

Chapter 1

A Ford in Her Future?

“I’ll go away to one of their schools,” said Lillian to herself, “but I won’t pay any attention to their religion.”

The Shafer family were celebrating a family reunion on their Kansas farm. Aunts and uncles and cousins had arrived. From faraway western Washington had come Pearl, an older sister, who had been watching eighteen-year-old Lillian day by day.

“Mother,” she began one day, “if Lillian stays at the farm with no church to attend and none of our young people for friends, she is liable to drift away from our faith.”

“Yes, I worry about that all the time,” answered mother thoughtfully. “She has already drifted. All she thinks of are dances and parties and fun. I’m about the only Adventist Lillian knows. Any girl needs friends of her own faith, and I wanted to send her to a denominational school; but, of course, your father has no interest in that. He wanted to send her to high school, but I wouldn’t consent to it, so she has been out of school for three years.”

“Let her go home with me to Washington. She can help me take care of the children, and I’ll send her to the academy in town.” Mrs. Shafer consulted her husband, and later, when they presented the plan to Lillian, she was delighted. She had been longing to study and make something of her life, and here was her chance. Then, too, a visit to the West meant adventure, and Lillian loved excitement.

However, one thing troubled her. In a denominational school she would be expected to join the church. She loved her mother and she liked her mother’s religion, but—(The girl twisted the new engagement ring on her finger.) She would hate being so far away from Jim! She had no intention of settling down and getting married yet, she decided, so it might be well to test their love by separation for a time. The real problem was that if she should become a church member, she would have to give up Jim. That she knew, and that she could never do. She said to herself, “I’ll go and study, but I won’t pay any attention to their religion.”

In September Lillian matriculated at Forest Home Academy, Washington. The days that followed were busy, for Pearl was caring for seventeen boys and girls in her home. Some were orphans, some from

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broken homes. All attended church school. Pearl was a good organizer, and every one of the seventeen had a special job to do in the short time between morning worship and school. There was a bedmaker, a “sweeper-upper,” a table setter, a kettle scraper, a dishwasher, and a couple of dishwipers. When they were all shooed off to school, Lillian picked up her books and set out for a morning at the academy. She loved school and did not mind the long hours of work at home. Her happy disposition and her love of fun won her many friends.

When the Week of Prayer came around, her heart was strangely touched. She longed to join the other students and take her stand for Jesus Christ. Then she would look at her engagement ring and the gold bracelet Jim had given her. No, she could never give up Jim. If only she could be baptized and still marry him! After all, she had given him her promise and he was waiting faithfully. Would God expect her to break a pledge? She searched the counsels of Ellen G. White, hoping to find a loophole, an excuse for carrying out her plans. But always she came back to the words: “Unless you would have a home where the shadows are never lifted, do not unite yourself with one who is an enemy of God.”

When the school year ended, the letters between Kansas and Washington were still traveling back and forth. During the vacation, Lillian went unwillingly to camp meeting with her sister. She would have been more unwilling yet had she known that Pearl and her school friends were praying for her in their prayer bands. How could she resist the power of those prayers? She determined to attend as few meetings as possible.

At the last Thursday night service, Pastor Luther Warren described the joys of heaven. To Lillian his voice sounded like that of an angel. The picture he painted with words made that other world more real than this one. She must make her decision, even though it seemed her heart would break if she tore out its idol. That night there was no sleep for her. At last, on her knees, she won the victory!

The next morning, as she was passing Pastor Meade MacGuire’s tent, the minister called, “Come in a minute, Lillian.”

The girl sat down in his tent and with tears in her eyes told how she had decided to follow Jesus.

“What are you sacrificing?” he asked.

“My plans to marry Jim, the opportunity to have a beautiful home and plenty of money, the fun of dancing and going to the movies, my jewelry-everything!”

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Then Pastor MacGuire, talking in his gentle way, helped her see that she was not giving up anything good. The jewelry, the amusements, the money, were tawdry and temporal. Her plans for marriage would never have brought her lasting satisfaction either, for as he said, "If you can't bow together in prayer you are missing the closest and most intimate relation in marriage. You will learn to love someone else—someone with whom you can share your deepest sentiments, someone who wants to dedicate his life to God's service."

Lillian was smiling through her tears when she left the tent. She determined to be baptized the next day, the last Sabbath of camp meeting. No time was lost in returning the ring and bracelet to Jim with a letter of explanation that was as kind as she could make it.

Two years later Lillian graduated from the academy. In her senior year the principal inspired the girl with a definite desire to be a foreign missionary to South America. Since he had served in Chile, he had a firsthand knowledge of that continent.

When Lillian entered Walla Walla College the next fall, there was one purpose in her life—to prepare for mission service. Thinking that teaching would be the most useful training for a foreign missionary, she enrolled in the normal course.

The leader of the foreign-mission band was a tall, lanky young man by the name of Orley Ford. A junior ministerial student, he was already committed to go to South America as soon as he finished his education. Like college boys then and now, he and his friends looked over the freshman girls with appraising eyes.

"There's the girl for me," he exclaimed to himself when he first saw pretty Lillian Shafer. And when she appeared at a foreign-mission band meeting he was more sure than ever that she was the girl!

A couple of days later as he was walking down the street a girl he knew came toward him. She said, "Orley, come here and meet a friend of mine from Forest Home Academy."

The girl accompanying her was Lillian, and this was the introduction he had been awaiting; but not under these circumstances, for he had been digging potatoes all morning, and his overalls were dirty and his face red.

It was love at first sight for Orley Ford. After forty-five years he still remembers how she looked that September day in her green jumper and cream-colored blouse. But for the girl, love was to be like a slow-growing plant. If Orley was watching her and trying to get acquainted, so were others, and she noticed him no more than the rest.

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The first time she remembers him clearly was when she attended a party at the home of Orley's parents. Everyone knew the Ford house at the east end of Maple Street (now Sixth Avenue). The brick house had been the first one built in the Walla Walla Valley. The girl enjoyed the friendly atmosphere of the home, with its big fireplace. (Little did she know that Orley had asked Lillian's escort to bring her to the party so he could get better acquainted. Who would have thought such a friendly young man would be too bashful to invite her himself!)

Their first date was on a college sleigh ride. Their second was a toboggan party on the hill behind the Ford home. While twenty young people were taking turns sliding down the snowy hill on a large toboggan, Orley took Lillian on a cozy sled built for two. She was thrilled with the speed and the glistening snow. Merrily she started to get off the sled at the bottom of the hill, when suddenly, with a swish and a crash, the toboggan hit them. Its driver had failed to notice that Orley and Lillian were at the bottom of the hill. Lillian's leg was broken and the fun spoiled for everyone, and Orley feared the budding romance was ruined, too. If he couldn't take better care of her than that-Lillian convalesced in her fourth-floor room of the girls' dormitory. Sometimes Orley would call to her from the fourth-floor science classroom in the parallel wing of the building. The distance was not too great, and they could manage a visit.

One day near the end of the school year, Orley told Lillian he had a letter to show her. As they stood in front of the administration building, he read the letter from the mission board, asking if he would go to South America a year from the end of the present year, and whether or not he would be going alone.

"Will you go with me?" Orley asked in his simple, direct way. The surprised girl managed to murmur something about their not knowing one another very well, then ran up the steps of the girls' dormitory two at a time to her fourth-floor refuge. Thankful not to find her roommate in, she closed the door and stood trembling. How could he propose like that? How did he know he loved her? It was all so sudden. She knew she wasn't in love. Yet in her heart she felt impressed that she must not refuse without taking time to think. Pastor MacGuire had told her she would love again. Perhaps in time-

Certainly Orley Ford was a likable fellow, the kind that was everybody's friend. He would chop wood for a poor widow or run errands for an old man. Kindness seemed to be the rule of his life.

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Orley left the campus a few days before school was out in order to enter literature evangelism. "I'll make two scholarships," he assured the girl. "Then we can be married at the end of the summer and you can go to school with me next year."

Lillian wanted to earn her own expenses, however, and she wasn't ready to be married or even engaged. That summer she went home for the first time in four years. As the train sped east, she prayed for strength to be true to her baptismal vows even if she were the only Adventist young person in town.

When the train pulled into the familiar station, there stood her father and mother-and Jim. She had promised to marry him when she turned twenty-one. Now she was twenty-two.

It was a lonely summer for Lillian, especially after the gaiety of dormitory life. Her old friends had married and gone. When the first Sunday came, she found she missed the good times she had once had on that day. When Jim arrived to banish her boredom, she was half pleased and half sorry. He was a handsome young man, and he had built a home which he begged her to share with him. The battle was on again between her affections and her conscience.

That autumn Lillian was disappointed when she could not return to Walla Walla College. When an opportunity came for her to teach church school in Nakoma, Kansas, she decided to accept it. Thirty-five German-speaking children were in her care that year. There were eight grades, and Lillian was the only teacher.

Letters came regularly from Orley, first from his colporteur field, and then from college. They told of his satisfaction in working for others and the joy of a life dedicated to God. Little by little she felt herself drawn to Orley by the strong cords of the ideals they shared. Slowly the gulf between her and Jim grew wider. But she was not ready to say Yes to Orley's proposal.