

Fashioned by Heaven's Hand

Geraldine was made for grandeur. Her elegant frame demanded gowns of finest silks and earth's rarest jewels. Hair of harvest gold, spun in braids about her graceful face, accented the steel-cold blue of her eyes. Sweet and strong, her voice like orchestral strings, communicated warmth and grace to all who heard. Whenever Geraldine entered the shelter, eyes turned toward her. There was healing as she moved quietly from person to person. A gentle touch, the warmth of her smile, and compassionate words softened the hard surface of pained faces. Yes, Geraldine belonged in a palace.

But Geraldine did not, nor did she wear the gowns and jewels of such a position. The beauty of the elegant lass had a quality and depth cultivated not by the primping of a palace but from the demands of harsh realities fashioned by Heaven's hand.

The world she entered was entrenched in winter's cold. Young and alone in a rugged homeless shelter, her mother struggled to push her from the warmth of her body to the brutal world about her. It was long and hard, and the woman screamed her torment. Two sisters, one named Faith and the other Grace, ministered to the woman, wiping her brow, speaking words of comfort, and holding her throughout the long night. Geraldine's life began in the ice of winter's cold while the warmth of eternity enveloped her mother.

Faith and Grace knew poverty. It stained every dogged step of their lives. They learned the value of generosity, for they had experienced it repeatedly. Fear often beleaguered them. They found courage broke through its dark walls. Clouds of hopelessness and despair often covered them with weariness. Songs of joy and gratitude to the God of Heaven chased those clouds far away. Clothed thus, they were able not only to nourish the tender Geraldine, but many like her, to bring joy out of sorrow, peace from pain, and laughter instead of tears.

Geraldine learned the secrets hidden in the book that Faith and Grace wore thin through use. It had no cover. Its pages were ripped and worn. Still the words were deeply engraved into their existence. She understood how food came because of Faith's night on her knees. At the tender age of five years, she saw lack while the needy came day after day for the sparse scraps available. Some days the soup held little but water with a few beans.

The imprint on her mind was there: Faith, kneeling on the bare floor in the small back room, shedding tears with loud petitions reminded the Giver of life of what He had promised. Morning came; the large iron kettle, filled with water sat on the black wood stove. The two sisters thanked God for water. A neighbour brought in a loaf of bread. With gratitude, Grace passed it to those who entered. That afternoon, the truck full of perishable goods broke down in front of the shelter.

Then, at sixteen, her heart had been broken. She met Jacob at school and was enchanted. His words were full of admiration and adventure. It was exciting! Then she overheard him talking to his friends, vile things about her. The disappointments and despair reminded her of things that earth's trifles had crowded out. From deep inside, a memory arose. She had treated the lonely child Faith and Grace brought home unkindly. Grace, rather than scolding, got down on the floor and played dolls.

"I have loved you with an everlasting love." It came as warm, refreshing rain. The verse took on flesh when Grace's calloused hand wiped the tears from her eyes. Faith and Grace reached with love's open arms always and forever reaching.

In it all, Geraldine learned the warmth of sunshine, the softness of a kitten, and the beauty of mountains and meadows. She grew beyond their world to experience the beauty of life, never forgetting the life she received nor the Giver of that life. There were others she met along the way, never embraced by Faith or Grace, lonely and afraid, and she dealt with them kindly.

Geraldine walked tall with a confidence she had learned from two humble servants. She hid the words of the treasured book in her own bearing. For Geraldine, carried the value of the inner being. It spread into all she became and radiated from each action. A beauty that never fades, a joy that radiates brighter until entering the grand throne room of the King of Kings, a Palace and a Kingdom far greater than any of this realm.