

# and be my Love

By PEGGY DERN

WNU RELEASE

THE STORY THUS FAR. "Alicia Stevenson has been murdered!" The story was all over Pleasant Grove in minutes. Late in the afternoon Tom stopped by to get milk, and they talked about Alicia's death. Meg was upset, and involuntarily Tom put his arms around her and called her "darling." That evening Meg and her father sat looking at each other, each remembering that the other was out late the night before. "Did you do it?" she finally asked. "No—did you?" She was stunned. Jim MacTavish suggested they make a bargain: "You forget that I was out of the house—I'll forget you were trysting with Tom Fallon." A hot tide of crimson covered Meg.

## CHAPTER XI

She caught her breath and could not believe she had spoken, though the words seemed to quiver in letters of fire between them. Her father stiffened with a little jerk. His face was white and hard and his eyes were veiled, so that she could not guess his thoughts.

For a moment that seemed a century long his eyes met hers, and then he said very softly, "No, my dear—did you?"

"Father!" It was a shocked, incredulous gasp that came scarcely above her breath. "How—how can you even—think—"

Her father lifted his shoulders in a gesture that was not quite a shrug and drawled coolly, "Why not? You seemed perfectly willing to believe I had!"

"Oh, no, Dad." In that breathless moment the endearing dimples came easily from her tongue. "I didn't think you had—I couldn't ever believe you had—"

"Yet you put the question very easily," he reminded her dryly.

"It—it was only that I heard you come in last night—a little after one—"

"A few minutes after you came in, if I remember," said her father calmly, his eyes never leaving her white, ravaged face.

"Suppose we make a bargain, my dear Megan." Her father's voice came softly, low-pitched, scarcely above a whisper, in the tone of one conspirator to another.

"A— a bargain, Father?" she managed faintly.

He nodded. "You forget that I was out of the house—I'll forget that you were—er—trysting with Tom Fallon on the Ridge," he said in that gentle, yet somehow terrifying drawl.

A hot tide of crimson poured over her face and reached from the collar of her neat cotton print frock to the very roots of her hair.

"I wasn't—trysting with Tom Fallon!" Her mouth twisted with distaste at the thought, and the implication.

"But you did meet him there—"

"Purely by accident!" she flashed.

Her father smiled thinly. "I believe you, my dear—though I am a little doubtful as to whether other people would, if it ever became necessary for other people to know of that—er—accidental meeting."

She put her face in her hands for a moment and her father watched her with a curious tenseness.

"But, of course, I can see no reason why anyone save the two of us should know anything about it," he went on smoothly. "Surely if my daughter and I wish to go for a walk in the fresh night air, it is nobody's business but our own. Unfortunately, in a murder investigation a great many seemingly unrelated facts come out. Of course, there's no likelihood that we should be in any way connected with this terrible affair. Neither of us had any motive to want Alicia out of the way—that is, I had none. I hoped to marry her!"

She stared at him, caught by some odd note in his voice. And after a moment he answered the look in her eyes. "Of course if it should become known that you were violently opposed to me marrying her, that you resented the thought of having her here in the house, and had been unable to persuade me to give up my plans to marry her—well—" Once again he lifted his shoulders in that gesture that was not quite a shrug, but that was an effective dismissal.

Megan drew a long, hard breath.

"You know I couldn't possibly have—" She set her breath against the sob that clutched at her throat.

"Of course, my dear—I know that you are completely incapable of any such deed of violence!" her father assured her, and there was a warmth that was very close to tenderness in his voice. "But it won't be what I know that will count, Megan—it will be what we can prove—or disprove!"

He let her sit huddled in a heap for a moment as though to think that over. And then he said quietly, "That's why I say there is no reason why anyone should be told that you and I were out of the house—though, unfortunately, not together—for several hours last night!"

"Whom did you think I'd be likely to tell?" she asked him huskily, after a moment in which she fought to pull herself together so that speech was at all possible.

"There will be an inquest, of course," he reminded her. "Undoubtedly we, as her closest neighbors—and I suppose her closest acquaintances—will be called to testify. And if we simply say that we went to bed a little after ten—"

"But that's perjury," she whispered faintly.

Her father's face darkened angrily. "Don't be an idiot! You did not kill her. Neither did I. So what possible difference can it make—if nobody knows that we went for a walk? I'm absolutely positive that I wasn't seen; I feel equally sure you were not. So where's the harm if we protect ourselves in a situation that could easily become very unpleasant?"

She hesitated and he said quietly, "Because, Megan, if it becomes known that you and I were not in bed and asleep—that you were out on the Ridge with Fallon—it's not only going to be extremely unpleasant for you, but it's going to finish him, once and for all. He'll never be able to get another job as a teacher no matter how innocent and accidental your meeting was. People will remember Alicia's little thrust about your spending 'hours together on the Ridge,' and people are good at adding two and two and getting six or seven."

Megan said quietly, "Where were you, Father?"



"Excuse me, sub—but could I talk to you—fo' a few minutes?"

He sat very still for a moment, his eyes clinging to hers, and she thought he scarcely seemed to breathe. And then he said casually, "I went for a walk."

And as proof that he had had his say on the subject and no intention of speaking again, he got up and left the room.

She couldn't believe that her father had killed Alicia Stevenson. It was an incredible thought; but he had been out of the house, and he was very anxious that no one should know about that. And she thought of herself and Tom Fallon, on the Ridge.

And then she remembered his face tonight and the tone of his voice when that little word "darling" had slipped out—the look in his eyes, naked and poignant and unashamed, the warmth and tenderness in his shaking voice that had been like a shining garment wrapped about her chilled body.

"Oh, no—no—I won't have it like that! I won't be in love with him—I won't!" she wailed, deep in her frightened, stricken mind. But her heart went relentlessly on, "You can't help it! You can't stop it. You didn't ask for it—but you can never deny it! He knows it, too—he feels as you do—you saw it in his eyes, heard it in his voice tonight. You love him and he loves you—and he has a wife who has a greater claim on him than if there were children. Your love can never, never mean anything except heartbreak and self-denial! You know that—but you can't stop loving him! Any more than you can stop breathing!"

The inquest was held the following afternoon in the rickety, nondescript little frame building where the Draft Board met, and it seemed that, except for the few bedridden in the town, everybody was there.

Everybody, that is, except Megan and her father. For contrary to Jim's uneasy fear, neither he nor Megan had been called to appear. Little Betty Hendrix, Bill Logan, Mrs. Stuart, and a few of the others who had been first on the scene had been called. Megan did not quite know whether to be more relieved, or more frightened that neither she nor her father had received orders to appear. But she had firmly declined Mrs. Stuart's hearty invitation that she go, anyway.

Megan made herself keep busy throughout a day that seemed age-long. When Annie put midday dinner beside Megan and asked, a faint uneasiness in her voice, "Miss Meggie, is Mist' Larry comin' tomorrow night?"

"I suppose so, Annie," Megan answered, and quivered a little inside at the thought of facing Laurence

with the thing that was in her heart; the thing that had been there—who could say how long?—but whose presence she had not discovered until under the shock of Alicia's death.

"I like to talk to him, Miss Meggie—of yo' think he ain' comin' anyhow, how 'bout yo' calling him up and askin' him to? So I could talk to him?" Annie was grave-eyed and portentous.

Megan, jerked out of her unhappy abstraction by Annie's tone, looked up at her curiously.

"Why, Annie, what's wrong? Why do you want to talk to Mr. Larry?" she asked, puzzled.

Annie drew herself up a little and there was a gentle, yet implacable dignity about her as she said firmly, "It's a private matter, Miss Meggie—but it's powerful important. Yo' call him fo' me?"

"Yes, of course, Annie," Megan answered and Annie thanked her and went out of the room, padding softly in the heeless felt slippers that she wore to "ease" her feet.

But Megan did not have to call Laurence, for at about four o'clock he came down the road and turned in at the gate grinning at her warmly and happily.

"I came over with the coroner and some of the county officers," he told her cheerfully, dropping down on the steps at her feet and baring his head to the soft wind. "Pleasant Grove's certainly getting her name in the papers. There was a newspaper correspondent for one of the Atlanta papers at the inquest."

Megan asked, after a moment, "What—what did the inquest find—"

"Death by means of a sharp instrument at the hands of a party or parties unknown," answered Laurence, looking up at her white, drawn face with surprise. "Oh look here, darling, I had no idea you were such a close friend of hers."

"I—wasn't, really," admitted Megan. "But—I knew her and—it's been a shock—"

"Of course," said Larry gently. He took her hand in his and held it closely. "We won't talk about it—"

"Yes!" said Megan so sharply that Laurence turned surprised eyes upon her. Megan managed a faint smile and said, "I—I really want to know—whatever they could learn—"

"Well, it wasn't much," said Laurence. "No trace of the weapon, a knife or a dagger of some sort. No trace of robbery or anything of that kind. The girl at the bank said she had cashed her usual monthly income check for fifty dollars, a few days ago, and her purse was found with more than thirty dollars in it. They feel sure that if she had surprised a burglar at work, he would not have left the purse. They believe that she was killed by someone she knew—or at least, someone she was not afraid of. There were no signs of a struggle in the place."

Megan sat very still, her hands locked tightly in her lap.

Killed by someone she knew! Someone she was not afraid of!

"There was one sensation," said Laurence after a moment, not looking at Megan. His eyes were on the garden, where, despite the fact that it was almost Christmas, a few late zinnias and marigolds were still in bloom and the chrysanthemums were great shaggy things of glowing beauty. "That was when the telegram from her husband arrived—"

"Her—husband?" she repeated incredulously.

Laurence nodded. "That seemed as much of a shock to everybody there as it is to you," he told her. "But it seems that when the detectives were going through her papers yesterday they found that she had a husband and that he was the one who was sending her fifty dollars a month. They wired him and the answer was brought to the inquest this afternoon. The husband is somewhere in the west, but he's flying east to claim the body. Should be here tomorrow or next day, they thought."

"But she was a widow!" Megan protested, dazedly.

"Apparently not," said Laurence, looking up as Annie appeared behind the screen door that led into the hall. "Hello, Annie—how about putting another plate on the table and letting me stay for supper?"

"Yessuh, Mist' Larry—us sho' be glad to," she assured him, beaming, and then asked uneasily, "'Scuse me, sub—but could I talk to yo'—fo' a few minutes?"

Laurence looked surprised, but got to his feet.

"Of course, Annie—don't tell me you want to divorce Amos, after all these years!" he laughed, excusing himself to Megan as he moved towards the screen door which Annie held open for him.

"I ain't suah, Mist' Larry, dat I ain't gwine git rid o' dat shifless, no-count nigger, sho' nuff!" she assured him darkly as she led the way to the kitchen.

Megan got up from the chair where she had been sitting for more than an hour. In the late afternoon, the sunlight had been warm and pleasant here, but with the coming of dusk, a chill little wind got up and tiptoed through the trees, and she went into the living room, where she built up the fire, making it brisk and cheerful.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

## IMPROVED UNIFORM INTERNATIONAL SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON

By HAROLD L. LUNDQUIST, D. D. Of The Moody Bible Institute of Chicago. Released by Western Newspaper Union.

### Lesson for September 22

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#### JESUS AND THE LAW OF THE STRANGER

LESSON TEXT—Exodus 22:21-23; Deuteronomy 24:14, 15; Matthew 25:34-41.

MEMORY SELECTION—The King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.—Matthew 25:40.

There is as much need today for the words of counsel and admonition regarding strangers which we find in our lesson, as there was in the days of Moses, for there seems to be an almost complete breakdown of neighborliness both between nations and individuals.

I. The Law Required Neighborliness (Exod. 22:21-23; Deut. 24:14, 15).

Our heavenly Father as revealed to us in his Word is a Father indeed, one greatly concerned about his many children; but especially does he care for those who are weak and needy.

The laws of ancient Israel made provision for the feeding of those who had no fields. The corners of the field were left uncut at harvest-time, some of the grapes were to be left on the vine, etc., so that the poor could enjoy the sense of self-respect as they picked for themselves what God had provided (see Lev. 19:9, 10; 23:22; Deut. 24:19-21, and other passages).

The poor man who found work was to receive his pay when needed. For the one who hired him to do otherwise was to bring upon himself the judgment of God. He listens to the cry of the hungry worker and his family (Deut. 24:15).

Strangers were in a peculiar way subject to the possibility of extortion. They are even today the easy mark of the one who lives by his wits, the "confidence" man and sneak thief.

If any such person reads these notes let me warn him solemnly to keep his tricky hands off the stranger, for God is watching and will hear their cry (Exod. 22:23).

The same is true of widows and orphans. God is their keeper and their defender.

Someone may say that all this is Old Testament in its background and principle. What about the follower of Christ in our day? The answer is that

II. Christ Expects Neighborliness (Matt. 25:34-41).

This is a prophetic picture of a great judgment scene. It is not, as many suppose, the same as the judgment of the Great White Throne of Revelation 20.

The scene here is not in heaven, but upon the earth. It is not individuals who are being judged, but the nations of the earth. They are not being judged regarding personal salvation, but for their treatment of Christ's brethren.

Who are his brethren? First we think of his brethren, after the flesh, the people of the Jewish race. Scripture reveals again and again that God is watching over his chosen people, even though they are now scattered in judgment for their unbelief. He will not hold any guiltless who harm his people (Gen. 12:1-3).

The word "brethren" is also used in such a passage as Matthew 12:46-50 to include all who do the will of God. That suggests a broader application of these words.

Our attitude toward God expresses itself in our attitude toward our fellow man. That which we do toward those about us is not a matter of indifference, but is the basis for God's judgment of our lives. Each of us must answer for the deeds done in the flesh whether they be good or evil. That is true even of the believer (II Cor. 5:10), whose salvation has already been determined by his faith in Christ.

Here in our lesson, however, the failure to do that which shows forth God's law of love is made the ground of eternal judgment. This is not because an act of kindness itself can be regarded as the ground of division, but because the failure to give it or do it reflects an attitude of heart toward our God and his Christ which is in reality a rejection of his way of salvation.

Judgment is thus a revelation of the attitude of the heart, which marks a man or woman as being either saved or lost. It may be possible to so belud the thinking of our friends and neighbors that we may go through life looking something like a Christian, but when Christ judges, it will all be revealed.

Notice the importance of a proper attitude toward those who need our kindness and help. All too often the only concern of men and women is to look out for "number one" and let the rest of the world shift for itself.

Observe also that the Lord identifies himself with his brethren—what is done to and for them is counted as done to and for him. Compare the experience of Samuel (I Sam. 8:7) and of Paul (Acts 9:5). Touch God's people and you touch him. Fall them and you fall him. Serve them and you serve him.

## The Home Town Reporter in WASHINGTON

By Walter Sheod  
WNU Correspondent

WNU Washington Bureau, 1616 Eye St., N. W.

### Federal Funds Will Aid Building of Hospitals

IF YOU live in one of the more than 1,000 counties in the nation in which there is no hospital, or where there is no adequate hospital, there is a chance, if you and your fellow citizens get together on the proposition, to get a new hospital at reduced rates—with the federal government paying a third of the cost.

For President Truman has signed the Hill-Burton bill, the national hospital construction act which sets up a potential total of \$1,125,000,000 for a five-year hospital construction program. But do not get excited and rush down here to Washington in the belief that one of these hospitals can be picked out of a hat.

### No Funds Available Now

Only 3 million dollars of this fund, of which the government's share is 375 million dollars at the rate of 75 million dollars a year for five years, has been made available by the 79th congress. This congress was a cautious congress. It considered, and probably rightly, that before any of this money should be made available, surveys should be made to determine how many governmental units could or would put up the necessary two-thirds cash to build a hospital. This survey, they opined, would take no more than 3 million dollars. So that much money is available for use of the local units of government. It will be up to the 80th congress, which convenes January 3 of next year, to put up the money called for in the new law. So it will be some time next year before the money is made available. Probably building construction costs are too high now, anyway.

Sponsors for local hospitals, under the bill, may be states, cities, counties, towns or other public governmental agencies, or private non-profit hospitals. States will share in the federal grants in aid on the basis of their needs, which will be ascertained through the ratio their per capita income bears to the national average. Other factors determining the amount apportioned to each state will be population and value of products.

### May Not Benefit Country

So whether this will favor those rural counties where hospitals are so badly needed, or whether it will work to the advantage of the more populous urban communities will depend largely upon responsibility placed in the hands of a non-governmental advisory council. This council is different, however. Most public health services such as nursing, cancer, tuberculosis and other activities are presided over by an advisory council, but they are advisory only. The council in the hospital act has the veto power, not only over some actions of the surgeon-general, who will administer the law, but likely over some state action. President Truman doesn't like this feature of the act and said so when he signed it.

At any rate, in counties where there is need and desire for a hospital, the first action is to determine how much money the local community can raise. A showing that the hospital can be maintained after construction is also necessary. When this information is forthcoming, the next step is to go to your state health office and ask for inclusion in the state program—and the state, if it approves, then makes the application and showing to the surgeon-general of the Public Health Service.

### Dr. Hoge Will Rule

Actual administration in the surgeon-general's office will be in the hands of Dr. Vane Hoge, who has been with the Public Health Service for 18 years. Dr. Hoge is a native of Waynesburg, Pa., and a graduate of Jefferson Medical school in Philadelphia.

Dr. Hoge has had several years experience in clinical work and in research, and for 10 years has specialized in hospital administration, and so has an excellent background as administrator of the new act. While his office expects much increased activity in hospital construction as a result of the federal grant of \$1 for \$2 of local money, he declared that there was no basis for estimate on the number of new hospitals or additions which may be constructed as a result.

He advised local communities not to wait for the state health agency to come around to visit governmental units wanting a new hospital but urged them to get busy themselves, determine their needs, their potential power to raise the necessary amount for construction and maintenance, and then to go to the state agency themselves.

While President Truman declared that the construction of hospitals and related facilities, such as health centers, was excellent, he said it was only the first step in the five-point national health program.

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