

*She brought me a Bible. The guards had searched it. I wanted to ask if they had found anything in it. Salvation. Grace, maybe. Compassion. She had marked off a passage for me and asked me to read it out loud: “The Lord is my strength and my shield; my heart trusted in him, and I am helped: therefore my heart greatly rejoiceth; and with my song will I praise him.”*

*“It seems like you’ve been in here so long,” she said.*

*“Some guys have done a whole calendar in here,” I said.*

*She looked at me, puzzled, and then asked what that meant. When I told her that doing a calendar meant spending a year in jail, she turned her head slightly and then turned back to me. The smile that came to her lips was one*

*she wrenched from someplace deep inside of her.*

*“No matter what anybody says . . .” She reached across the table to put her hand on mine and then pulled it back, thinking a guard might see her. “No matter what anybody says, I know you’re innocent, and I love you very much.”*

*And the conversation was over. She cried. Silently. Her body shook with the sobs.*

*When she left I could hardly make it back to the cell area.*

*“No matter what anybody says . . .”*

*I lay down across my cot. I could still feel Mama’s pain. And I knew she felt that I didn’t do anything wrong. It was me who wasn’t sure. It was me who lay on the cot wondering if I was fooling myself.*