

The Sweetness of Certain Things

J. Laurence Day



Even now, sometimes, he looks up from what he is doing and stares, unseeing, because some sound, some word, sometimes nothing at all, has brought her back. Her name whispers through his mind, and there is a break in the rhythm of his heartbeat. The thought may come while he is washing the car, or feeding his grandson, or sitting in church. It is there for an instant, then gone. Not dismissed, just not retained. But in that instant, there is gladness in knowing, a hoping that she is all right.

A bitterly cold wind swirled the papers that littered the Montevideo curb where an *onda* stood, its motor rumbling in the near-midnight air. Elder Ted Carlton automatically held his hat on his head as the gust blew past him.

"Mama mia," said Elder Jones. "Winter has come. Don't you wish you were flying to Paraguay instead of going to Tupambay on this goosey bus?"

"At least I'm going north," Carlton replied. "I could've been sent to Paysandu. Elder Druby told me he about died of the cold last winter."

He didn't feel as cheerful as he sounded. After three months in Montevideo, he welcomed a chance to get back to the interior. But Tupambay! It hadn't had a baptism for more than a year.

The door of the bus opened and people began moving toward it. Elder Carlton picked up his overloaded briefcase and held out his right hand to Elder Jones.

"Thanks for seeing me off, Elder. Maybe we'll see each other again soon."

"Not in Tupambay, if I can help it. I'm hoping for Lima. President is sending four missionaries to open Peru soon."

"Well, good luck," said Carlton. Then he hefted his briefcase aboard and looked for his assigned seat. He found it, relieved that he wasn't sitting beside the woman with the whimpering baby who had preceded him aboard.

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That thought made him wince. He should have a more Christlike attitude. Especially now that he was a senior companion.

The motor roared. The driver steered the bus into the sparse traffic. Carlton stared at the leafless trees set in squares of dirt in the sidewalks. "The Fourth of July in Tupumbay," he thought. Then he went to sleep.

It was after nine the next morning when the *onda* pulled into Tupumbay, the roar reverberating against the whitewashed walls. Carlton got off, claimed his suitcase, and started walking.

He was halfway across the cobblestone plaza before he remembered he didn't know where he was going.

The little boys sitting near an ornately tiled fountain in the center of the plaza ran toward him.

"¡Che! Che nene. Vení."

"¿Lustre?"

"No gracias. Hoy no." Carlton didn't want a shoeshine. Especially not on Sunday. On the other hand, the boy was probably hungry. He was ragged and pinched looking.

"No, I don't want a shoeshine, but you can help carry my briefcase a ways if you want. I'll give you fifty centavos. I'm going to Calle Acevedo Diaz 451 — do you know the way?"

"Sí," said the boy. "It's not far."

As they walked, Carlton asked the youngster about Tupumbay. Carlton's Spanish was fluent, his accent relatively good. His first senior had come from a Texas border town — lazy but he spoke great Spanish.

Acevedo Diaz Street was about four blocks from the plaza. The branch was in a block of contiguous houses whose front doors opened onto the sidewalk. The only distinguishing mark was a brass plaque next to the door: *Iglesia de Jesucristo de los Santos de los Ultimos Dias*.

Carlton gave the boy sixty centavos and watched him scoot down the street, giving little skips of excitement every few steps. From inside came the sounds of an ancient pedal organ laboring through the opening of "Welcome, Welcome, Sabbath Morning."

Carlton left his suitcase, briefcase, and hat in the hall and, wearing his overcoat buttoned up, entered the unheated room. Remodeling had turned the living room and dining room of the house into a small chapel with room for a dozen wooden benches, the organ, and a moveable lectern. A picture of President McKay hung on a side wall, with a picture of Christ on the front wall above the two missionaries who sat facing the congregation. The ten people on the benches in front of Carlton had their coats buttoned up. Carlton sat down on the last bench. The cold, gray weather, the tiny branch with its huddled members, the knowledge that he would be in Tupumbay for months and in Uruguay for another year and a half seemed unbearable. He wanted to go home — now. Carlton shivered involuntarily, then shook his head and tried to concentrate on the meeting.

After opening exercises he introduced himself to the members and the two junior companions who had been nervously conducting the meeting. The

lesson was given by a gray-haired woman, apparently one of the few stalwarts. When Sunday School was over, Carlton carried his stuff upstairs to the two large rooms where the missionaries lived. There were two single cots in each room, two writing tables, and two small closets. One room had a door that opened onto a small balcony overlooking the street. The rooms looked cluttered and untidy.

"I'm glad you're here, Elder," said Elder John Thompson, a tall freckle-faced farmboy from Ririe, Idaho. "That was scary trying to conduct Sunday School with *my* Spanish."

"You must be the senior?"

"I got in the mission a month before Elder Ballentine, but his Spanish is better than mine. I tried to get him to conduct, but he wouldn't."

"When is Elder Spencer coming in?" asked Ballentine, who had just come up the stairs. Elder Clifford Spencer, the other new senior, would be his companion and Tupambay's new branch president.

"Couple of days," said Carlton. "He's coming down from Paraguay and apparently had some last-minute things to do."

"Man, I'd like to go to Paraguay," said Thompson.

"So would I," said Ballentine.

"Well, you may get the chance. Meantime, what say we clean up?" asked Carlton. "Looks like the place has been ransacked." He grinned to soften the criticism.

"Crud, Elder," Thompson said. "This *is* cleaned up. You should have seen it before."

"I take it Elder Trout didn't run a very tight ship." Elder James Trout, the former branch president, had been transferred to Melo on the other side of the country. He was no longer a branch president.

"You could say that. You could also say he didn't run the ship at all. And Elder Brech was on his trunk the whole last month he was here."

"Well, let's turn that around. We can make this place really hum," Carlton said.

"I hope so," said Thompson.

"Let's start by cleaning up and making it look like the Lord's representatives lived here." Carlton knew he had laid that one on too heavy, but he let it go.

Elder Ballentine said he didn't think house cleaning was a proper Sabbath activity, but he cooperated. While they were working, someone knocked on the front door. Elder Thompson went downstairs, then came back up. "It was Nena. Laura wanted to borrow half a kilo of sugar."

"Who is Nena? And Laura?" asked Carlton.

"Laura Castillo. Her dad owns this building. The Church rents it from him. Laura and her husband, Cesar, live next door. They've got two little girls. Laura sends over cookies and cakes and stuff all the time. She's great. Nena is her maid, about fourteen."

"Are they members?"

"No."

“Do you call her Laura all the time?”

“Sure. Everyone does.”

“Missionaries are supposed to call a married woman *senora*, and an unmarried one *senorita*, unless she’s a member, in which case you call her *hermana*.”

“Crud, Elder, you really go by the rules.”

“That’s right. That’s what they’re for.”

“Crud,” Thompson repeated. Then he went downstairs and started picking out tunes with one finger on the old pedal organ.

The next morning, Carlton roused the two juniors out of bed at six for a Spanish lesson and scripture study. The two seemed to take perverse pleasure in mispronouncing the words and mixing up the Spanish syntax. Carlton took his own pleasure in quoting rules whenever he could.

After study, the missionaries ate a breakfast of hot chocolate, hard rolls, and jam. Then Elder Carlton announced a morning of tracting. The two junior companions flatly refused. People were suspicious enough of the gringos when they came two-by-two knocking at their doors. Going with three might even cause some complaints to the police. Carlton gave in on tracting but insisted that they spend the day visiting members.

Carlton met Laura Castillo on his third day in Tupambay. Elder Ballentine had suggested that weekly volleyball games might attract young people so they had started making a court in the backyard. They were packing the red dirt with a heavy roller they had borrowed from Laura’s father when Laura came with a plate of cookies and stood under the bare grape arbor on the patio. Carlton noticed her first. It was cold, and Laura had a bulky, man’s sweater over her own dark red pullover. She was wearing gray wool slacks and had a colored handkerchief tied around her head. She was taller than most Uruguayan women, perhaps five foot seven. She had light brown hair and green eyes, not what you’d expect from a Latin American woman. Her parents were German, immigrants who came before World War II to Tupambay. Johann Vogle, a carpenter, had become a prosperous building contractor.

The two junior companions saw the movement of Carlton’s head, spotted Laura, and immediately trotted to the patio table. Carlton kept pulling the roller but he heard every word.

“Is that the one they sent to replace Jeemy?”

“Uh-huh.”

“He doesn’t seem very friendly,” said Laura. “Or is he just shy?”

“No, he’s *gungho* . . . er, that means . . . well, no, he’s not too friendly.” Elder Ballentine called to Carlton, “Elder, come and meet Senora Castillo.”

Carlton dropped the handle and walked to the patio, wiping his hands on his levis.

“Senora Castillo,” said Thompson, emphasizing *senora*. “This is Elder Ted Carlton, my new companion.”

Laura held out her hand and Carlton shook it firmly. There was a trace of humor in her frank, green eyes. “The basketball team must miss you very much,” she said.

"They did quite well without me, from what I've heard," said Carlton.

"Then you do play basketball? I was making a joke. It's just that you are tall even for a North American."

"Oh, I don't know," said Carlton smiling. "Around home everyone calls me Shortie."

"*Qué cosa!*" said Laura in mock horror.

Just then someone knocked at the front door. Elder Ballentine went to answer it while Carlton and Thompson took two cookies apiece.

Elder Ballentine yelled, "It's Elder Spencer. He hasn't got any money for the taxi." They all walked down the hall and out the front door. The taxi driver was leaning against the door of his ancient right-hand drive Ford with his hands in his pockets. Elder Spencer was standing amidst a pile of suitcases, bags, and boxes.

He grinned at them and shrugged. "I spent all my money getting down here from Paraguay and I'm broke until my check comes in."

"How did you come?" asked Ballentine.

"I flew to Salto and took the *onda*. I'm beat."

Laura met him, then excused herself. Carlton paid the taxi driver and the four of them carried Spencer's stuff upstairs.

Within days of Spencer's arrival, it was clear that he wasn't going to be the dynamic leader the branch needed. He avoided decisions. Whenever he had to make one, he fussed and worried and second-guessed himself. Yet he and Elder Ballentine spent so much time in "branch business" that they did almost no tracting.

Elder Carlton and his companion followed an unrelenting schedule — tracting all day, visiting members, and making callbacks all evening.

In the second weekly package *onda*-delivered from the mission home, there was a special announcement sandwiched between materials for the branch auxiliary programs, new missionary assignments, and mail from home. President Whitney informed the Tupambay elders that Elder Henry D. Moyle of the Council of the Twelve was coming. He was on an extended tour of the missions in South America and would arrive in Tupambay in three weeks. Elder Spencer was to cooperate with the Riochuelo Branch in preparing a conference under the direction of district president Elder Wallace Compton: a reception for Elder Moyle Saturday evening, a program afterward, and two conference sessions on Sunday.

Elder Compton and his companion came from Riochuelo two days later. The following three weeks blurred into planning the reception, printing programs, rehearsing musical numbers and folk dances, making costumes, and arranging publicity.

Then a couple of days before the conference, Carlton found out that the extra dishes somebody's aunt had promised for the reception didn't exist. Within a half hour, the caterer informed Elder Spencer that he had accepted a big wedding for the same day and would not be able to fill the branch's order.

Spencer came home from the caterer's and went straight to his room. He lay on his cot facing the wall and began picking at a place where the paint was peeling.

Carlton got the disastrous news from Elder Ballentine and walked into Spencer's room. "What are you going to do?" he demanded.

Spencer didn't look up. "Well, Elder, I don't know. We'll just have to try and work something out," he said, and went back to picking at the flakes of loose paint.

Carlton stormed from the room and strode downstairs, so enraged he wanted to break something. He walked out onto the sidewalk and slammed the great wooden door, heading rapidly up the sidewalk to the caterer's, forgetting that he didn't know where it was. As he turned the corner, he ran full tilt into someone, grabbed for the stumbling person, and then saw it was Laura Castillo. Electricity ran from his fingers to his armpits and he dropped his hands to his sides.

"Carlton, where were you going in such a hurry? I thought I had been hit by a truck. Is everything all right?" Laura was breathless.

"I'm sorry, senora. I must be more careful. I was walking too fast. I beg your pardon."

"It was nothing." She stared at him. "You are troubled. What is it?"

Carlton felt a flash of disorientation, almost vertigo. He stepped back, but her eyes were steady, unwavering. "We have a very important conference of the Church here two days from now and everything is going wrong."

"What things are going wrong?"

"Well, for one thing, the caterer just canceled our order after he'd accepted it three weeks ago. We'll have nothing to serve at a reception for one of our most important leaders. And the person who promised to provide dishes and cups and things to serve everyone now tells us that they really don't exist."

Laura's eyes glinted. "Perhaps I can help. Who is the caterer?"

"No, senora. I didn't mean to bother you. We'll work something out. Thank you. And I'm sorry I nearly knocked you down." Carlton turned to leave.

"Carlton, you believe in the Bible, don't you?" asked Laura. There was a breath of laughter in her voice.

"Yes, of course."

"The Bible says that we should help our neighbors."

"I know that, but . . ."

"But you need help, and I can help. Don't you think I know how people in this town treat you Mormons? They are supposed to be Christians, these people. Their Christianity doesn't extend beyond the doors of the church. Now tell me who the caterer is."

"Garibaldi, I think his name is."

"I thought so. That snake. But he's the best in town. Leave him to me. Now, about the rest. Why don't you and Johnny come over this evening and we'll talk about it?"

"I really don't think we could impose. . . ."

"Carlton, were you born stubborn? Or is this just something you put on for my benefit?" She *was* laughing but it made him relax.

"You are very kind, senora. Yes, I am stubborn. But I don't think I am stupid. If you can get Garibaldi to renew our order, we will be deeply grateful."

“Why do you call me *senora* when the others have always called me Laura? Jimmy and I used to talk for hours about your country and your American customs. Americans are not a formal people, I believe.”

Carlton felt the muscles in his shoulders tense. Woodenly he said, “I call you *senora* because that is the rule of the mission. We are here to teach the gospel, and we have certain rules to follow. Some don’t always follow them, but I try to. They’re for the good of everyone.”

“Ah rules. And you are not supposed to speak in the familiar. Jimmy told me. But he did it. You know I just can’t say *usted* instead of *tu*. It’s so cold and formal,” said Laura.

Carlton started to say, “But that’s the rule, *senora*.” Instead he said, “I understand how you feel.” Somewhere deep inside him he felt suddenly light.

“Do you have a *novia*?” asked Laura.

“Yes. Yes . . . sort of. We have an understanding, but she is free to go out.”

“How strange you Americans are. Does she write you?”

“Yes. Quite often.”

“Jimmy got a ‘Dear John’ while he was here. He took it very hard. You call it ‘Dear John,’ no?”

“Yes. I may get one too. Tracy is dating regularly. Maybe Tupambay is an unlucky place for missionaries.”

“It will be a lucky place for you. If you get a Dear John it will be because she isn’t the one for you.”

“That’s what they say,” said Carlton. “*Senora*, I must go. I shouldn’t be out here on the street alone. That’s a rule too. You see, I do break the rules.”

“Oh, my. What will happen? Will you have to do penance? Will you have to go to confession?”

Carlton looked closely at Laura. He was pretty sure she was teasing him, but he decided to act as if she were serious.

“No, we have no confessional in our church nor penance either. We confess to God and try to right the wrong and not do it again.”

“Well, that’s better than going to the *cura* for forgiveness, when he’s just a man like any other. Of course, I believe very little of any of it. I like the Bible, but that’s about all.”

“That’s a great start. You probably believe more than you think you do.”

“Perhaps.”

“I must go. Thank you again, *senora*.”

“Will you come tonight to discuss the rest?”

“Elder Spencer and Elder Ballentine will come.”

Carlton had to knock on the door to get back into the branch.

Elder Ballentine was surprised. “Where have you been?”

“I was on my way to the caterer, but I didn’t have the address.”

“Alone?”

“Yes.”

The next morning while the missionaries were cleaning the chapel, a message from the caterer arrived. The things they had ordered would be delivered on schedule. There had been a slight misunderstanding.

Twenty minutes later, a car drove up and the driver unloaded boxes of cups, plates, and silverware. Then a man from a flower shop came by. Some flowers had been ordered. Where would they be used? When he knew, he could send the most appropriate arrangement. Spencer stammered, "We haven't ordered flowers. We won't pay for them." The flowers were already paid for.

About that time, some members arrived to help the elders get ready for the program. Laura dropped by a little while later with Nena and promptly began washing windows. Some of the members were visibly disconcerted, not used to working side by side with people of Laura's social standing.

Laura was dressed in slacks and a soft gray sweater, hardly housecleaning attire. As Elder Carlton came in from the patio, he noticed how beautiful she looked before he could censor it.

"*Que tal*, Carlton," she said.

"*Buenos dias*, senora," said Carlton, "We're deeply grateful for all you have done."

"Oh, I haven't done very much, really. But I must tell you what happened with the caterer. It's delightful." Laura's smile twinkled, gleeful. "I went to his place right after I talked to you and asked him casually about your order. He huffed himself up and said, 'Those gringo *fallutos*. They'll get nothing from me, ever.' And I leaned forward and said very quietly, 'Senor Garibaldi, those gringo *fallutos* are my friends, and I think you are going to have to forget about that order my mother gave you for my sister's coming-out party. I think my mother will have it catered from Riochuelo.' And I started to leave the shop. You should have seen him falling all over himself to keep me inside while he smothered me with promises."

The conference was a great success. The chapel overflowed at both sessions. Elder Moyle was impressed with the reception and the program. When he saw Laura helping with the refreshments, he asked Elder Ballentine how long she had been a member of the Church. When he heard the answer, he stared hard at Elder Ballentine and instructed him to begin teaching her the gospel at once, that bringing Laura and her husband into the Church would do untold good for the branch. He added that it was important to fellowship as well as teach the Castillos.

The evening after the conference, Carlton and Thompson went to visit the Castillos. Cesar wasn't home, and Laura was putting the two little girls to bed.

"What a surprise," she said, "Come in and sit down. We'll chat as soon as I get these two night owls to sleep. Carlton, I can't believe it. You actually came to visit."

"It's not entirely a social call, senora. We wanted to thank you again for all you did to help with the conference, and to ask you to let us teach you and your husband about our church."

"You want to teach me? Jimmy mentioned some lessons from time to time, but I said I was too old to learn a new catechism, and Cesar thinks he's an atheist."

"It's not a new catechism," said Carlton stolidly, "It's the gospel of Jesus Christ, which offers peace of mind and salvation to all who embrace it."

Laura smiled kindly. "I already have peace of mind," she said. "And as for salvation, I'll leave that in the hands of God. He must know me. If I am worthy, he can take care of it. If I'm not . . . well then he can't."

"What you say is true, as far as it goes, senora, but it just isn't enough to live a good life. Please let us teach you." To his horror, he heard a quiver in his voice.

Laura stared at him. "Oh Carlton," she said. "If it means that much to you, of course you can give your lessons. Though I can't speak for Cesar."

It turned out that Cesar liked social calls and enjoyed playing volleyball with the missionaries, but he didn't want to study Mormon beliefs. In fact, he asked the missionaries to come during the daytime so that evening visits would be free of business. Carlton and Thompson came during the siesta which neither the missionaries nor, apparently, Laura observed, then stayed awhile to chat. After all, Elder Moyle had given them a special charge to teach *and* fellowship. They sometimes played chess with Cesar in the evenings. He never failed to show up on volleyball nights.

One afternoon, as the two arrived, Laura was outside hanging clothes. She called an invitation to sit down. Just as they did, Elder Thompson remembered a plate on which Laura had sent over a cake.

"I'll be right back." Thompson was out the door before Carlton realized the situation. He called after his companion and began to follow just as Laura came into the room.

"He went . . . he went to get the plate . . ." said Carlton.

Laura crossed the room, her eyes never moving from Carlton's face. As she walked she raised her hands, and Carlton's hands rose, too, seemingly by themselves. Laura took them in hers, raised one to her lips and kissed it lightly.

"¿Cómo esta?" said Carlton. It was the first phrase he had learned in Spanish and the only one that now came to mind.

"Bien," said Laura as she smiled into his eyes. They stood motionless until they heard Elder Thompson returning. Then Laura released Carlton's hands and walked to the other side of the room. Carlton sat down.

"Here's your plate, senora," said Thompson as he came in, "I nearly forgot it."

The lesson that afternoon lacked its usual polish. Carlton found himself skipping questions or asking the wrong ones, while Laura gave answers to questions that hadn't been asked.

The following day, Carlton turned the teaching and fellowshiping of the Castillos over to Elder Spencer and threw himself into the proselyting effort. Surprisingly, he and Elder Thompson began to be successful. Doors opened as never before and people in Tupambay began to listen with interest to the young Americans. In visits to members, Carlton bore fervent testimony and urged inactives to put their lives in order. His obvious sincerity led to frequent confessions and tearful promises of repentance.

Carlton and Thompson soon led the mission in number of proselyting hours and were fourth in number of discussions given. Attendance at branch meetings increased. Even the name Tupambay acquired a new status throughout the mission.

But for all this, Carlton was in turmoil. He worried about his breach of mission regulations while he struggled to keep his mind occupied with gospel topics, memories of home, new approaches to lessons — anything but Laura.

About that time Elder Carlton and Elder Thompson asked a family they had been teaching to be baptized. When the Garcias accepted, a baptism date was set for the next Saturday morning at a small pond outside town. Other baptisms were also scheduled for the same time.

Carlton fasted for twenty-four hours before the baptism and spent most of the night on his knees. At the baptismal service, he insisted that the other missionaries perform the ordinances. The Garcias were disappointed but accepted his explanation that he had participated in several baptisms and wanted to give others the experience.

Laura attended the baptism at the invitation of Elder Spencer. She had joined the small group of church members and investigators who walked from town that warm spring morning to the woods north of Tupambay. On the way back she walked beside Carlton while Elder Thompson accompanied the Garcias. Carlton and Laura had not spoken alone since he had turned her instruction over to Elder Spencer.

“What are we going to do?” Laura asked as soon as they were by themselves.

“Do about what?”

“Do about the way we feel.”

“Nothing.”

“Nothing! We can’t do nothing. I think about you all the time. I dream about you.”

“I don’t think about you at all,” replied Carlton.

Laura, who had been looking straight ahead, turned her face quickly to his. Their eyes met and reluctantly Carlton continued.

“I don’t think about you at all. I have invented a thousand ways to keep from thinking about you. Maybe when I’ve invented a thousand more I can keep you out of my mind for an entire day.”

“You *do* care for me,” whispered Laura.

“I can’t believe this is happening,” Carlton continued. “I’m a missionary. I could be sent home in disgrace. I’ve never felt this way about anyone!”

“I know,” said Laura. “What are we going to do?”

“The only thing we can do. We’ll avoid each other and keep our relationship formal. Sooner or later I will be transferred and the problem will be solved.”

Laura stopped abruptly, “We will maintain a formal relationship. You will be transferred, and the problem will be solved. How very efficient you Americans are! Or is it your Mormonism? You can simply ignore untidy emotions and go on as if nothing had happened. Efficient and painless. How nice.” Tears were brimming as she turned and walked rapidly down the road.

Carlton hurried after her. “Hardly painless,” he said. “I know something of pain. Acting as if nothing has happened is exactly that — acting. I can never be the person I was because I love you very much. Only my faith has saved me from doing something very rash and very wrong.”

“Your faith?” asked Laura, looking at him with sadness and longing. “Oh, Carlton, if you knew the sweetness of certain things, not even your faith could save you.”

Carlton felt his face flush as warmth spread from his temples to his groin. This time it was he who turned and walked rapidly toward Tupambay, leaving Laura to wait for Elder Thompson and the Garcias.

In the following weeks Carlton did maintain a distance between himself and Laura, but his emotional involvement continued to affect his work. He drove himself and Elder Thompson — striving for more and more hours of service. And to his own surprise, he developed an almost tender regard for the ineffectual Elder Spencer. Although Carlton had never been openly hostile to the branch president, it was clear to Spencer as well as to the junior companions that Carlton did not respect him. Now, however, overwhelmed with the monumental nature of his own shortcomings, Carlton felt a need to help Spencer overcome his. He began seeking ways to encourage him and consciously tried to act as if Spencer were the best possible branch president. This coupled with the recent rise in the fortunes of the branch, had a remarkable effect. Spencer grew more self-confident. He began to get satisfaction from making decisions and seeing that they were carried out. The members and investigators responded positively to his efforts and in a short time, Elder Clifford Spencer became president of the Tupambay Branch in deed as well as in name.

That led Carlton, indirectly, to another meeting alone with Laura. Spencer had decided to reorganize some of the branch auxiliaries and catch the branch records up to date. So with newly acquired authority, he sent the two junior companions out tracting together while he and Carlton worked at the branch.

It was a warm spring morning so Carlton took the scribbled papers that constituted two months of branch history down to the patio. Elder Spencer was working upstairs when a quiet knock came at the front door. Carlton paused a moment, not sure anyone was there. Then he stood up, his heart racing, and walked down the hall. He knew it was Laura before he opened the door, but he had no time to think of what he would say or do.

Laura, standing on the sidewalk in a summery white blouse and flowered print skirt, was carrying a plate of cookies and iced cakes. She smiled, her eyes bright with mischief.

“Good morning, sir. I’m going into the catering business and have been told you give many parties. I thought if you sampled my wares, you might let me be your caterer.”

“How nice,” said Carlton, picking up on Laura’s lead. “We will be happy to try a sample, but I should tell you right off that we give all our business to Garibaldi. He’s such a kind, warm man and such a friend to the Mormons.” They both laughed, and Carlton turned and yelled in English, “Elder, it’s Senora Castillo. She brought some cookies and things. Can you come down?”

“I’ll be down in a minute. Invite her in. There’s some bottles of Crush in the icebox.”

Carlton resumed his Spanish, “Come in, senora. Where is Nena? Is she coming over too?”

"Nena is at my mother's with the girls."

Carlton led the way to the patio. Their lighthearted exchange had taken away much of his tension. He motioned her to a seat at the table where he was working.

"I'm catching up the branch history. Do you read hieroglyphics?"

"Don't you have the gift of tongues?" Laura teased. "I thought all good Mormons did."

"No," laughed Carlton. Then the smile left his face, "How have you been?"

Laura watched him intently, "Wonderful and awful. Marvelous and terrible."

"Me too," said Carlton.

"I've driven poor Nena to distraction with projects and busy work. Anything to keep occupied. I've smothered Cesar with so much wifely devotion that he is threatening to go to his father's *estancia* for a little peace and quiet."

Carlton smiled, "And I've made Elder Thompson work so hard that he is undoubtedly the best-prepared junior companion in the mission."

"Well then, at least some good has come from all this," said Laura.

"I don't know if that's possible," replied Carlton. "I've always been taught that good cannot come from evil, that the devil can disguise himself as an angel of light. I keep waiting for something awful to happen."

"Ah, Carlton, what evil is there here? We love each other, but we have done nothing wrong. We didn't seek these feelings. If I am to believe in anything, I would rather believe in God than in the devil."

"You don't understand," said Carlton. "After the baptism you spoke of the sweetness of certain things. Thoughts keep slipping into my mind, and I find I don't want to get rid of them. I feel terribly guilty most of the time."

"I wish I had never said that," Laura cried. "It was just that you seemed so cold! I wanted to hurt you, too. I'm sorry now because I know you were right. It is the only way. You have your mission, your faith, and your future. I have my home, my hope, and my little girls. I can accept this and be at peace. Except, perhaps, for one thing."

"What is that?" asked Carlton.

"Will you ever kiss me? Just one kiss, nothing more?"

"No."

"Not ever?"

"No, not ever," said Carlton. Then to soften the words, he reached across the table and squeezed her hand before picking up one of the scraps of paper and continuing his work.

New missionaries arrived in Montevideo a couple of weeks later with a general shake-up following. Carlton's new assignment was Tres Arroyos, a new and thriving branch on the Brazilian border, where he would serve as branch president. Elder Thompson and Elder Ballentine were made senior companions, assigned to branches in Montevideo. Elder Spencer was called to Montevideo for special leadership training after which he would return to Tupambay with three new elders.

The night before the elders left, the branch held a traditional *despedida*, complete with songs, refreshments, and tears. The next morning Carlton helped his three friends load their belongings into two taxis and accompanied them to the *onda* terminal. His own bus didn't leave until later in the day. Each gave him an *abrazo*. Carlton could hear to the roar of the engine long after the bus had turned the corner and disappeared.

He stood in the plaza and thought of the Sunday morning so long ago when he had arrived in Tupambay. Then he forced himself to think about his new assignment. Finally, as his heart jackhammered, he allowed the thought to surface — he was alone in Tupambay.

He walked toward the branch, keeping his eyes straight ahead as he passed the Castillos' door. His head felt light, as if he were no longer in control. His heart raced. Finding the branch door ajar seemed inevitable, and he paused just a moment before stepping into the cool semidarkness.

Laura was standing at the far end of the hall, silhouetted against the light from the open patio door. She turned when she heard the front door close and silently walked toward him. As they embraced, Carlton was swept by feelings of joy, of wonder, of relief. They kissed, and Laura whispered, "*Te quiero, te quiero.*" Carlton, beyond rules, beyond stopping, bent to kiss her again, but Laura raised her fingers to his lips and leaned back against his embrace.

"No, *mi querido*. Just one. I asked only one. Now I must go before I break my promise to God."

She walked to the door and turned, "*Chau*, Elder Carlton."

"*Chau*, Hermana Castillo," said Carlton.

Then she stepped onto the sunlit sidewalk and pulled the door shut.