

Hannah Hurnard

HINDS'
FEET *on*
HIGH
PLACES



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Hinds' Feet on High Places

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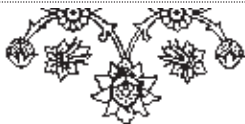
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Lessons Learned on the Slopes of the High Places

Hannah Hurnard: A Brief Autobiography

The Lord God is my strength,
and he will make my feet like Hinds' Feet,
and he will make me to walk upon
mine High Places.

Habakkuk 3:19



Preface to the Allegory

One morning during the daily Bible reading on our mission compound in Palestine, our little Arab nurse read from *Daily Light* a quotation from the Song of Songs, “The voice of my Beloved! behold, he cometh leaping upon the mountains, skipping upon the hills” (Song of Solomon 2:8). When asked what the verse meant, she looked up with a happy smile of understanding and said, “It means there are no obstacles which our Savior’s love cannot overcome, and that to him, mountains of difficulty are as easy as an asphalt road!”

From the garden at the back of the mission house at the foot of Mount Gerizim we could often watch the gazelles bounding up the mountainside, leaping from rock to rock with extraordinary grace and agility. Their motion was one of the most beautiful examples of exultant and apparently effortless ease in surmounting obstacles which I have ever seen.

How deeply we who love the Lord of Love and desire to follow him long for the power to surmount all difficulties and tests and conflicts in life in the same exultant and triumphant way. To learn the secret of victorious

living has been the heart's desire of those who love the Lord, in every generation.

We feel we would give anything if only we could, in actual experience, live on the High Places of love and victory here on this earth and during this life—able always to react to evil, tribulation, sorrow, pain, and every wrong thing in such a way that they would be overcome and transformed into something to the praise and glory of God forever. As Christians we know, in theory at least, that in the life of a child of God there are no second causes, that even the most unjust and cruel things, as well as all seemingly pointless and undeserved sufferings, have been permitted by God as a glorious opportunity for us to react to them in such a way that our Lord and Savior is able to produce in us, little by little, his own lovely character.

The Song of Songs expresses the desire implanted in every human heart, to be reunited with God himself, and to know perfect and unbroken union with him. He has made us for himself, and our hearts can never know rest and perfect satisfaction until they find it in him.

It is God's will that some of his children should learn this deep union with himself through the perfect flowering of natural human love in marriage. For others it is equally his will that the same perfect union should be learned through the experience of learning to lay down completely this natural and instinctive desire for marriage and parenthood, and accept the circumstances of life which deny them this experience. This instinct for love, so firmly implanted in the human heart, is the supreme way by which we learn to desire and love God himself above all else.

But the High Places of victory and union with Christ cannot be reached by any mental reckoning of self to be dead to sin, or by seeking to devise some way or discipline by which the will can be crucified. The only way is by learning to accept, day by day, the actual conditions and tests permitted by God, by a continually repeated laying down of our own will and acceptance of his as it is presented to us in the form of the people with whom we have to live and work, and in the things which happen to us. Every acceptance of his will becomes an altar of sacrifice, and every such surrender and abandonment of ourselves to his will is a means of furthering us on the way to the High Places to which he desires to bring every child of his while they are still living on earth.

The lessons of accepting and triumphing over evil, of becoming acquainted with grief, and pain, and, ultimately, of finding them transformed into something incomparably precious; of learning through constant glad surrender to know the Lord of Love himself in a new way and to experience unbroken union with him—these are the lessons of the allegory in this book. The High Places and the hinds' feet do not refer to heavenly places after death, but are meant to be the glorious experience of God's children here and now—if they will follow the path he chooses for them.

Perhaps the Lord will use it to speak comfort to some of his loved ones who are finding themselves forced to keep company with Sorrow and Suffering, or who walk in darkness and have no light or feel themselves tossed with tempest and not comforted. It may help them to understand a new meaning in what is happening, for the

experiences through which they are passing are all part of the wonderful process by which the Lord is making real in their lives the same experience which made David and Habakkuk cry out exultantly, "The Lord God maketh my feet like hinds' feet, and setteth me upon mine High Places" (Ps. 18:33 and Hab. 3:19).



Part One
“Weeping may endure for a night”
(Psalm 30:5)



Invitation to the High Places

This is the story of how Much-Afraid escaped from her Fearing relatives and went with the Shepherd to the High Places where “perfect love casteth out fear.”

For several years Much-Afraid had been in the service of the Chief Shepherd, whose great flocks were pastured down in the Valley of Humiliation. She lived with her friends and fellow workers Mercy and Peace in a tranquil little white cottage in the village of Much-Trembling. She loved her work and

desired intensely to please the Chief Shepherd, but happy as she was in most ways, she was conscious of several things which hindered her in her work and caused her much secret distress and shame.

In the first place she was a cripple, with feet so crooked that they often caused her to limp and stumble as she went about her work. She had also the very unsightly blemish of a crooked mouth which greatly disfigured both expression and speech and was sadly conscious that these ugly blemishes must be a cause of astonishment and offense to many who knew that she was in the service of the great Shepherd.

Most earnestly she longed to be completely delivered from these shortcomings and to be made beautiful, gracious, and strong as were so many of the Shepherd's other workers, and above all to be made like the Chief Shepherd himself. But she feared that there could be no deliverance from these two crippling disfigurements and that they must continue to mar her service always.

There was, however, another and even greater trouble in her life. She was a member of the Family of Fearings, and her relatives were scattered all over the valley, so that she could never really escape from them. An orphan, she had been brought up in the home of her aunt, poor Mrs. Dismal Forebodings, with her two cousins Gloomy and Spiteful and their brother Craven Fear, a great bully who habitually tormented and persecuted her in a really dreadful way.

Like most of the other families who lived in the Valley of Humiliation, all the Fearings hated the Chief Shepherd and tried to boycott his servants, and naturally it was a great offense to them that one of their own family should have entered his service. Consequently they did all they could both by threats and persuasions to get her out of his employment, and one dreadful day they laid before her the family dictum that she must immediately marry her cousin Craven Fear and settle down respectably among her own people. If she refused to do this of her own free will, they threatened to use force and compel her.

Poor Much-Afraid was, of course, overwhelmed with horror at the mere idea, but her relatives always terrified her, and she had never learned to resist or ignore their threats, so she simply sat cowering before them, repeating again and again that nothing would induce her to marry Craven Fear, but she was quite unable to escape from their presence.

The unhappy interview therefore lasted a long time, and when finally they did leave her for a while, it was already early evening. With a surge of relief, Much-Afraid remembered that the Chief Shepherd would then be leading his flocks to their accustomed watering place beside a lovely cascade and pool on the outskirts of the village. To this place she was in the habit of going very early every morning to meet him and learn his wishes and commands for the

day, and again in the evenings to give her report on the day's work. It was now time to meet him there beside the pool, and she felt sure he would help her and not permit her relatives to kidnap her and force her to leave his service for the dreadful slavery of marriage with Craven Fear.

Still shaking with fear and without pausing to wash the tears from her face, Much-Afraid shut the door of the cottage and started off for the cascade and the pool.

The quiet evening light was filling the Valley of Humiliation with a golden glow as she left the village and started to cross the fields. Beyond the river, the mountains which bounded the eastern side of the Valley like towering ramparts were already tinged with pink, and their deep gorges were filled with lovely and mysterious shadows.

Through the quiet and peace of this tranquil evening, poor, terrified Much-Afraid came to the pool where the Shepherd was waiting for her and told him of her dreadful plight.

"What shall I do?" she cried as she ended the recital. "How can I escape? They can't really force me to marry my cousin Craven, can they? Oh!" cried she, overwhelmed again at the very thought of such a prospect, "it is dreadful enough to be Much-Afraid, but to think of having to be Mrs. Craven Fear for the rest of my life and never able to escape from the torment of it is more than I can bear."

“Don’t be afraid,” said the Shepherd gently. “You are in my service, and if you will trust me they will not be able to force you against your will into any family alliance. But you ought never to have let your Fearing relatives into your cottage, because they are enemies of the King who has taken you into his employment.”

“I know, oh, I know,” cried Much-Afraid, “but whenever I meet any of my relatives I seem to lose all my strength and simply cannot resist them, no matter how I strive. As long as I live in the Valley I cannot escape meeting them. They are everywhere and now that they are determined to get me into their power again I shall never dare venture outside my cottage alone for fear of being kidnapped.”

As she spoke she lifted her eyes and looked across the Valley and the river to the lovely sunset-lighted peaks of the mountains, then cried out in desperate longing, “Oh, if only I could escape from this Valley of Humiliation altogether and go to the High Places, completely out of reach of all the Fearings and my other relatives!”

No sooner were these words uttered when to her complete astonishment the Shepherd answered, “I have waited a long time to hear you make that suggestion, Much-Afraid. It would indeed be best for you to leave the Valley for the High Places, and I will very willingly take you there myself. The lower slopes of those mountains on the other side of the

river are the borderland of my Father's Kingdom, the Realm of Love. No Fears of any kind are able to live there because 'perfect love casteth out fear and everything that torments.'"

Much-Afraid stared at him in amazement. "Go to the High Places," she exclaimed, "and live there? Oh, if only I could! For months past the longing has never left me. I think of it day and night, but it is not possible. I could never get there. I am too lame." She looked down at her malformed feet as she spoke, and her eyes again filled with tears and despair and self-pity. "These mountains are so steep and dangerous. I have been told that only the hinds and the deer can move on them safely."

"It is quite true that the way up to the High Places is both difficult and dangerous," said the Shepherd. "It has to be, so that nothing which is an enemy of Love can make the ascent and invade the Kingdom. Nothing blemished or in any way imperfect is allowed there, and the inhabitants of the High Places do need 'hinds' feet.' I have them myself," he added with a smile, "and like a young hart or a roebuck I can go leaping on the mountains and skipping on the hills with the greatest ease and pleasure.

"But, Much-Afraid, I could make yours like hinds' feet also, and set you upon the High Places. You could serve me then much more fully and be out of reach of all your enemies. I am delighted to hear

that you have been longing to go there, for, as I said before, I have been waiting for you to make that suggestion. Then,” he added, with another smile, “you would never have to meet Craven Fear again.”

Much-Afraid stared at him in bewilderment. “Make my feet like hinds’ feet,” she repeated. “How is that possible? And what would the inhabitants of the Kingdom of Love say to the presence of a wretched little cripple with an ugly face and a twisted mouth, if nothing blemished and imperfect may dwell there?”

“It is true,” said the Shepherd, “that you would have to be changed before you could live on the High Places, but if you are willing to go with me, I promise to help you develop hinds’ feet. Up there on the mountains, as you get near the real High Places, the air is fresh and invigorating. It strengthens the whole body and there are streams with wonderful healing properties, so that those who bathe in them find all their blemishes and disfigurements washed away.

“But there is another thing I must tell you. Not only would I have to make your feet like hinds’ feet, but you would have to receive another name, for it would be as impossible for a Much-Afraid to enter the Kingdom of Love as for any other member of the Fearing family. Are you willing to be changed completely, Much-Afraid, and to be made like the new name which you will receive if you become a citizen in the Kingdom of Love?”

She nodded her head and then said very earnestly, "Yes, I am."

Again he smiled, but added gravely, "There is still one thing more, the most important of all. No one is allowed to dwell in the Kingdom of Love, unless they have the flower of Love already blooming in their hearts. Has Love been planted in your heart, Much-Afraid?"

As the Shepherd said this he looked at her very steadily and she realized that his eyes were searching into the very depths of her heart and knew all that was there far better than she did herself. She did not answer for a long time, because she was not sure what to say, but she looked rather flinchingly into the eyes which were gazing at her so penetratingly and became aware that they had the power of reflecting what they looked upon.

She could thus really see her own heart as he saw it, so after a long pause she answered, "I think that what is growing there is a great longing to experience the joy of natural, human love and to learn to love supremely one person who will love me in return. But perhaps that desire, natural and right as it seems, is not the Love of which you are speaking?" She paused and then added honestly and almost tremblingly, "I see the longing to be loved and admired growing in my heart, Shepherd, but I don't think I see the kind of Love that you are talking about, at least, nothing like the love which I see in you."

“Then will you let me plant the seed of true Love there now?” asked the Shepherd. “It will take you some time to develop hinds’ feet and to climb to the High Places, and if I put the seed in your heart now it will be ready to bloom by the time you get there.”

Much-Afraid shrank back. “I am afraid,” she said. “I have been told that if you really love someone you give that loved one the power to hurt and pain you in a way nothing else can.”

“That is true,” agreed the Shepherd. “To love does mean to put yourself into the power of the loved one and to become very vulnerable to pain, and you are very Much-Afraid of pain, are you not?”

She nodded miserably and then said shamefacedly, “Yes, very much afraid of it.”

“But it is so happy to love,” said the Shepherd quietly. “It is happy to love even if you are not loved in return. There is pain too, certainly, but Love does not think that very significant.”

Much-Afraid thought suddenly that he had the most patient eyes she had ever seen. At the same time there was something in them that hurt her to the heart, though she could not have said why, but she still shrank back in fear and said (bringing the words out very quickly because somehow she was ashamed to say them), “I would never dare to love unless I were sure of being loved in return. If I let you plant the seed of Love in my heart will you give

me the promise that I shall be loved in return? I couldn't bear it otherwise."

The smile he turned on her then was the gentlest and kindest she had ever seen, yet once again, and for the same indefinable reason as before, it cut her to the quick. "Yes," he said, without hesitation, "I promise you, Much-Afraid, that when the plant of Love is ready to bloom in your heart and when you are ready to change your name, then you will be loved in return."

A thrill of joy went through her from head to foot. It seemed too wonderful to be believed, but the Shepherd himself was making the promise, and of one thing she was quite sure. He could not lie. "Please plant Love in my heart now," she said faintly. Poor little soul, she was still Much-Afraid even when promised the greatest thing in the world.

The Shepherd put his hand in his bosom, drew something forth, and laid it in the palm of his hand. Then he held his hand out toward Much-Afraid. "Here is the seed of Love," he said.

She bent forward to look, then gave a startled little cry and drew back. There was indeed a seed lying in the palm of his hand, but it was shaped exactly like a long, sharply-pointed thorn. Much-Afraid had often noticed that the Shepherd's hands were scarred and wounded, but now she saw that the scar in the palm of the hand held out to her was the exact shape and size of the seed of Love lying beside it.

“The seed looks very sharp,” she said shrinkingly. “Won’t it hurt if you put it into my heart?”

He answered gently, “It is so sharp that it slips in very quickly. But, Much-Afraid, I have already warned you that Love and Pain go together, for a time at least. If you would know Love, you must know pain too.”

Much-Afraid looked at the thorn and shrank from it. Then she looked at the Shepherd’s face and repeated his words to herself. “When the seed of Love in your heart is ready to bloom, you will be loved in return,” and a strange new courage entered into her. She suddenly stepped forward, bared her heart, and said, “Please plant the seed here in my heart.”

His face lit up with a glad smile and he said with a note of joy in his voice, “Now you will be able to go with me to the High Places and be a citizen in the Kingdom of my Father.”

Then he pressed the thorn into her heart. It was true, just as he had said, it did cause a piercing pain, but it slipped in quickly and then, suddenly, a sweetness she had never felt or imagined before tingled through her. It was bittersweet, but the sweetness was the stronger. She thought of the Shepherd’s words, “It is so happy to love,” and her pale, sallow cheeks suddenly glowed pink and her eyes shone. For a moment Much-Afraid did not look afraid at all. The twisted mouth had relaxed into a happy

curve, and the shining eyes and pink cheeks made her almost beautiful.

“Thank you, thank you,” she cried, and knelt at the Shepherd’s feet. “How good you are. How patient you are. There is no one in the whole world as good and kind as you. I will go with you to the mountains. I will trust you to make my feet like hinds’ feet, and to set me, even me, upon the High Places.”

“I am more glad even than you,” said the Shepherd, “and now you really act as though you are going to change your name already. But there is one thing more I must tell you. I shall take you to the foot of the mountains myself, so that there will be no danger from your enemies. After that, two special companions I have chosen will guide and help you on all the steep and difficult places while your feet are still lame and while you can only limp and go slowly.

“You will not see me all the time, Much-Afraid, for as I told you, I shall be leaping on the mountains and skipping on the hills, and you will not at first be able to accompany me or keep up with me. That will come later. However, you must remember that as soon as you reach the slopes of the mountains there is a wonderful system of communication from end to end of the Kingdom of Love, and I shall be able to hear you whenever you speak to me. Whenever you call for help I promise to come to you at once.

“At the foot of the mountains my two servants whom I have chosen to be your guides will be waiting for you. Remember, I have chosen them myself, with great care, as the two who are most able to help you and assist you in developing hinds’ feet. You will accept them with joy and allow them to be your helpers, will you not?”

“Oh, yes,” she answered at once, smiling at him happily. “Of course I am quite certain that you know best and that whatever you choose is right.” Then she added joyfully, “I feel as though I shall never be afraid again.”

He looked very kindly at the little shepherdess who had just received the seed of Love into her heart and was preparing to go with him to the High Places, but also with full understanding. He knew her through and through, in all the intricate labyrinth of her lonely heart, better far than she knew herself. No one understood better than he, that growing into the likeness of a new name is a long process, but he did not say this. He looked with a certain tender pity and compassion at the glowing cheeks and shining eyes which had so suddenly transformed the appearance of plain little Much-Afraid.

Then he said, “Now you may go home and make your preparations for leaving. You are not to take anything with you, only leave everything in order. Do not tell anyone about it, for a journey to

the High Places needs to be a secret matter. I cannot now give you the exact time when we are to start for the mountains, but it will be soon, and you must be ready to follow me whenever I come to the cottage and call. I will give you a secret sign. I shall sing one of the Shepherd's songs as I pass the cottage, and it will contain a special message for you. When you hear it, come at once and follow me to the trysting place."

Then, as the sun had already gone down in a blaze of red and gold, and the eastern mountains were now veiled in misty mauve and grey, and the shadows were lengthening, he turned and led his flock away toward the sheepfolds.

Much-Afraid turned her face homeward, her heart full of happiness and excitement, and still feeling as though she would never be frightened again. As she started back across the fields she sang to herself one of the songs from an old book of songs which the Shepherds often used. Never before had it seemed to her so sweet, so applicable.

*"The song of Songs," the loveliest song,
The song of Love the King,
No joy on earth compares with his,
But seems a broken thing.
His Name as ointment is poured forth,
And all his lovers sing.*

*Draw me—I will run after thee,
Thou art my heart's one choice,*

Invitation to the High Places

*Oh, bring me to thy royal house,
To dwell there and rejoice.
There in thy presence, O my King,
To feast and hear thy voice.*

*Look not upon me with contempt,
Though soiled and marred I be,
The King found me—an outcast thing—
And set his love on me.
I shall be perfected by Love,
Made fair as day to see.*

(CANT. 1:1-6)

She walked singing across the first field and was half-way over the next when suddenly she saw Craven Fear himself coming toward her. Poor Much-Afraid; for a little while she had completely forgotten the existence of her dreadful relatives, and now here was the most dreaded and detested of them all slouching toward her. Her heart filled with a terrible panic. She looked right and left, but there was no hiding place anywhere, and besides it was all too obvious that he was actually coming to meet her, for as soon as he saw her he quickened his pace and in a moment or two was right beside her.

With a horror that sickened her very heart she heard him say, "Well, here you are at last, little Cousin Much-Afraid. So we are to be married, eh, what do you think of that?" and he pinched her, presumable in a playful manner, but viciously enough

to make her gasp and bite her lips to keep back a cry of pain.

She shrank away from him and shook with terror and loathing. Unfortunately this was the worst thing she could have done, for it was always her obvious fear which encouraged him to continue tormenting her. If only she could have ignored him, he soon would have tired of teasing and of her company and would have wondered off to look for other prey. In all her life, however, Much-Afraid had never been able to ignore Fear. Now it was absolutely beyond her power to conceal the dread which she felt.

Her white face and terrified eyes immediately had the effect of stimulating Craven's desire to bait her. Here she was, alone and completely in his power. He caught hold of her, and poor Much-Afraid uttered one frenzied cry of terror and pain. At that moment Craven Fear loosed his grasp and cringed away.

The Shepherd had approached them unperceived and was standing beside them. One look at his stern face and flashing eyes and the stout Shepherd's cudgel grasped in his strong, uplifted hand was more than enough for the bully. Craven Fear slunk away like a whipped cur, actually running from the village instead of toward it, not knowing where he was going, urged by one instinct alone, to find a place of safety.

Much-Afraid burst into tears. Of course she

ought to have known that Craven was a coward and that if only she had lifted her voice and called for the Shepherd, he would have fled at once. Now her dress was torn and disordered, and her arms bruised by the bully's grip, yet that was the least part of her distress. She was overwhelmed with shame that she had so quickly acted like her old name and nature, which she had hoped was beginning to be changed already.

It seemed so impossible to ignore the Fearings, still less to resist them. She did not dare look at the Shepherd, but had she done so she would have seen with what compassion he was regarding her. She did not realize that the Prince of Love is "of very tender compassions to them that are afraid." She supposed that, like everybody else, he was despising her for her silly fears, so she muttered a shamed "thank you."

Then, still without looking at him, she limped painfully toward the village, weeping bitterly as she went and saying over and over again to herself, "What is the use of even thinking of going to the High Places? I could never reach them, for the least little thing is enough to turn me back."

However, when at last she reached the security of the cottage she began to feel better, and by the time she had drunk a cup of tea and taken her evening meal she had recovered so far that she was able to remind herself of all that had happened there beside the cascade and the pool. Suddenly she remembered, with a thrill of wonder and delight,

that the seed of Love had been planted in her heart. As she thought of it, the same almost intolerable sweetness stole over her, the bittersweet, indefinable but wholly delightful ecstasy of a new happiness.

"It is happy to love," said little Much-Afraid to herself and then she repeated: "It is happy to love." After putting the cottage in order for the night, because she was utterly tired out with all the conflicting emotions of that strange day, she went to bed. Lying there before falling asleep, she sang over and over again to herself another of the lovely songs from the old song book.

*O thou whom my soul loveth,
Tell me where thou dost feed,
And where thy flocks at noonday
To rest and browse dost lead.
For why should I
By other be,
And not by thee?*

*O fairest among women,
Dost thou indeed not know?
Then lead my little flocklet
The way that my flocks go;
And be to me,
As I to thee
Sweet company.*

(CANT. 1:7-8)

Then she fell into a heavy, dreamless sleep.