

A black and white photograph of a night sky. A full moon is visible in the upper right quadrant, partially obscured by wispy clouds. The lower portion of the image shows the dark silhouettes of several trees against a lighter, hazy background.

# 1.

## Shadows

DARKNESS DRAPED ITS GIANT SHROUD over the jagged peaks of the Sierra Madres. The round moon hung low as if to illuminate the drama the night would unveil. The stars shone against the inky sky like slivers of broken glass.

Like a giant serpent, a rutted road humped its way from the Pan American Highway to the ridge of a mountain eight miles away. Slithering through streams, twisting through cornfields and shadowy forests, the dirt drive snaked over razorback ridges and valleys. Slab-wood shacks and cornstalk huts with threads of smoke spiraling from their thatched roofs dotted the dark mountain slopes. Up the shoulder of the mountain the road wound its way, teetering dangerously near the brink of ravines. The trail writhed on until it came to the shadowed forms of a lone dwelling, a chapel, and a school clinging to the spine of the mountain.

To the rear of the dwelling, an army of pine trees sighed and whispered in the wind. Beneath their swaying branches, a stealthy movement in the shadows betrayed dark forms lurking in the undergrowth, waiting for the lights of the isolated dwelling to be extinguished.

Had the curtains been drawn back from the window, one could have seen a glowing fire on the hearth. To one side of the fire, a mother rocked her infant. Sweet tones of a lullaby accompanied the rhythmic squeak of the rocker. A wisp of dark hair escaped from the top of the pink blanket in her arms.

Marie's dark hair was brushed away from her pleasant face and twisted neatly under a black veil. Her large brown eyes were honest with a touch of kindness and a serious look that hinted at a maturity beyond her twenty-eight years. There was a trim youthfulness about her that belied her mothering five children. Marie, with her spontaneous, outgoing ways, had grown up on a farm handling a tractor as well as almost any boy.

Leaning back in his chair on the other side of the fire, John studied his Bible, his stockinged feet propped on the hearth. In the shimmering firelight, his sandy hair appeared golden. His clear eyes were serious with the calm of a cloudless sky and a touch of humor within their depths. His love for the Guatemalan coffee was surpassed by his love for the Guatemalan people. John's love for people had been fostered by the years his parents had spent as youth sponsors at their church. His father was a pastor, a grocer, and a butcher, and he had passed on his butchering skills

to his son. Consequently, John butchered much of the mission's meat.



The John Troyer family in 1981.

*How special it is to be alone with John*, Marie thought contentedly, gazing at her husband's rugged features. Moments alone with John were rare, as his hours were filled with visiting sick villagers, studying for Spanish sermons, and giving agricultural training. Besides his duties at Palamá, John pastored a second church at Paquib (pah KEEP), a two-hour hike beyond Palamá. He also studied the Cakchiquel dialect.

The Troyers shared their house with John's assistant, Gary Miller, as well as Emiliana, a native Christian who had been hired to help Marie with the babies.

Since hearing of the death of Ruth's husband two weeks before, Marie considered time spent with John especially precious.

Ruth. Like a dark cloud, the memory drifted into her thoughts, casting a dark shadow over her contentment. The smile on her lips evaporated. Ruth—dear friend! Only two weeks ago an accident had snatched her young husband from her, leaving her with three small children. Marie shuddered. Seven years with John were not nearly enough.

For several moments there was only the creak of the rocker and the crackling of the fire. Then, softly, her sweet voice carried the lines of a favorite hymn.

*God's way is best; I will not murmur,  
Although the end I may not see;  
Where'er He leads, I'll meekly follow—  
God's way is best, is best for me.*

John looked up from his Bible. "That song is special to you, Marie."

"It's the prayer of my heart, John. That's why I wanted it sung at our wedding."

"Our wedding—it seems like a long time since we walked the aisle together," John mused, "and even longer since we were two teenagers stranded at the Guatemala City airport."

"Oh, the airport!" Marie laughed softly. "Do you know what an awkward feeling it was to be stranded in a foreign city with a former boyfriend?"

"No one met us at the airport because the message of our arrival hadn't been delivered. But I didn't mind being stuck with you," John confessed with a mischievous twinkle in



Emiliana  
with  
Marilyn.

his eyes. "I can still see you sitting on the suitcases to guard them while I went to flag down a taxi."

His tone grew serious. "I know God planned for us to go to Guatemala on the same flight—it wasn't just a coincidence. We'd had two dates at Bible school, then broke up after a letter or two, didn't we? What was it, three months after we came to Guatemala when we started dating again?"

"It was three months. You were stationed at headquarters, while I was at the clinic here at Palamá," Marie replied dreamily. "We didn't see each other very often, you know." Stroking the baby's soft hair, she asked, "Tell me again what brought you to Guatemala."

"Remember, I've told you how I went to Costa Rica with my minister when I was in high school," John