

Sydney smiled at us with glimmering eyes and drew a deep breath in her pearls of wisdom way and sighed. "So," she began, "what are the desires of your heart?"

I looked at the others as their eyes raced around to see who would speak first. She coaxed us for several seconds, urging us to confess our dreams to each other. I took what she said as a challenge. I have a habit of doing that so it wasn't surprising to anyone when I stood up and walked over to a shelf laden with new books just aching to have their spines broken and dust jackets torn away. "I want to write one of these and see my name on the cover." I swallowed hard as my mother's eyes rolled in her head. Defiantly I continued, "I want to write a book." Jenna seemed indifferent, and Sydney nodded her head. "A novel, I have always wanted to write a novel."

Sydney smiled. "I'm sure with all your experiences you could come up with a great novel."

"She's not going to do it," my mother countered. "She's been starting her novel for years, and she never gets past the first chapter. She has dozens of first chapters." One of the things I least like about my mother is that ever since she became a Christian she believes in telling the truth, no matter what.

"Maybe that's because I never get any support," I countered with one eyebrow lifted. I know what I looked like because my mother returned the look. "I studied Creative Writing in college. I wrote some short stories and poetry."

"Raquel even had one of her poems published in the New Yorker," Mom quickly changed from critic to proud parent. She picked up her purse and dug out her wallet as I returned to my seat. She opened her billfold and pulled out an ancient magazine clipping of my one and only publishing credit. It was a poetry competition that I entered. I didn't win any money, but I got an honorable mention along with thirty some other poets. Mom carefully straightened out the paper and read it. "Clouds shout to the sun in golden glows..." Did I mention I wrote it when I was eleven?

"That's beautiful," Jenna said at the end of my mother's alliteration of my work.

"It's okay," I shrugged. "I really do want to use my education for more than correctly spelling when I write out the checks for our bills."

"Raqui, what do you think it would take to finish a novel?" Sydney asked.

"I don't know. I think I just want to write one. I'd need to pray about a method and a story idea."

"Amen," Sydney agreed.

"Oh, I get it," Mom chimed. "You're saying that if we delight in the Lord then He'll give us the desires of our hearts. Raqui ought to look to the Lord for inspiration instead of her education or abilities."

"Yes, that's one way of looking at it," Sydney nodded. "But more importantly, I believe that God gives us the dream in the first place, what we do with it is up to us."

"I know what my dream is," Mom said softly.

"Mom's dream is to lead worship," I stated.

Sydney took her hand. She was even maternal with my mother. "Is that your dream, Laura?"

"It's silly, huh?"

"Sing something," I ordered.

"You can; it's not physically impossible. Just open your mouth and belt it out."

"I'm not like you," Mom countered.

"But if it's your dream," Jenna joined in the cause.

"It's not her voice, it's her nerve. Did you know that for five years she supported us by singing in clubs?" I wished I had a clipping to pull out of my purse. I was really proud of my mother's short-lived musical career. It took us from the camper shell to a trailer park. For us it was a major move.

"Laura, you never told us that," Jenna's eyes widened.

"It was before my incarceration."

"She was good," I added.

My mother lowered her eyes.

Sydney's smile erupted. "This is wonderful! We are blessed with gifts. Maybe God intends for you to sing before thousands, and you're not trusting."

"My dream is to worship, not do Broadway," Mom joked sipping her hot drink.

"That would be my dream," Jenna didn't even lift her eyes to meet us. "I've always wanted to see my name up in lights. I know it's not the most Christian dream, but I want to be..."

"A star?" I asked.

"Yes, well, no, I'd just like to be in a play, maybe in Community Theater."

"That's got to be the most attainable of all our dreams," I encouraged her. "You could walk in the door at the theater and ask to audition for something."

She shook her head. "It doesn't work that way. You have to take tickets for a production before they'll ever let up on stage. You have to pay dues." She sipped her coffee. "Besides, what would Billy say? I have the kids, and we just bought the new house."

"Billy would think it's great for you to have something to do with your time. He's always telling Jack that all you do is sit around and complain about being bored." Did I mention I have a way of putting my foot in my mouth? "I mean, not complain, exactly..."

Jenna waved me off. "It's just a dream."

"But it could be God's plan for you," Sydney interjected. "That's the point. If you want it, you really want to get out of your rut, then you have to go for it. Life is too short to have regrets."

"But what if we fail?" Jenna asked. "How embarrassing it would be to go after something and make a fool of myself."

"How sad to never have tried," Sydney countered taking Jenna's hand.