

Chapter 1

Into The Valley

If Wayne had been watching, he would have come bounding down the steps to welcome Karen with open arms. But he was not watching, and Karen strode by on the opposite side of the street, careful not to betray her feelings by more than a casual glance toward his house.

Leapin' Lizzie stood in the driveway, evidence that Wayne was at home. But he was not delving into the innards of the old Model A as he usually did on Friday afternoon. Karen had so hoped he would be there today-oh, please, at least today! But he was not there, and all her resolutions began to crumble.

For a moment she wavered. It would be so simple to dash across the street, press the doorbell, and say the two short words, 'I'm sorry.'" But Karen could not make herself do it, much as she wanted to. And now she had passed his house.

Wistfully she thought about Leapin' Lizzie, as she and Wayne had dubbed the old car when he had bought it two years before. She remembered helping him brush on the coat of dark-green paint. Later they had waxed the car together.

"If we keep enough wax on these fenders, it will delay rusting by two or three years," he had explained. "We can't afford to paint her again till after we're through medical school, honey, so we'd better take good care of this job."

He stopped to flash a quick smile at Karen. Nodding in agreement, she picked up the rag and energetically polished some more. How Lizzie glistened when they stepped back to admire her! And how Wayne's eyes shone as he stole frequent glances at his fiancée, her face smudged with dirt, her brown hair curling around her sweaty forehead.

But that was long ago when they had first come to medical school. Now they were nearing the end of their junior year at the College of Medical Evangelists, and the old car was beginning to show signs of neglect and wear. It had weathered many a purposeful detour through orange groves on moonlit nights and hard pulls up curving mountain roads to the snow-capped peaks. Gay and carefree days those had been. They had spent golden hours together discussing plans for the future. They would be missionaries-go to India, perhaps, and set up a mission hospital where they could labor together.

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Karen sighed. Since the little car, like their other interests, had ceased to be a joint project, it received no attention from Karen and very little from Wayne. He kept it running just well enough to make monthly trips home where his aging mother waited for his visits.

Karen remembered her last trip home with Wayne. On the day before Thanksgiving he had caught her by surprise after class with the unexpected question, "How would you like to go home with me for Thanksgiving dinner, Karen?"

Because they had hardly spoken to each other since their quarrel two months before, Karen nearly lost her balance and tripped over the doormat in front of the chemistry building. Reaching out a hand to steady her, Wayne caught her eyes with his, searching deeply. Trying to be casual, she smiled lightly at him and answered, "That would be fun, Wayne. I've hardly been off this campus for three months!"

The trip was a failure. Although Mrs. Wells welcomed Karen warmly, it was difficult for the girl to play a double role. In his mother's presence Karen must pretend that everything between Wayne and herself was as it had been, while deep in her heart she knew it could never be the same again, unless—When they were alone in Leapin' Lizzie, Wayne's pleading eyes told more than he would allow his lips to utter. He stumbingly apologized for his part in the quarrel, but she did not forgive him, and he did not mention the subject again. Karen knew the next move was up to her. The trouble had been mostly her fault, yet she could not bring herself to make up with him.

She felt as if this were all a bad dream, as if Wayne were not really sitting over there on his side of the car, making no attempt to draw her closer. Soon she would wake up and everything would be all right. They would be talking of their plans after medical school, of where they would intern, of their wedding, of a call to the mission field. But the horrible dream lasted the whole day long. When she forced herself to smile and kiss his mother good-bye, she felt that this could possibly be her last visit to his home. On the way back to Los Angeles she and Wayne talked of a number of trivial things.

Safely in bed that night, Karen cried herself to sleep. She did love Wayne, and she knew he loved her. Then why couldn't she say the words that would set things right? Wayne had given her the opening, but she had been too proud! She buried her face in her pillow and dreamed of Wayne reaching out his arms to her, of wedding bells ringing.

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Now it was February. Karen thought and planned what she would say to Wayne to patch things up, but the opportunity never seemed to come. Finally she told herself that this nonsense must stop! She would just walk over to his house and tell him.

“Wayne,” she would say, “I am the one who was wrong. I’m the one who needs to apologize. I’m sorry, and I love you.”

“It would be simple,” she told herself as she set out for his rooming house that Friday afternoon. Maybe he would be working on his car; then she wouldn’t have to risk meeting some other medic coming to the door when she rang the bell. But he was not outside. Panic struck her, and pretending not even to notice the place, she strode on toward the County Hospital. “If he sees me,” she thought, “he will only think I’m on my way to complete some assignment at the County.”

“Go back, Karen! Go back and knock on his door!” her heart kept telling her. But her feet marched relentlessly, like the steady beat of drums in the night, leading her away from the man she loved.

After spending an hour wandering aimlessly through the wards of the huge county hospital, now and then stopping to check an interesting case, Karen started back along the street to her dormitory. She would pass Wayne’s rooming house again, and maybe this time he would be out working on the car. But again she was disappointed. So near and yet so far. Just twenty steps up his driveway. Just one push on the doorbell-Quickening her pace, Karen choked back tears of frustration and glanced at her watch. It was nearly five o’clock! There was still her dress to press for Sabbath, her hair to fix.

“Maybe I’ll see him at MV tonight,” she thought, “or maybe at supper. I’ll tell him then, I really will.”

But Wayne did not come to the cafeteria that night, at least not while Karen lingered there, making her food last as long as she dared. Nor was he in Missionary Volunteer meeting. She went to bed with a heavy heart, determined to end the useless suspense the very next time she saw him, even if that was during church.

Sabbath morning Karen dressed carefully. This was to be The Day to End the Quarrel, and she wanted to look her best. She took a seat near the back of the church where she could watch everyone come in. His class was near the front. She had often been glad hers was behind it because she could steal a sly glance in his direction without his knowing it.

Suddenly someone tapped her on the shoulder.

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“Pardon me, Karen, but could you tell me how to get in touch with Wayne Wells’ mother?” It was Tom Smith speaking.

“Why? Is something wrong with Wayne?”

“Yes, I’m afraid so.”

Instantly Karen was on her feet following Tom into the vestibule. “What’s wrong, Tom? You must tell me!”

Tom hesitated, then apparently decided she had a right to ‘know.

“I took him to the hospital this morning. He is a very sick boy. They aren’t sure what’s wrong, but they’ve put him in the contagious ward over at the County. It-well-it looks like it might be meningitis!”

“Oh, no!” cried Karen. “Not Wayne! He’s always been so healthy!” She fumbled in her purse for a handkerchief, choking back the tears. “Will they let me see him, Tom?”

“I don’t know,” Tom said quietly. “We can try.”

Riding beside Tom in Leapin’ Lizzie, Karen sat tense and erect. Tom told her that he had heard Wayne moaning in his room early that morning. He went in to see what was wrong and found Wayne tossing on the bed and complaining of a splitting headache. His temperature was high. Tom called the men’s dean, who secured the services of a doctor within an hour. The doctor recommended that they get Wayne into the county hospital at once.

“They’re more fully equipped than our hospital to give the tests I want right now,” he explained. At the County, tests were begun at once. Wayne’s condition had grown steadily worse.

“When I left,” Tom finished, “he seemed to be almost in a coma!”

Karen jumped from the car before Tom had brought it to a complete stop. She dashed ahead to the contagious disease ward, learned that Wayne was in a private room, and donned the necessary cap, gown, and mask to be allowed to enter.

Wayne did not know her! Throwing caution to the wind, she knelt by his bed, begging him to forgive her. Oblivious of Tom and of the nurse working over Wayne, she poured into his unhearing ears the words she knew he had been longing to hear. Wayne only moaned in his delirium and turned unseeing eyes upon her. Karen could not restrain the tears and withdrew to the window to give the nurses and doctors more room to work. She pleaded with God for Wayne’s recovery. She realized that if she had only stopped to see him yesterday she might have gotten help for him earlier!

Through the hours that followed, Karen did not leave the bedside for more than a few minutes at a time. Wayne’s mother arrived with

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one of his older brothers. She treated them kindly, telling them all she could about Wayne's sickness, but not mentioning her own private torture-the fear that he might never regain consciousness or be able to forgive her!

The doctors consulted with each other and reached a diagnosis of spinal meningitis. There was little that could be done* except to relieve the symptoms. An icepack was applied to the patient's neck; he was fed intravenously and given constant nursing care. The doctor tried to break the news gently to Wayne's aging mother that there was little hope for his recovery. Helplessly Karen watched the light of hope go out in the mother's care-lined face. Wayne was all she had left. Her other boys were married, and none of them shared with her the advent faith as Wayne did. She had sacrificed all she had to give Wayne a medical education.

*Antibiotics had not yet been discovered.

As the hours ticked slowly by, Karen watched as the dreadful disease sapped Wayne's strength. The next day came, and still there was no turn for the better. By the second night Wayne was too weak to move a finger. Still she hovered near, hoping and praying that he would regain consciousness.

Before dawn Tuesday morning Wayne Wells was gone. Karen stumbled from the room, too grief-stricken to comfort his poor mother but for a moment.

"Too late!" she sobbed into her pillow as dawn broke over the college campus. "Too late! Oh, why did I put it off so long?"

Picking up the threads of life was not easy for young Karen Anderson. Through long nights she questioned God's wisdom in allowing Wayne to die. Hadn't they planned to serve Him together in India? Here was a young doctor halfway through his training, a good Christian boy-the very best! Why did God allow him to be taken?

Gradually her thoughts aligned themselves in order, and she could feel God encircling her with His love. Surely God in His wisdom knew best. Perhaps Wayne would have met insurmountable temptations in years to come. She searched her own life, wondering if she would be ready if a sudden call came to her. Finally, through prayer, she found her footing again.

Plunging into her studies with a determination to do the work of two doctors if need be, she finished her senior year with honors and took the well-deserved diploma with satisfaction. Staring through her tears at Wayne's vacant chair with the ribbon draped across it, she kept

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locked in her heart the secret that she had been too late, and Wayne had died never knowing of her love!

A new determination took hold of her on graduation night. She would make good. Wayne would be proud to meet her when they were reunited in heaven. He would know then that because of her love for him she had accomplished all she could for God. For him she had answered the call to the mission field, alone.