

NO EASY PATHWAY

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Dedication

To all young people who find themselves in less-than-ideal scenarios during courtship. May God give you confidence to step out in faith on a path that is not always easy.

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Anchored to the Infinite

The builder who first bridged Niagara's gorge,
Before he swung his cable, shore to shore,
Sent out across the gulf his venturing kite
Bearing a slender cord for unseen hands
To grasp upon the farther cliff and draw
A greater cord and then a greater yet;
Till at last across the chasm swung
The cable—then the mighty bridge in air!
So may we send our little timid thought
Across the void, out to God's reaching hands—
Send out our love and faith to thread the deep—
Thought after thought until the little cord
Has greatened to a chain no chance can break,
And we are anchored to the Infinite!

Edwin Markham, 1852-1940

AUTHOR'S NOTE

Dear readers,

Have you ever, like me, looked at happy older couples and somewhat wistfully imagined that their married life just somehow fell into place?

This book is not a manual of courtship dos and don'ts. It is not a fairy tale. Neither is it a historical account.

This is simply one girl's journey, in which the main characters have been fictionalized and many details imagined.

I pray that this story could be one more strand in your cord of faith that anchors you to the Infinite.

Sandra Strite

PRELUDE

February 1981

With slow measured steps, Michael Anderson's short legs carried him down the path from the greenhouse where he was employed, to the big brick house where supper was waiting at his boss's invitation. He paused and gazed up at the tall snow-covered pines bordering the woods.

Oh, Lord, his lonely heart cried, You know my desire for a companion. In Your vast world of people, would You have one godly woman suitable to be my wife?

In the hush of twilight, the picture of a sincere, godly young woman seemed to stand before him with startling clarity. Not that he hadn't thought of Margaret before. He had long appreciated her as one of the more spiritually minded girls he knew, friendly and always interested in others. But never before had he felt so sure that Margaret Kauffman was God's plan for him. In awe, he paused for several moments.

An unusual spring hastened his steps as he let himself into Daniel Kauffman's familiar living room. Daniel's wife Anne was pulling a pan of fragrant apple dumplings from the oven. Daniel's younger sister Margaret was filling the water glasses at the dining room table.

Prelude

With an effort, Michael turned his attention to the two little boys playing on the living room floor. He dropped to the floor and pretended to join their play. He had never had little brothers, and he had found it awkward at first to relate to Daniel's sons. But with pleasure, he realized that he was learning to enjoy them.

With Margaret in such close proximity, Michael didn't feel like talking at the supper table. When he and Daniel retired to the living room, he picked up a magazine and browsed through it. Before long, Anne joined them, with baby Patrick dressed in his pajamas. From the whoops and squeals coming from outside, Michael concluded that Margaret had taken her niece and nephews outside for some fun in the snow. He glanced at Daniel, then at Anne, who was rocking her now-sleeping baby. Should he tell them what was on his mind? He and Daniel could talk about almost anything, but somehow, this subject was different. He turned several pages of his magazine.

Anne broke the silence with a little teasing amusement in her voice. "I don't think you're reading that magazine, Michael."

Michael returned her smile with a sheepish grin. Daniel let his paper fall to his lap and focused on him. "What's on your mind, Michael?"

Michael toyed with the corner of a page and cleared his throat. "Well," he began, "sometimes I wonder what God has in mind for me as far as a . . . well, as far as a wife. I don't feel like I'm ready to take that kind of step just yet," he hastened to add, "but—"

Daniel nodded. "I guessed as much." At Michael's surprised look, he continued, "Don't forget, Michael, it wasn't so long ago that I was a young fellow in your shoes."

Michael thought of his rendezvous with God on the path through the woods just an hour before. Wasn't that God's answer? It had come so clearly; how could he doubt it? He felt an urge to share it with Daniel and Anne. But, no, that would never do. Not yet. Not with half a dozen female coworkers, including Margaret, coming and going in the greenhouse. Sometimes their tongues worked overtime. No, he knew better than to say anything to Daniel about this. He would use his common sense. But what was Daniel saying?

"—would encourage you to give yourself more time to stabilize before you begin a courtship. Like you said, you're still working through things yourself. A tremendous responsibility comes with seeking a wife."

Michael nodded. The laundry room door burst open, bringing in an excited flurry of little voices. Michael stood to his feet.

"We pray for you," Anne said as he pulled on his jacket. "Just remember, it won't hurt to give yourself plenty of time." Then, almost as an afterthought, she added, "Maybe ten years."

Michael's hand dropped from the doorknob. He couldn't have been more surprised if Anne had slapped him! Seven-year-old Dannie straggled into the living room with little Peter on his heels. The words died on Michael's lips, and he turned abruptly to go.

"Good night!" Daniel and Anne called after him. His good night was muffled in the bang of the door as he stepped into the night.

Ten years, ten years, ten years. The chant in his head kept time with his feet as he marched through the snow. *I agree I need more time before I'm ready for a step like this. Maybe more time than I think. But—ten years! What is Anne thinking?*

Prelude

The next morning at the greenhouse door, Michael's heart warmed a little as he remembered what God had shown him the evening before. It had been dampened badly by Anne's parting words, but then, maybe Anne had been wrong.

His heart warmed even more as Margaret looked up from her row of tomatoes and greeted him pleasantly. With calculated cautiousness, he returned the greeting and went to find his gloves. He was surprised at his sudden shyness. What was wrong with him? Usually, he would have paused to chat a bit, but somehow, this morning, he couldn't bring himself to speak.

Margaret's words stopped him. "You shared an apartment with David Becker for a while, didn't you?"

Michael nodded as he turned to face her.

With characteristic frankness, she continued, "Maybe you can tell me more about him. I got a letter from him a few days ago, and I hardly know him."

A deep chill penetrated the length of Michael's spine. How was he supposed to handle this? He studied his gloved hands. It wouldn't be fair to discourage the girl, but he couldn't encourage her, either.

Margaret was waiting. He had to say something. "Well," he forced himself to say, "I don't feel like I'm really a very good one to ask." He paused. "You should probably seek advice from someone older."

In a daze, he found his way to the farthest part of the greenhouse. His fingers grasped a sucker that was much too large and pinched it off almost furiously. *God, I don't understand!*

The rejection and loneliness of his past pressed upon him. He thought of his high school sweetheart. When he became a Christian,

he had told her they couldn't continue their relationship unless she was willing to follow him. He had made it clear that he wasn't willing to risk his heavenly relationship for an earthly one. That had ended their friendship. He had not regretted that decision. Yes, that was still his commitment.

But would God snatch Margaret away just after he had felt so sure that she was part of God's plan for him? Or wouldn't He? Now that God had shown him the prospect of a Christian wife, what was he to make of Margaret's unexpected announcement? Could he trust his own perception of God's will that he had felt in the darkness last evening?

Faithfully the Spirit brought to his mind the promise he had clung to since his conversion. "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you."¹ Michael made an effort to square his shoulders. It was God's promise still. His desire for companionship was great, but it would not be his first priority.

¹Matthew 6:33

Part One
David

CHAPTERS 1-9
1980-1982

CHAPTER 1

April 1980

Margaret made a quick survey of the backyard below, spreading out into the darkening forest. The old attic window creaked as she shoved it as far open as it could stretch. Then, with a few quick moves she wiggled her small frame out onto the gently sloping roof. She took a long, deep breath of the crisp spring air and grinned. Maybe she deserved the teasing her big sisters sometimes gave her for being unladylike. Well, on this last night of being a teenager, she needed to sit on the roof by herself and think.

Shivering a little, she drew her knees up to her chin and wrapped her robe more closely around her legs. Something about last things scared her. Now that she was about to turn twenty, she could never go back to her teen years when her father had still been alive—when the family had all been together at the church her parents had attended since their marriage.

She had been barely into her teens when, one by one, her older brothers had left for the newer conservative Mennonite church at