



1.

Shock

*And we know that all things work together for good
to them that love God, to them who are the called
according to his purpose.*

— Romans 8:28

Lloyd gripped the van's steering wheel. His face reflected the shock and grief of the unplanned hour. The air was thick with crushed feelings and unspoken prayers for God's mercy on our son. Words had not yet penetrated the stillness as we rounded the curve and crossed the bridge a mile from our home.

I readjusted my unconscious son in my arms. "What happened?" My grief-stricken words were barely audible. Lloyd didn't answer immediately. Our spirits were stunned. I was sure Nathan's neck wasn't broken, so I lifted him from the bumpy van seat, ignoring the blood running down my dress. His dirty, bleeding form nestled limply in my arms.

It was Friday, May 30, 1986. The day had begun like any other day on our family farm in Jefferson County, New York.

Once the morning activities, chores, and responsibilities were finished, we had settled down for our regular time of family worship. Everyone who could read chose a verse from the Bible, and those who could not read repeated the verse from memory. We sang a few songs and then knelt to pray. After our family worship, Lloyd drove to the local farm supply store. The salesman there always paid attention to the little boys, who liked to go along with their father. The five older boys worked outside, and our two girls and I thought it would be a good time to clean the house.

At lunchtime the family was again united, as usual. We discussed going on a trip. Maybe we could visit our cousins in Canada this weekend. The corn was planted, and it wasn't time for haying yet. We let our imaginations run, all talking at the same time about what we would like to do in the next few weeks.

We knew not how our heavenly Father had perfectly planned our time for the weeks to come.

I had just settled down to do some sewing when our two oldest boys dashed in through the kitchen door. "Mom!" they called, almost in unison. "Nathan's hurt!"

Immediately I was in the kitchen, little thinking that the tablecloth I had been hemming wouldn't be finished until a month later.

"Bring him in," I ordered. Why had they left him outside if he was hurt? He'd probably pinched his finger or stubbed his toe or sustained any of those other minor injuries that are so common on a farm with seven boys. My sister had asked me several times, "Don't you worry about your boys? Farms have the highest statistics for serious injuries and deaths."

“No,” I always told her. “I commit my children to God’s protection.” But had I been unconsciously taking His care for granted? Was I being careless about safety precautions and justifying it by calling it “trust”?

“He’s unconscious!” they shouted.

The impact of their words finally hit me. I didn’t wait to hear more. “He’s in the van,” I numbly heard as they followed me across the lawn.

“We’re going to the hospital,” Lloyd said in a calm, though unusually strained, voice.

“Bring my shoes and a wet towel,” I called to the children as I climbed into the van.

By the time Lloyd had turned the van around, they had brought the things I had asked for.

“You all go and pray for Nathan,” I said, shutting the door. The children looked forsaken and stricken as they watched us speed out the lane.

The speedometer maxed out as Lloyd guided the van along Elmridge Road to Route 11. We had a good half-hour drive ahead of us. Lloyd and I both started praying by turns or together, however it came out between the deep groanings of our spirits. As our prayers ended, Lloyd told me what had happened.

“Mary Ann,” Lloyd began gently, “the back wheel of our big tractor rolled over Nathan’s head. It will be a miracle if we can keep him.”

I examined Nathan’s head and face more closely. He seemed too fragile to move. His eyes were partly opened. I opened one, then the other. The right eye was rolled completely up in his

head, and the left eye wasn't responding at all. *He's leaving us!* I thought. *Or his brain is not functioning. . .*

The blood wasn't gushing out of his ears anymore, but a slow trickle continued to reveal a serious fracture. A blood clot from his ear stuck to his shirt collar.

What a blessing this child had been to us these five years! Was God really going to take our Nathan home now? As I thought of the future without him, the days, months, and years ahead looked empty and cheerless. I remembered how we had committed Nathan to God when he was born. He was God's child and not our own. He was ours to care for only as long as God lent him to us. But no matter how surrendered I had thought my will, the parting looked very painful. Lloyd and I loved all our children, but now our strongest emotions were drawn to Nathan, who needed them most.

The miles seemed to drag in spite of the speeding van. *Will we ever get there?* I wondered. "O God, help us, help us now!" was the only prayer I could think of. I pressed Nathan's precious, unconscious, bleeding form gently to myself. I kissed him softly on his cool, dirty forehead. His irregular breathing was faltering, and momentarily it stopped. There was a gurgling sound in his throat. "He's not going to make it, Lloyd." I spoke quickly, calmly. The feeling of panic was gone. The calmness had to be from God. "I will be holding him in my arms when the death angel gently bears him away."

Tears came to my eyes—tears of grief, tears of parting, tears of love. The hardest of all were tears of remorse. Instinctively, I raised his head slightly. The gurgling sound, I discovered, was food. His stomach was rejecting its beef, mashed potatoes, and

peas. The wet towels we had brought along came in very handy. Nathan resumed his irregular, gurgling, half-moaning breathing.

Lloyd and I had long had a theme song. We sang it on all special occasions. We sang it together when we were dating, on our wedding day, on anniversaries, and in any difficult or joyful experience. We sang it when each new baby was born, and now, after seventeen years of married life, we sang it again. We had just approached the red light at the Watertown city limits when Lloyd softly, falteringly started singing, “God moves in a mysterious way, His wonders to perform; He plants His footsteps in the sea and rides upon the storm.”

This must be a storm, I pondered.

“Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take; the clouds ye so much dread are big with mercy and will break in blessings on your head.”

Even this? I wondered. I bowed my head and meditated in reverence on the song’s old yet ever-new message. I joined in the next verse but didn’t get very far. “Judge not the Lord by feeble sense, but trust Him for His grace; behind a frowning providence He hides a smiling face.”

And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. This familiar verse had become a faithful standby and echoed in our hearts just now.

Lloyd continued singing as I faltered. “His purposes will ripen fast, unfolding every hour; the bud may have a bitter taste, but sweet will be the flower.”

Is Nathan the bud? Will he soon bloom in Heaven? I wondered.