appearance, Sue was of average height, dark and freckled. The grin she flashed in response to most conversation crinkled her turned-up nose and deepened the dimples beside her mouth. None of Sue's friends would have claimed she was pretty, yet somehow her appearance demanded a second look. And anyone who really knew her thought she was lovely - it was the word they used out of habit. And it did fit.

Leaving the chapel, Sue fell into step with her roommate, Linda Rimm, and another girl, Anne Milton.

"Will your parents be coming, Anne?" Sue asked.

Her friend shook her head. "But my grandparents and an aunt and uncle will be here. It's just too long a trip for Dad. Besides, it would cost too much for him to fly down from Alaska."

"I guess so," Linda commented. "There are a lot of advantages to living in the Willamette Valley." She winked at Sue, at the same time reaching to squeeze Anne's hand.

"Don't mind Linda," Sue interjected. "She thinks no place but Oregon is fit to sustain human habitation."

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Anne almost smiled. "Anyway, my grandparents practically raised me. They're pretty special to me."

"My father can't get the whole weekend off, but Mother will be here," Sue said. "It's important to have at least someone to represent the family at a big occasion like this."

"Cut the sentiment!" Linda jibed. "Anne, what topic did you get for the term paper Mrs. Adams assigned this morning?"

Sue sat down at the first table as they entered the library, and she reached for the evening paper that someone had left there. She glanced out the window, only half listening, while her roommate and Anne searched through the nursing journals that Mrs. Hunter, the librarian and registrar, had left out for them. The lights of Portland came flashing on. Sue stared out at the skyline a few times, trying to see beyond its rim of gold-edged clouds the reality of the news from overseas.

Rob had been there nearly three months now, and a number of his letters had come - a couple even after the mail service began breaking down over there. Just like Rob, she thought, to try to sound buoyant about the mess that had suddenly exploded around him. The country of his student-missionary assignment had seemed so safe before he left. Then the political upheaval...

Linda plopped her small self into the chair opposite Sue, spreading her notebook and magazines until they covered part of the newspaper. "Come on, Anne," she called over her shoulder. "Sit down. Sue's slipping into a funk again reading the newspaper."

Anne settled herself on one knee in the chair Sue pulled out for her and stacked her books on the table. "I just have to be more methodical," she suddenly scolded herself. "I guess I'm a little bit - more than a little bit - like Dad. All in a sweat to try something challenging, but not always so good at sticking with it all the way."

Raising her eyebrows, Linda asked one of her none-too-polite questions: "Your dad can't hold down a job?"

Embarrassed, Anne replied, "Oh, yes, he's had a good job with the same company for a long time, and he has a nice little ranch started for himself not far from Fairbanks." She paused, evidently uncertain whether it was any of Linda's business. "I meant marriage-wise. He and Mom broke up several years ago. And since then his job is about the only thing he has remained with. He's experimented with two more wives and as many new life-styles. Well, he's stuck by me most of the time. I guess I shouldn't talk like this."

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Sensing that Linda was about to ask something else personal, Sue caught her friend's eye and shook her head, but Linda paid no attention. "He's helping you through nursing, isn't he?"

"Sort of," Anne hedged. "He paid off my academy bill that was two years old. Otherwise I couldn't have gotten into clinical."

"Law of the Medes and Persians," Linda interrupted, still ignoring Sue. "If all the bills aren't paid up to the penny, no go!"

"I guess it's only fair," Anne replied slowly. "After all, if a person can't manage each step of the way, it's foolish to expect she will suddenly turn out responsible. And besides, they don't want a bunch of financial dropouts."

"They!" Linda smiled as she emphasized the word.

Recognizing that Linda was about to burst into another of her speeches and determined to head her off, Sue exclaimed, "Anyway, we're about to be capped, and then the real nurse's training begins. It will be a pile of work for all of us, but we asked for it." The headlines from the paper were still vivid in her mind in spite of the conversation.

"And I had better practice that pledge for a while," Anne gulped. "I hardly know it. You'd think that after two years spent in planning for

"She stopped abruptly, piled her books together, and left.

"Well!" Linda shrugged. "Wonder how she'll make it here."

"You never know," Sue replied. "She'll probably make it."

"But the courses are stiff. Everybody says they are." Linda made a face at herself in the window and began placing her own research materials into a pile.

"They?" Sue laughed. "They all say so. Absolutely everyone."

"Oh, all right," Linda snapped. Then her mood changed suddenly - into more the Linda that Sue had known since the first quarter on college campus.

"I know I've been a little witch, Sue," she confessed. "I'm sorry for bugging you all the time and not cooperating with getting the room arranged and

"

"Hold it! That's OK. I knew you would come around. Now, what's bothering you? Come on now; 'fess up."

"The missionary bit," Linda exploded. "Everybody's talking about being a missionary nurse - even a student missionary nurse! You'd think that the only place needing nurses was the church overseas. Why, I'll bet there are more trained national nurses than positions for them to fill in a lot of areas!"

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"Everyone?" Sue asked softly. "Not everyone is pressuring you, Roommate. You're right. Portland needs good nurses as much as anywhere, I suppose. Wherever people are sick."

"Sorry again," Linda apologized. "I just can't see myself a missionary. The last few weeks in College Place I felt the pressure coming from all sides. Foreign service. You'd think there wasn't another possible choice!"

Strange, Sue thought. She had felt nothing like that at all. Looking closely at Linda, she wondered what the girl was really struggling with.

The capping came off with no hitches, and Sue felt surprise as to how naturally the stiff little thing fitted on her head. But in short order she found that nursing on clinical campus was a lot more than laboratory experience. Like pharmacology class, for instance.

"You know what I got off the grapevine?" Linda asked as she came in one afternoon to find Sue laboring over formulas. "You know, Meg reads papers for Mrs. Hutchins, and"

Sue looked up from her textbook. "What?"

"Anne has the highest scores for the term in pharmacology. And Polly says she was at the top of chemistry class too. The way she talked, I thought she'd be the class dunce."

"I'm glad she's making it."

"But she's so flighty," Linda went on. "And she seems either to think she knows everything or nothing at all. I've worked with her on duty at the hospital a couple of weeks now. You should see her!"

Sue smiled. "If she's doing that well in pharmacology, I guess I had better ask her to help me review for midterms."

A few days later Sue found a chance to ask Anne for the help she needed, and the girl was more than willing to assist her. That evening they worked on formulas and proper dosages for a couple of hours.

"My head's swimming, Anne," Sue said at last. "Let's call a break." She slammed her textbook shut, a little surprised at the bang it made.

Anne leaned back in her chair. "Do you want an A, a B, or a C?"

"Oh, come on!" Sue chided. "Overdoing it now won't make that much difference. I've worked hard on the class from the beginning, and I'll probably get a B - I usually do. I'm a good sound student but never spectacular."

"Salt-of-the-earth Sue," Anne laughed. "Honestly, I wish I didn't always feel compelled to get an A in everything. I guess it's a basic insecurity that makes me have to do better than anybody else in order

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to feel good about myself. Even then I don't always feel good about myself after all the trouble. If my friends view me the way I see myself, it's a wonder I have any."

"Oh, hush!" Sue remonstrated. "Is Polly back yet? I haven't seen her for several days. I heard she had a bad case of flu or something, and her mother came for her."

Anne shook her head. "This room seems like a tomb without her. What would I do without her all the time? She's just the right balance for me. Positively refuses to look at the negative side of life." She looked wistfully at her hands. "But if my family lived right here in the city, you could be sure I'd live at home! Dorm experience could never lure me away from the nest."

Sue started to disagree when she remembered that Anne had never had a real home of her own.

"Come on, Anne, let's go down to my room," she suggested. "I got a box from my kid sisters this morning. Want to help me devour its contents?"

As they munched homemade cookies a few minutes later Anne cleared her throat and started to say something. Then she thought better of it and remained silent. But a moment later she went ahead anyway. "Sue, what happens to a student nurse who gives a different medication

.I mean different from the one the doctor prescribed?"

Choking on the half-chewed nuts in her mouth, Sue exclaimed, "Oh, Anne! You haven't

."

"Yes, I have. I told the supervisor about it afterward. Really, I'm sure the doctor couldn't have meant the medication he had on the chart. I don't see why the supervisor was so upset. She said that if ever we are in doubt, we're to have her call the doctor to verify. But

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"You're in for trouble," Sue declared, feeling more than a little annoyed at Anne's composure. "Even a graduate nurse has no right to give anything whatsoever without the doctor's orders, and here we are, just fledglings."

"Yes, I know. I had to fill out all kinds of forms, and the doctor roared at the supervisor over the telephone. I could hear him clear across her desk. I have to see him tomorrow morning. Let me tell you, I don't look forward to it!"

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“You’ll just have to tell him you’re sorry and admit that you had no business

.”

“All repentance and tears, I suppose,” Anne interrupted. “How can I, Sue? All that humility just isn’t my bit. You know it. It can’t be that bad.”

“Just a little while ago you were so humble you had some of the class members worried that maybe you weren’t smart enough to make nursing,” snapped Sue. “Come off it, Anne. Just make up your mind that an A in pharmacology doesn’t qualify you to upstage the doctor.”

Unexpectedly, Anne laughed. “I must look ridiculous to you, Sue,” she remarked. Traces of worry lurked in her eyes despite her smile. She cocked her head, listening.

Then Sue heard Linda’s voice. “Buck up,” Sue urged. “A person can do anything that he really has to - with God’s help. Sometimes I think we leave out that dimension. Just face that doctor as if he were another test.”

“Only there’s no chance of an A here,” Anne said soberly.

Linda opened the door with a rush. “Hi, Sue! Hi, Anne!”

Deanna Trivling swung in under full sail behind her and surveyed the remaining cookies for a moment, then turned to Linda, evidently finishing the conversation begun in the hall. “That accent!” she hooted. “Sue, have you met Miss Hattie Johnson?” Deanna helped herself to a handful of cookies.

“It’s got to be phony,” Linda agreed. “We ran into her while she was carrying her suitcases. And you won’t believe it until you hear it yourself. They don’t talk that way even in London.”

Relieved to have Linda interrupt right then, Sue grinned. “Fraid I haven’t met this Miss Hattie Johnson yet.”

“Well, you’ll have to right now!” Linda giggled and grabbed her with one hand and Anne, looking pained, with the other. “Just come on down the hall and see for yourselves. She’s in room 10.”

When Linda knocked, it brought no response. “Try again,” Deanna urged. “As for me, I’ve got to get back to my own troubles. Tests, tests, tests!” She shrugged her bulky sweater into place on her more than ample shoulders and left.

Knocking louder, Linda opened the door a crack. “Anyone here?”

“Sorry. Come in if you can get in.” The voice sounded muffled. In a moment a tousled blonde head emerged from behind a pile of boxes between the bed and the closet.

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“This is my roommate, Sue,” Linda introduced. “And Anne Milton. Sue and I live down the hall three doors on the right.”

“I’m glad to know you both,” Hattie smiled. “The dormitory seems so big and empty. Since I came midterm to work some extra, I knew I’d have lots of adjustments to make. Thought dormitories were supposed to be teeming with action, but the whole place seems dreadfully depressing.”

“Exams,” Sue explained, “shed an atmosphere of gloom twice each quarter. After you get a roommate, you won’t find it so lonely.”

Catching Sue’s eye, Linda winked. Sue knew her own smile was as much one of amusement at Hattie’s accent as friendliness.

“But I won’t have a roommate,” Hattie murmured with a melodramatic sigh. “The dean tried to be kind about it, but it seems that everyone who is here already has one, and the others coming from college campus are all paired up the way they were there. Oh, well - maybe in another term when I have made some friends here...”

Her voice and expression were so serious that Sue couldn’t help laughing. “Well, we’ll be friends then,” she said, extending her hand. She shook Hattie’s hand firmly, and finally the pale face erupted with a smile that brought out dimples and laugh lines Sue wouldn’t have guessed hid there.

“Friends, then, as you say,” Hattie agreed. “But I won’t bother you when you’re busy studying. Come back when I have this place organized so you can find a proper seat.”

Back in her room, Sue found, to her surprise, Deanna sprawled on her bed, munching another cookie, with a notebook and its contents spread everywhere.

“Well?” Deanna asked, as if she belonged right where she lay.

Annoyed, Sue snapped, “South Africa, I think.” She dug furiously in her desk drawer while she bit her tongue.

“Not phony?” Linda marveled from a corner of the room.

“I don’t think so. I had a teacher once who came from there. And he talked just like that. It used to send us up the walls at first. But what difference does it make? She’s in the same boat with us - a student nurse is a student nurse.”

“If you want it that way,” Deanna snorted. She jumped up and started collecting her books. “Personally, I have all the friends I can use!”

Linda watched her methodical departure, then groaned. “She’s really sweet, isn’t she?” she chuckled as they heard Deanna’s heels

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clumping down the hall. "But she's good in med-surg. There are reasons behind my friendships, too, you see, Roommate. We all use each other - friends and all."

"Oh, Linda, you can make us all sound like such a sick, sorry lot," Sue interrupted. "How about a shower to clear away our foul moods?"

A little later they sat - still damp and pink - facing each other on their beds. "She's lonely," Sue mused, setting her hair.

"Hattie?"

"We could give her a little boost if we were friendly. She'll have plenty of friends, too, after she gets acquainted. Until then..."

Linda grinned ruefully. "So here begins another missionary project engineered by Packard and Rimm."

"We're all that ourselves, one way or another," Sue commented, a hair clip between her teeth. "I feel positively snowed under tonight!"

When Linda dropped off to sleep, Sue slipped out of bed and down the hall to the prayer room. What she needed more than anything else right then - more than sleep or study or friends - was prayer. Easing onto the little bench, she rested her head in her hands.

"If there were just no newspapers full of bad news, Lord, and roommates with sharp tongues and classmates who get themselves into trouble and new girls who need a friend when I have almost no time to spare on them. And there's that test tomorrow! You know I've given it the best I have all along. My pride won't be hurt if I'm not the best in the class, but please help me to make a respectable showing, at least."

The aching in her heart wouldn't submit to words. She sat there a long time, half praying, half listening, mulling over all the day's troubles. Then far off she heard the scream of an ambulance siren. It grew louder and louder as it rushed toward the hospital. Then behind it another siren wailed. Both raced past the dormitory, the lights flashing through the stained-glass window over the Bible on the table in front of Sue.

"I guess I'm not the only one with griefs tonight," she thought. "We're all safe and comfortable in here while over in the hospital they are unloading three or four mangled bodies right now. Please, God!"

Her imagination pictured the emergency entrance for an instant. Then the image seemed to waver and change until it looked like the aftermath of street fighting in a distant city. The photograph in the paper that morning! "Please, God!" Sue repeated.

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She sat there in the prayer room and remembered the last week in August when she and Rob had been together. Now it seemed years ago.