

# Diary of a Loving Heart

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HARVEST HOUSE PUBLISHERS

EUGENE, OREGON

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**DIARY OF A LOVING HEART**

Copyright © 1984 by George Bacher  
Published by Harvest House Publishers  
Eugene, Oregon 97402  
[www.harvesthousepublishers.com](http://www.harvesthousepublishers.com)

ISBN 978-0-7369-5155-5

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## “Tempus Fugit”

Mockingly, the grandfather clock chimed as Chris Beth closed the bedroom door with a silent turn of the knob and stepped into the hall. She had grown to dread the clock’s mellow song since Vangie had fallen ill. There had been a time when the two of them laughed like the care-free sisters they were at the 24-note tune the bells rang out just before striking the hour.

“What does it play, Wilson?” Vangie had asked her husband.

“*Tempus Fugit*,” he said.

Vangie’s voice, as golden as her hair, rose an octave higher as always when she was excited. “Speak English, Wilson!” she had demanded, and then to Chris Beth, “He loves teasing me with Latin!”

“Time Flies.” Even then, five years ago, Wilson’s voice had been sober. Being a doctor made him more aware, she supposed. Of time. Of life. And death. Now the translation tore at her heart, too.

Deliberately, Chris Beth waited until the great clock tolled its inevitable stroke of twelve before walking into the living room of the North home. Noon. And somehow the old clock knew. God had separated the darkness and light. But man had created an ingenious mechanism for marking equal periods of elapsing time and, in this case, housed the knowing instrument in a harmless-looking mahogany box.

Frightened, she walked toward the front window to look out at the August rain.

*“Tempus Fugit!”* The grandfather clock ticked on. *Oh, Vangie... Wilson... Joe!*

Vangie would sleep only a short while even with the aid of the pain-killer. When she awakened, she would be asking for Wilson. He would need a meal beforehand, just as he had needed the few short hours away from the confines of Vangie’s room, her suffering, and the inevitable feel of death. All else was secondary—even his practice.

Hurriedly, Chris Beth set to work cutting thick slices from a loaf of graham bread. As she buttered it she tried to remember which of the three men preferred mustard to green tomato relish on their ham sandwiches. But even as her mind, numbed with loss of sleep, tried to concentrate on so small a matter, Young Wil’s “Whoa!” said that he, Wilson, and Joe were back from Turn-Around Inn and lunch was not nearly ready.

Today it had taken Vangie longer than usual to doze. The medication did less and less good. Vangie had asked for her diary then, but unable to find strength to write, wanted to talk. Then, finding no strength for talking either, she cried. The crying hurt worst of all. Chris Beth’s heart broke anew with each tear that coursed down the Dresden-china features of her sister’s fragile, but nonetheless beautiful, face. *Don’t cry, Vangie... don’t cry, darling...* How many times had she, the older sister, whispered the words in their growing-up years? Vangie was afraid of storms. Vangie was afraid of the dark. Vangie was afraid of the wind... mice in the attic... the bears beneath her bed! Only this time, there was no way Chris Beth could bring reassurance. Death, the Grim Reaper, would not go away.

Busying her hands helped, Chris found. Purposefully, she set about peeling the last of the fall tomatoes. There would be no time for the fried potatoes Wilson, his always-hungry nephew, and her husband enjoyed. But coffee, strong coffee. They would need that.

“Horses are curried.” How good to hear Young Wil’s everyday comment. Chris Beth turned from the woodstove to look at the lanky youth. How like Wilson he looked, more like son than nephew—same dark eyes, broad shoulders, teasing manner. What concerned her was the 14-year-old’s temperament, such a private person and yet so hard-loving. *What*, she asked herself as she asked God in her prayers over and

over, are these two men I love so much going to do without the woman they are going to lose? And what can Joe and I do to ease the pain? Joe being a minister would help but—

Chris Beth was unaware that Young Wil had crossed the kitchen until he interrupted her thoughts with a wave of his hand in front of her eyes. “Yoo-hoo!”

“Sorry,” she mumbled and moved into action again. “Want to set the table for me?”

“Anything to speed up production.” Then, after a clatter of dishes, he asked, “How is she?”

Chris Beth concentrated on measuring coffee into the pot before asking softly, “Can’t you bring yourself to call Vangie—well, something other than *she*?”

“Like what?” She didn’t need to look up to know that the brown eyes had turned sullen and defiant.

“Try *Mother*. It would make her so happy—Aunt Vangie—even Vangie—”

“She’s not my mother—or my real aunt—just my uncle’s wife.”

“I know, darling. But I am only your teacher, and the two of us have such a good understanding. I just wish—”

“I just wish *you’d* have married Uncle Wil!”

Chris Beth stared at him, stunned. She felt confused, her heart pumping wildly in her chest. Abruptly, he turned and stalked away.

When the boy mumbled something inaudible at the door, Chris Beth turned in hope of hearing his words. But to her amazement, Joe and Wilson were standing silently, watching the retreating figure. *How long had they been at the door? How much had they heard?*

“Oh, I didn’t see you,” she said too quickly. “Oh, the coffee!”

It was too late. The pot had boiled over. She grabbed at the handle, burning her fingers. “Here, let me.” Wilson took the sticky pot from her hand, poured out three cups, and set the granite vessel on the edge of the stove.

The brown liquid hissed on the hot stove, rolled into steaming droplets, and disappeared. But the odor of parched coffee filled the room. “I’m sorry,” she murmured.

“No problem an open window can’t handle,” Joe said in the gentle manner she had come to expect of her husband. It won her heart and his congregation.

Returning to where Chris Beth stood, he smoothed the dark tendrils of her hair from her forehead and kissed her. “You are overtired, Chrissy. You must get some rest. You’ll be needed even more later.”

Joe’s gentle words and the concerned look in his hazel eyes brought a semblance of order to her world. *I wish*, she thought fleetingly, *we were alone... that Joe would take me in his arms... that we were back to the way things used to be. I wish, oh! I wish, time did not fly...*

But before the thought was so much as completed, the great clock chimed with warning and there was a small moan from Vangie’s bedroom.