



Heaven Begins Now

a Serialization of

All The Way To Heaven

by Elizabeth Sherrill

My *pension* in Geneva was a large third-floor apartment on *rue* Charles Bonnet, home to eight female students from five nations. The landlady, Madame Brulhart, was a tiny, excitable woman who called us "mes enfants" and rapped briskly on the bathroom door if the tub water ran too long.



The Last Sunny Day

John's *pension* was half a mile away on *rue* Calvin. We'd been told that Geneva in the fall would be rainy, but the sun was out when he parked his bicycle outside Mme. Brulhart's one Tuesday morning shortly after university classes began.

"This may be the last sunny day," he said. "We can make up European History, but we might not have another chance to bike out and meet the country people."

We missed a lot of European History that September, as one cloudless day followed another, but we got to know Alpine villages, ruined castles, and each other. "It's the last sunny day!" John would call up to my window as he balanced his bike at the curb. And we would set out, with a baguette of bread, a wedge of Gruyere cheese, and a pad of paper. We talked to dairymen and pig farmers, cheese makers and wood-carvers. I was exploring a new country, a new culture -- and for me something even newer. I was discovering what it was to wake in the morning and fall asleep at night with a single person on my mind.

Years later, reading about Christ-centered lives, I understood how someone could "pray without ceasing." It wasn't a question of effort. They were in love; they couldn't help themselves.

It was on one of our outings toward the end of September, as we gathered up the leftovers of our picnic, that John, looking thoughtful, said, "We really should get married *before* Christmas."

I stopped packing my bike basket and stared at him. Marriage had never even been mentioned. Certainly I'd never told him about that strange "knowing" on the *Queen Elizabeth*.

"There's a three-week break then," John went on, as though the matter was long decided. "We could go down to Italy, write about how things have changed since the war. But we'd need to be married."

It was true; in the Europe of 1947, "decent" single women did not travel with male companions. The story idea --

a soldier revisiting battle scenes -- was a good one too. Ideas bubbled up from both of us. The fact that we would marry was as obvious, now that it had been said, as useless to debate, as the snowcapped Alps soaring above us. And as hard to accomplish, we were to learn, as to climb those distant peaks.

FORGOTTEN LESSON

I learned something that day about the ideas we reject offhand. The prospect that had seemed so forbidding in theory, marriage-in-the-abstract, vanished like the phantom it was in the face of a specific relationship. There is no marriage-in-general, only marriages, each different. Conflicts there would certainly be in ours, as in every close relationship, but not the home versus career tension I'd imagined.

Having learned this about marriage, how was it that I held on so long to another stereotype, Christians-in-general? *They*, I believed, were all the same. Why was I so slow to grasp that there are no "Christians-in-the-abstract," only the specific relationship of each believer to Jesus.

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