

JANET LUNDER HANAFIN

THE QUESTION *A short story in two parts*

JULIE

"Whose wife will she be in Heaven?"

Julie jerked her head up so fast that Owen turned to see what was the matter.

"That's right," Pastor Maggie said, pausing in her stroll down the center aisle. "They asked, 'WHOSE WIFE will she be in Heaven?'"

Pastor Maggie was telling about the woman in the Bible who had married seven brothers. She called the oldest brother Abner. When Abner died, Martha, the unfortunate widow, was married off to his next younger brother who also perished, and then on down the line until she got to number seven, who succumbed as well. It was a trick question. The Pharisees were trying to trip up Jesus on some theological technicality.

Theological technicality? Really? Marriage was "til death do us part." Julie clearly remembered that. When she was a bride it had seemed a long time down the road, and heartbreaking if you stopped to think about it. Owen's wife for eternity . . . Now that was something she hadn't considered lately.

Next to her, Owen was paging through the hymnal, looking to put his bulletin in the right page for the hymn that would follow the sermon. That was Owen. The Eagle Scout. Always planning ahead. Always prepared. Their wills were done, trusts set up for the grandchildren.

Bible woman, Martha, must have been a real femme fatale, Julie thought, with emphasis on the fatale. Julie wondered why, by the time Martha got to about number four, the boys hadn't figured out something was fishy and gone looking for plainer but less deadly spouses. She would guess that when it was the youngest brother's turn he had tried to run, screaming, from the altar.

