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CHILDREN'S PAGE STORIES -- 1969

By Mrs. Paul E. King

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Story 1
THE MAGIC KEYS

Father closed the garage door for the night, then hurried to open the door of the house. He tried key after key but to no avail. With the flick of a button mother turned a switch, flooding the garage with light. "Maybe this will help you," she laughed.

"It certainly will," father said, finding the right key and opening the door.

Once inside the house the children went gleefully from room to familiar room. Tim found his model and began construction on it. Somehow, something just wasn't fitting or working right. Over and over he tried putting the model together and each time it fell apart. "Dear me!" he exclaimed, almost in tears, "it just won't work!"

"Having problems, Tim?" Jimmy asked, coming closer and surveying the work.

"It won't go together. It just won't!" Tim was nearly crying now.

Jimmy's eyes brightened. He thought of father and the key. "Maybe it's because you're not using the right key, Tim."

"Right key! Jim, are you all right? You don't use keys for models."

"Daddy had to have the right key before he could open the door. Remember?" Jimmy said softly.

"But no one uses keys for models, Jim." Tim sounded half irritated:

"No-? Well, let's see now," and Jimmy began putting the pieces together. "To build a model you'll need the key of patience and perseverance, Tim," and Jim continued his work. Longer and taller the model got and grew. At last there were no more pieces; the model was finished.

A broad smile parted Tim's lips. "Say! That's something, Jimmy!" he said, surveying the beautiful model. "And it isn't falling apart, either!"

"Not when the key of patience and perseverance is used," Jimmy said emphatically.

Suddenly the light of Jimmy's words broke through on Tim's understanding. "The . . . the right key will always work and . . . and unlock doors, huh, Jimmy?"

"Right, pal," Jimmy said, getting back to his arithmetic assignment.

Tim hurried to the dining room, where Susan was poring over an English book. He hated that wall that was between him and his sister . . . the wall that he had put there! Maybe if he used the right key -, the key of humility and repentance -- just maybe, it would tear that ugly wall down and shatter it to the ground and make it vanish forever.

"Susan, I.. I'm sorry I was so unkind and ugly and selfish with you," Tim began. "Please forgive me for saying all those nasty things to you and . . . and . . . those sharp cutting words." Tim was crying now. The right keys were working remarkably well in his heart. "Will you forgive me, Susan? I can't get my prayers through to God since I was so hateful to you."

Susan's face brightened. Great tears glistened in her eyes. "Of course, you're forgiven, Tim!" she exclaimed, rushing to him and hugging him soundly. "I'm so happy you're coming back to Jesus. We've been praying for you for ever so long. We all love you, Tim."

"Would you pray for me now? I'm so miserable; but I'm truly sorry for the way I've treated all of you. I want to get back on speaking terms with Jesus. A fellow can't have fellowship with Him and act like I've been acting." Tim was sobbing now. His sins had hidden God's face!

Tim's keys of humility, repentance, confession and Godly sorrow worked miracles. His faith reached right up to heaven and God for Christ's sake forgave all his sins and made him happy again. He was on speaking terms with Jesus again and, Oh, it was wonderful to know that His presence was living in his heart!

Mother and father began thanking and praising the Lord for taking their boy back into the fold. Suddenly mother went shouting through the house. : Billow after billow of glory rolled over her soul.

"See, Tim!" Jimmy exclaimed happily, "the right key always unlocks doors: mother used the key of praise and thanks to God and the Lord is now blessing her soul until she cannot contain the blessings . . . : she's shouting for joy and happiness."

"And I'm going to use the key of unselfishness more often," Betsy said, coming into the room. "If I'm not selfish with Gwen it will keep the door of peace and harmony open all the time between us." And Betsy dropped to her knees for prayer.

The magic keys were working wonders in the Kristy household. They want to work the same for you, boys and girls. Try them!

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February, 1969

Story 2

THE SWEET PEA FAMILY

Jackie stumbled noisily up the porch steps and slammed the door loudly behind him. The two kittens, Kippie and Tippie, twitched their furry ears nervously then took off on a mad run down the porch steps to the big tangly hedge bushes where they knew Jackie would never find them. Too many times they had been innocent victims of his foul moods. Whenever Jackie came near they ran and hid. They loved Tommy. But Jackie... well, he was something else!

Perhaps they hadn't been in the world as long as their pretty mother, but they had learned plenty in the three months they had been here. One thing sure, they learned that there was as much difference between Jackie and Tommy as daylight was from darkness.

Even Bossie the milk cow noticed the difference. She loved for Tommy to milk her. Always, he sang sweet songs about Jesus and Heaven while milking and he even stroked her reddish-brown back every now and then as he worked. Tommy was kindness and goodness through and through. It made Bossie feel like she wanted to give milk and milk and more milk to the boy who always had songs and a kind word for her ears . . . a word of praise and thanks for the good milk she gave.

Jackie was different... terribly different. Bossie was scared of him! If she twitched her tail to chase a fly from her back Jackie took the milk stool and pounded it soundly across her poor ribs or back, causing her much pain for many days after. Jackie's heart was bad and wicked. No one knew this better than Bossie and the kittens!

"Where's my bat?" Jackie bellowed crossly, feeling all mean and hateful inside.

"It's where you put it last," Mother answered sweetly.

"Get my bat!" he ordered Tommy.

"Jackie!" Mother's voice was stern as she took hold of his shoulders. "March to the nearest kitchen chair and lay across it. You and I have some pretty important business to take care of. We don't bang doors around this house and we don't talk like you've been talking."

Very skillfully and deftly mother applied the thin, lithe willow switch to a place of great effectiveness across Jackie. "Now go to your room, Son, and stay there until I call you," she ordered.

Obediently the boy hurried to his room, marveling over how well mother could bring a fellow down to size. Jackie was hurting from more than just wounded pride! Yes, Sir!

He threw himself across the bed and was soon fast asleep and dreaming. In his dream he skipped alongside of the happiest, merriest kind of stream ever. He could see all the way to the bottom, so clear was the shining water. Little minnows darted about happily in every direction, playing peacefully together. At length a big monster of a fish swam into the happy minnows. Frightened, they scattered like quick-silver and soon disappeared completely from sight.

The big fish glared at Jackie. His eyes, like magnets, bade Jackie follow him. On and on the fish swam and a strange kind of force pulled Jackie right along on the water's bank. Almost without warning the powerful fish halted.

Jackie halted too . . . at the very edge of a terrible looking tangled forest.

"Get out of my way!" A gruff voice shouted to a half-starved, crippled dog. "Get out of my way!" The voice bellowed again. The dog fled as quickly as he could on his crippled legs. His tail was pinched tightly between his poor legs.

"Stop swinging your tail!" The wicked voice shouted mercilessly at a cow that looked for the world like Bossie. "STOP IT!" the voice commanded as the heavy milk stool fell over the poor cow's back, cracking her ribs. It sounded like falling timber to Jackie. He started to protest and tried to run but the eyes of the big fish kept him glued to the spot.

"This is the 'Land Of Confusion And Strife,' a voice called from somewhere deep inside the tangled forest. "Troublemakers, peacehaters and the wicked dwell here. Come in. You are welcome. Your nature will make you feel right at home. Come in, lad!"

"Please!" Jackie begged. "Don't keep me here."

Quickly the big fish turned and swam downstream. Jackie followed. They turned from the main stream and followed a happy, ripply, singing brook into a peaceful meadow. Wild flowers of every description and color bloomed and blossomed in the thick velvetygreen grass. So far as Jackie's eyes could see, the hillsides and valleys were covered with the fragrant beauties.

He felt tired, terribly tired. He threw his body down upon the thick, green, flower-perfumed grass and was soon surrounded by a group of the happiest looking children he had ever seen. Some were singing, others were laughing melodiously and still others were waving palm branches and doing nothing but praising. He felt terribly out of place here.

"Wh... where am I?" he asked, terror stricken, as the happy group drew nearer to him.

"You are in 'Peaceful Valley' ", a little girl answered.

"Everybody speaks kindly here," another said, her face like that of an angel.

"Wh . . . where did you come from?" Jackie asked roughly, trying to run.

"Come from?" and the little girl laughed softly again. "We are the Sweet Pea Family. We belong in 'Peaceful Valley.' A Great King gave us this valley for our inheritance."

"Ga... gave it to you?" Jackie stuttered, looking anxiously about him.

"We had to be obedient to inherit this wonderful valley," a gentle voice informed him.

"Obedient? I thought you said a King gave you this valley for your inheritance. Some inheritance, I'd say!" Jackie retorted sharply.

"It is all too apparent that you have not learned the lessons The King is trying to teach you!" one exclaimed sadly. "And 'tis a shame, toe, when it is sheer delight to do His commands!" She shook her head sadly.

"This Valley is made for a special people . . . a peculiar people, really," a pleasant voice said. "All who are here have repented of their sins and made full restitution for them. I am Peace. I entered this Valley and received my new name simultaneously the night I was converted."

"I am Praise!" another happylooking being exclaimed joyfully. "I too entered Peaceful Valley and had my name changed the morning I got saved in the campmeeting. My soul will bless the Lord at all times; His praise shall continually be in my mouth." Waving the palm fronds joyously, she continued praising.

"Get me out of here! Get me out!" Jackie exclaimed. "I feel all out of place here."

"Later, Jackie! Later you may go," another voice said, drawing" near to him and peering intently into his face. "If you could only know the joys you are missing. Tongue can never begin to tell what our heart knows and feels. I am Purity. After conversion we all sought and found God in sanctifying power. At this time the blessed Holy Ghost filled us entirely with His sweet, pure Presence. There is naught but Divine Love in the Valley of our inheritance. Ours is a world akin to Heaven."

"That's why I feel out of place," Jackie said, surveying the happy beings around him. "Do you suppose I can change? Ever? Or is it too late for me?" he asked, as great tears spilled down his face.

"Of course you can change!" And two other delightful looking beings commanded his attention now. "I am prayer and this is my sister Promise."

"If we confess our sins He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness," Promise quoted eagerly, excitedly.

"Seek the Lord while He may be found," Prayer invited tenderly.

"Oh, God! Come in!" Jackie screamed, awaking himself.

"Trouble, Jackie?" and Mother was bending over him.

"Let's pray, Mother. I'm going to be different. I want 'Peaceful Valley' for my inheritance from The King."

Mother didn't understand about Peaceful Valley, but then, that didn't matter. She knew Jackie meant business and that was all that mattered. Together they prayed until Heaven met earth and Jackie's sins went rolling so far away from him until he never again saw them. He had entered 'Peaceful Valley'. He sought after and obtained entire sanctification. He knew the language now of the inhabitants of this blissful and wonderful Valley. Even Bossie noticed the radical change. She liked to hear Jackie sing, "What A Wonderful Change In My Heart Has Been Wrought." No one knew better than Bossie and the two kittens that he was different! It was a great and wonderful feeling.

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March, 1969

Story 3

THE FATE OF THE REDWING BLACKBIRD

It was such a little thing . . . just a very little thing... Cindy thought, and after all, so long as one didn't get caught what did it matter?

With one swoop of her hand she had it! Making sure that no one saw her -- absolutely no one -- she thrust the pen deep into her jumper pocket. In her haste she knocked the bud vase off Miss Shafer's desk, shattering it to tiny pieces. She rushed out of the room without looking back.

"Hey, Cindy, where are you going in such a mad rush?" and Susie hurried up beside Cindy. "Can you ever run! Can you!" Susie exclaimed, panting for breath.

"Going? Oh! I . . . er.. " Cindy didn't know what to say.

"Let's eat our lunch outside today," Susie proposed. "Miss Shafer said it would be all right so long as we don't toss paper on the ground."

"Lunch? Oh! Yes . . ." Cindy had forgotten all about lunch. She didn't even feel hungry. Strange too, but all of a sudden that pen didn't even seem nice anymore. It seemed hot and sort of burny there in her pocket. Cindy felt like crying. She was too miserable to talk.

"Coming?" Susie asked, breaking in upon her thoughts.

"Cindy Hollowell! What's the matter with you?" Susie was almost in tears "You haven't been paying one bit of attention to what I've said."

"I . . . er..," Cindy stuttered, "Of course I'll eat with you Let's go" and away she ran for the maple tree along River Front.

"This is fun," Susie said, laughing gayly and eating her second sandwich with relish. "I was hungry."

"It tastes better outside," Cindy admitted, tossing some of the bread crust into the street.

"Aren't you glad we came?" Susie asked.

"Of course I'm 'glad," Cindy laughed.

"Oh, Cindy, look!" Susie was nearly hysterical over a red-wing blackbird that was eating hungrily of the bread tossed into the street. "That car's going to hit him if he doesn't fly away. FLY!" she hollered. "FLY AWAY!"

"Shoo!" the girls screamed together. "You'll be killed! There's a car coming!"

The car kept coming, faster and faster; still the bird stood his ground.., eating, eating. He would get every single crumb! The car was nearly upon him now. Sensing the predicament he was in, the bird raised his wings to fly. But alas! The car hit him, smashing him to the ground. He rolled over a few times then lay still very, very still and silent.

Susie was crying. Cindy was white.

"Let's dig a hole and . . . and . . . bury him," Susie said, as she looked at the upturned feet of the bird on River Front. "What if he has babies to feed!" Another shower of tears started falling.

Cindy was very silent. She was crying too, but for a different reason than Susie.

"Will you help me to bury him?" Susie asked, going to the road and wrapping the dead bird neatly in her white paper napkin.

"I . . . I'll help." Cindy's voice could hardly be heard.

With loving hands the girls laid the red winged blackbird in the shallow grave they had dug beneath the maple tree. The gravesite was marked carefully with a big gray stone.

"Here lies REDWING," Susie said, reading a mental obituary to the deceased bird, "He would rather have had bread, than to have resisted temptation and fled; and now, yes, now he is dead!"

"Stop it, Susie! Stop it!" Cindy screamed. "I can't stand it! I can't!" and she ran toward Miss Shafer's room as fast as she could go.

"What's the matter?" Susie asked, following.

"I've been just like Redwing; I yielded to temptation and I . . . I . . . feel awful. It will kill me, just like it killed Redwing. Oh, Susie this is awful! I . . . I sinned!"

"Why, Cynthia Hollowell, have you lost your mind? Are you sure you're all right?" Susie was scared now.

"I'm quite all right, Susie; but I'll be much more all right when I see Miss Shafer and tell her I stole her pen and I broke her vase and . . ." Away she ran.

"Miss Shafer! Miss Shafer," she began, rushing up to her teacher, "forgive me. I stole your pen a little while ago and I knocked your bud vase down and broke it, too. Oh, forgive me and pray for me. I never did anything like this before and I'll never, never do it again. NEVER! I'm truly sorry." Cindy pulled the pen out of her jumper pocket and gave it to her teacher. Immediately that hot burny feeling left her. "I'll pay for the Vase," she said, crying.

"I'll be happy to pray with you right now, Cindy," Miss Shafer said, putting an arm around Cindy's waist. "It seems like it won't be a hard thing to do," she added.

As the bell rang for classes to resume, a new kind of bell rang in Cindy's heart . . she belonged to Jesus now, and the bells of Heaven started ringing in her soul. O, she was so happy! And she felt so good-- her condemnation was all gone!

* * * * *

April, 1969

Story 4-a

THE MYSTERY OF THE SCARECROW

PART I

"Billy is a scaredy cat! Billy is a scaredy cat! Billy is a . . ." The voice slowly faded away.

Billy kept walking . . . faster and faster. Something was wrong, terribly wrong. He knew this. "Old Raggedy," as he had called the scarecrow he and his dad had made, was different. His belly today was fat and pudgy and round instead of slender and slim and Billy was sure he saw a second pair of shoes . . . and they moved! Old Raggedy had only one pair. Where had the other pair come

from? Maybe that story Uncle Robb had told him about a scarecrow that suddenly came alive was true!

Billy looked quickly toward the strawberry field where Old Raggedy stood, his corn husk hands fluttering gently in the breeze. "If only father were here!" he mused silently, forgetting the sting in Larry Blantworth's accusing words about him being a "scaredy cat." Larry hung around the strawberry patch a lot lately, Billy remembered suddenly. One thing sure, father and mother had counted heavily on that strawberry crop and he would have to protect it regardless!

"Any berries today?" Beth asked, as Billy came through the yard gate.

"Not enough to pick", Billy answered, not daring to mention Old Raggedy's bloated form and two pairs of shoes he avoided Beth's eyes.

"But father said we should have a great abundance by this time," and Beth looked troubled.

"I can't understand it, either," Billy answered, still avoiding his oldest sister's eyes. Beth had a sixth-sense just like mother, he thought.

"You're sure the birds aren't eating them?" Each day Beth asked the same question.

"I'm sure," Billy answered. "Positive!"

"Oh, Billy, what will we do when father and mother come home and we haven't sold even one quart of those berries? Father made that big missionary pledge and he was counting on the berries to help pay it. Mrs. Conoway called again today. She asked when her thirty-six quarts will be ready for her to freeze and make into preserves. She wants really ripe ones for the preserves. Mr. Johns called too; said Mamie wanted at least forty-eight quarts this year. Seeing as how daddy and mother always give such good measure, plus choice berries, it looks like we're not going to have enough to supply all the neighbor's needs."

"I . . . I . . . wish father"

"Yes, I wish he and mother wouldn't have had to leave, either," Beth interrupted, "but grandmother's awfully ill and they had to go, Billy. They entrusted things into our hands, We can't fail them, Billy; we can't! Someway, there is a solution."

"You're right!" Billy said, standing as straight and tall as his ten years would permit, "the Lord has the solution! He can show us what's happening, if anything. But I'm sure of one thing, the birds aren't getting those berries. He turned and walked toward the barn.

The haymow was as good a place as any to pray, and hadn't his father often resorted there to pray when he had problems that needed solving? Or burdens that needed lifted?

Praying sure made a difference! Billy found that the problem which had looked so big and black and hard became suddenly small when placed in God's hands.

He ate supper hungrily. Beth sure could cook . . . almost as good as mother. And Sue's rhubarb pie! Well, it just melted right on the tip of a fellow's tongue and: did nothing but call for more and still more! Sometimes Billy had wished he had an older brother to cling to and to confide in, but tonight he was extremely thankful to God for his five older sisters. They sure were good sisters . . . even if they did tease him about his red hair and freckled face. He had seconds of everything -- including Sue's pie!

It was after family worship, when his sisters had all settled down for the night, that Billy tiptoed quietly downstairs. He was sure the Lord had shown him what to do and he was willing to try it. If only the back door wouldn't squeak too loudly now! Carefully he turned the knob and very, very carefully he opened the door. The tiniest, faintest squeak was heard and then all was total silence.

He stood on the porch for a while, listening. All was peaceful and quiet within the house. His sisters hadn't heard him. Now for the strawberry field!

His moccasined feet darted swiftly through the meadow. How pleasant and refreshing it all was. The air was fragrant and pungent with the smell of cut alfalfa from Hiram Henshaw's farm. Billy had watched them bale it that very day. He wished desperately he were older so he could cut his father's crop and have it put away by the time his parents returned home.

He entered the corn field and ran gingerly down the long rows to the very edge where the cornfield met the strawberry field. He sat down and waited, wishing for the world that he had brought Kohli the German Shepherd, with him.

A big round moon was riding lazily across the heavens. It spread a shimmery looking quilt over the meadow and valley and bathed Old Raggedy in an almost luminous kind of light. He waved his raggedy, rusty corn husk hands as if to welcome Billy and, of all things! Old Raggedy was sleek and trim looking tonight!

Just exactly like Billy and his father had made him!

This was indeed mysterious! Billy was certain of one thing . . . he would solve this mystery. Those berries belonged to the Lord. He would wait!

WHAT WILL HAPPEN? SEE CHAPTER II NEXT MONTH.

* * * * *

May, 1969

Story 4-b

THE MYSTERY OF THE SCARECROW

Chapter 2

Billy sat cross-legged on the ground between two rows of corn. Oh! It was wonderful to be alone. He never realized that the night had so many eyes and sounds. He listened to the soft chirping sound of the crickets. They made him too sleepy. Quickly he drew himself alert. He hadn't come to the field to sleep! He must watch and listen.

A screech owl landed on one of the big oak trees in the meadow and let out an unearthly scream. It sent funny shivers and chills racing up and down Billy's spinal column. He knew he wouldn't go to sleep now! But those chills were only momentary. Billy knew that the little screech owl was out searching for his supper and would never, never harm him . . . not a bit more than the big hoot owl who was sitting in the walnut tree near the farm house asking, "Who-o? Who-o-o? Who-o? Who-o-o-?" in a big, deep, bass voice.

God made the night just like He had made the day and Billy had learned to love the night. Often, his father would take him out at night and together they watched the moon and stars and just sat and listened to the many wonderful night sounds.

A light footfall made Billy forget all the wonderful night sounds. He sat erect, his eyes straining to pick out the object of the sound he had heard. He saw a tall man enter the strawberry field. Rufus Billingsby! Billy recognized him immediately. Suddenly Billy remembered. Rufus probably couldn't sleep again. He was out walking, trying desperately to tire his body enough to induce sleep. Rufus was not the answer to the mystery. No, sir! Billy's father had told him, on one of their nights out, how poor Rufus would have to walk for two hours at times before he could go to sleep and he was a farmer too! Seemed like Ruffus never would get over his little girl's death. Billy felt suddenly sorry for the neighboring farmer and sent up a fervent prayer for his bodily healing. The Billingsbys were good neighbors.

Slowly the night wore away. Billy felt like his eyes just wouldn't stay open another minute. He looked at the moon; it was making a slow, lazy descent into the western sky. This made him sleepier than ever. He tried to pray quietly; next he began quoting some of the Scripture verses he had learned around the family altar. He must watch . . . and wait! He felt sure the Lord had shown him to do this! "Help me now, dear Lord," he prayed softly, "and don't let me fall to sleep."

"Hey, Tub, let's get the east end this morning." It was Larry's voice, half-muted but unmistakably clear.

Billy was suddenly wide awake . . . alert. The boys were coming toward him!

"Yeah," Tub answered. "This is a cinch, Larry. I never made easier money . . . never. These berries are beauties and sell faster than we can pick them."

"The people buy them like hot cakes," Larry admitted, coming closer. "And are you ever doing a good job of scaring Billy! Are you ever! You're big enough to fill that scarecrow out perfectly big and full and round." And Larry doubled over with laughter.

"If the old folks don't come home for awhile yet we should have enough spending money to last us quite a spell," Tub said gaily, "And I hear these berries were to pay off some foreign mission pledge Billy's dad made!" he mocked. "What would the Crowders think if they knew their precious berry money was buying cheap paper backs, cigarettes, cards and . . ."

"What will the Crowders think?" Billy asked, rushing toward the boys. "I'll let you answer that question yourself., to Somebody bigger than you and I."

"Wh . . . what . . . where did you . . .?" and away Larry ran. Desperately, Tub tried to keep pace with his friend.

From seemingly nowhere, Kohli darted out of the cornfield after Larry.

"Get him off reel Get him off!" Larry screamed.

"Kohli! Kohli, come here, boy!" Billy commanded.

Obediently the German Shepherd raced to his young master's side. Seeing Tub trying for a hasty retreat he raced angrily after the fat boy

"Help! Help!" Tub screamed, "He'll kill me!" Puffing furiously, Tub fell flat on his face. "I'll never do it again! Never!" he promised.

Billy rushed over to Tub and pulled Kohli away from him. Kohli growled a low, deep, threatening growl as he stood by Billy, watching every move each of the boys made.

"You've been stealing," Billy began, "and no thieves can ever enter Heaven. You know this."

Tub's and Larry's faces were ashen white:

"Wh . . . what are you going to do with us?" Tub asked, afraid.

"How many berries have you sold?" Billy asked.

"A . . . a lot," Larry confessed, never once taking his eyes off Kohli.

"First off, you're both going with us to Sunday School and Church every Sunday. This is what the sheriff would make you do if he had caught you. I'll tell him everything if you miss so much as one single Sunday!" Billy threatened. He meant it, too.

"Aw, now, Billy!" Tub pleaded. "That's not fair. You know Larry and I aren't church minded."

"You will be!" Billy exclaimed, "Take your choice . . . either to church with us or to the sheriff's office today. No sin goes unpunished when the law finds it out. God works the same way:

"The wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." he quoted. "Take your pick . . . church or the sheriff's office?"

"Well, O. K." Larry said, sounding trapped. "We'll go to church."

"Good." Billy said. "Now, the next thing you do is help us pick every berry. This will help father to pay his missionary pledge."

"Aw, Bill! Have a heart!" Tub was sweating now.

"I do have a heart," Billy said, grown-up like. "We're expecting my folks home any day now and they will be real happy to know we have a few berry pickers."

"Aw, Bill . . . please!" Tub begged. "It's hard for me to stoop that long."

"See you both this time tomorrow morning, Lord willing," Billy said. "There'll be plenty of berries to pick by then. Goodbye for now. I better hurry home and have some breakfast. My sisters will be worried if I don't show up at the table."

Billy stood for a brief moment, watching. Slowly Tub and Larry started homeward, their heads down.

"Thanks, Pal," Billy said, reaching down and stroking Kohli's head affectionately. "Thanks for coming when I needed you most," he whispered softly into the dog's ear. "You're a good dog! The mystery of the fat scarecrow has been solved."

Billy walked briskly homeward. Old Raggedy waved his rustly corn husk hands as if to say, "Thank you, Billy. Hurry back to me."

* * * * *

June, 1969

Story 5-a
MARY AND THE PUPPETS

Chapter 1

"Oh! Mary Jane, I'm all excited: I'm going to Vacation Bible School!" Jill exclaimed across the picket fence that separated her and her little friend. "Could you go along with me? We'll learn all about Jesus and make beautiful things, too."

"I asked Mother yesterday and she said I may go with you," Mary Jane answered. "I was just waiting for you to ask me. I really want to go."

"That's wonderful, Mary Jane. It starts in an hour. I'll be over as soon as Mother brushes my hair. We'll go together," and Jill ran across the lawn to her back door, her long honey-blond hair blowing gently behind her.

"Mary Jane may go, Mother! She may go!" Jill was nearly breathless with excitement. "Maybe her father and mother will get saved now."

"We'll have to pray for Mary Jane to open her heart to Jesus," Mother said, brushing the silken hair of her daughter. "If she gets saved and lives for Jesus her parents will get hungry for salvation, too. Many a child has led his father and mother to Jesus . . . including my darling Jill,"

Mother hugged her little girl soundly, remembering how she had felt when Jill came home from church that Sunday morning exclaiming happily, "I got saved today, Mother. It's wonderful to have Jesus living in my heart!" It all had happened in Mrs. Horne's Sunday School class. From then on, both mother and father were smitten down with Holy Ghost conviction. They began taking Jill instead of sending her. The third Sunday they attended they were genuinely converted. Their home had been different from then on.

Mother watched as Jill walked through the gate that separated Mary Jane's yard from theirs. Tears of happiness trickled down her cheeks as she saw Jill walk proudly down the street holding Mary Jane's hand. Mary's hair was as black as Jill's was blonde, as short as Jill's was long. What a contrast, she thought, breathing a prayer heavenward for the salvation of Mary Jane's soul.

Everything was new and strange to Mary Jane at Vacation Bible School. Jill lingered protectingly near her little friend. When the group began singing the beautiful Bible choruses and making the motions to them Mary Jane forgot all about her shyness. This was great. She wondered why she hadn't been allowed to attend before this.

As the large group divided and went to their different classes Jill took Mary Jane's hand. "You will go with me to my class," she said proudly. "And you'll like Mrs. Horne. She's a wonderful teacher. I told her many nice things about you. She's expecting you."

Jill introduced Mary Jane to Mrs. Horne. "Aren't we glad to have Mary Jane with us today?" Mrs. Horne asked the class.

The children chorused a happy "Yes."

"Jill told me a lot about you, Mary Jane. I'm certainly happy to have you here," Mrs. Horne added. "We'll get right into the lesson for today," she said. "I have something very special for you every single day of this week."

Mrs. Horne took something from a big box.

"Puppets!" the children exclaimed with glad surprise.

"That's right," Mrs. Horne said smiling. "Today's lesson is called, 'Who Pulls Your Strings?' or 'Whose Orders Do You Obey?'" and she lifted a pretty little boy puppet out of the box. Next she took a funny looking little mouse creature out. Each had a lot of strings attached to their little body. She fastened everything in its proper place as she prepared for the lesson.

"What does sin do to us?" she asked securing the last bit of string in place.

"It hurts us," a little girl said.

"It does that, Marie, and a whole lot more," Mrs. Horne said, standing tall and facing her class of alert scholars.

"It destroys us," Jill answered.

"That is right, Jill. The Bible says, 'Sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.' This is Jamie, girls," she said, working the little boy puppet. How happy he looked as he skipped across the brown cardboard stage into a cardboard grocery store!

"Jamie is sent to the store by his mother," Mrs. Home explained. "Mr. Perkins, the owner of the store had to go to the back room for some supplies. Jamie sees all the penny candy on the counter top. His mouth waters but he knows it would be sinning if he stole any, so he walks away from the temptation," and Mrs. Home maneuvered the strings and Jamie away from the counter top, over near the door.

Suddenly, mincing ever so lightly and almost politely before him, the funny looking creature mouse tripped over to Jamie.

"Aw! Go ahead. Take that licorice, Jamie." He said. "Just once won't hurt you." The little creature cast a hurried look toward the storeroom where Mr. Perkins was. "Mr. Perkins won't see you. What's more, he won't ever miss just one piece of candy!" Mrs. Home's voice sounded scary as she talked for the mouse.

Quickly Jamie hurried back to the counter top and snatched not one but three pieces of candy from the counter and stuffed them into his baggy little pockets.

The girls were aghast with fear as he did it, but the little creature mouse jumped up and down with delight as Jamie obeyed his voice. Mrs. Home had him jumping with glee and holding his sides with laughter.

"Jamie got the things mother sent him after," Mrs. Horne said, "but he had a problem: What would mother say if she saw the candy?" I know, Jamie said, "I'll sit down under this tree and eat the candy before I get home. Yes, Sir! Mother will never know that way." Down the cardboard sidewalk Jamie's flimsy little legs wobbled to a big shady tree. He sat down under it.

"Where's the tempter now?" one of the girls asked.

"He's very, very near, Patricia," Mrs. Horne replied. "Watch and see."

Sure enough, the tempter was peeking his bold little face around the tree..., almost at Jamie's little head!

"He looks like he's satisfied with what he sees," Jill said sadly, wanting ever so badly to shout to Jamie to run, run, run, and not look back . . . ever!

Jamie was getting to his feet. With one hand he wiped the sticky candy from his mouth.

"Where have you been so long, Jamie?" his mother asked.

"Long! Oh! I sat down under a big tree, Mother."

"But where did you get money for licorice, Jamie?" his mother asked, seeing the telltale black all around his mouth.

"Licorice! Oh, that! I I . . . " all Jamie could do was stutter.

"There's the tempter again!" Mary Jane exclaimed aloud, sitting on the very edge of her seat.

"Tell the truth, Jamie! Tell the truth!" Jill exclaimed, clasping her hands tightly together

WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO JAMIE NEXT?

'See next month's issue for "Mary And the Puppets"

* * * * *

July, 1969

Story 5-b

MARY AND THE PUPPETS

Chapter 2

"Run, Jamie! Run!" the children called together as the tempter minced and pranced before Jamie.

"Where did you get money for candy, Jamie?" mother asked again.

The tempter gave Jamie a hard push.

"I . . . I found three pennies on the sidewalk," he lied quickly.

The tempter jumped up and down with hellish glee as Jamie told the lie. Jamie was obeying him exactly like he had planned and hoped he'd do. Jamie was going to make one of the best soldiers in the Devil's army if he continued being obedient.

"You found it?"

"Yes, Ma'am. I found it." Jamie was glad his mother hadn't questioned him further. He hurried out to play. His heart felt awfully wicked and funny. But the tempter was happy, happy. Jamie was his slave sure enough. Not only had he stolen candy, he had told two lies and he was only eight years old, too!

"But something wonderful happened in Jamie's life," Mrs. Home said. "God sent a preacher to Jamie's church who preached repentance and confession and restitution of sins," and Mrs. Home fastened a home-made preacher puppet onto some strings. She made the little preacher go quickly to Jamie.

"All who serve the devil," the preacher thundered through Mrs. Horne, "will be eternally lost and burn forever and ever in the regions of the damned. 'For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.' Who is the tempter, girls?"

"The devil," the class chorused. "And if we obey him what does that make us?"

"His slave," several girls answered simultaneously.

"His slave and his servant," Mrs. Home answered. "Jamie became a servant of the devil. Whatever the devil ordered him to do he did and obeyed."

"All liars shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone," the preacher preached fearlessly. "'Thou shalt not steal' is one of the Ten Commandments," he said.

"Poor Jamie! He was guilty. He knew it. God knew it. Two voices bid strongly for Jamie's heart. One Voice was tender and gentle. It urged him to confess his sins and make restitution and so find peace in his heart. The other voice commanded him stubbornly not to repent and confess. Poor Jamie! He was facing a crisis in his life. The whole pattern of his life hinged upon the deciding factor."

"I hope he runs from the devil," June said loudly. "I had to do it one day before I got peace."

"I hope he never listens to him again," Mary Jane said, great tears spilling down her pretty cheeks. "See all the trouble he got Jamie into; and . . . and me, too," she confessed.

"What would you do?" Mrs. Home asked the class. "Unless you confessed your sins and forsook them you're just like Jamie. You're on the road that leads to Hell and eternal damnation and punishment. What will you do with Jesus? And which way will you take?"

"What must I do, Mrs. Home?" It was Mary Jane. "I want to get saved." And she hurried up to the teacher and looked pleadingly into her eyes. "I lied to mother, too. I told her I put my paints and art: book on the closet shelf like she had told me to do, but I shoved them under the bed instead. I'm just like Jamie. I've been listening to the voice of the tempter just like he did. Instead of hanging my clothes on the hangers like mother said I should do I tossed them in a corner of the closet. I've been a disobedient girl. That's sin, isn't it, Mrs. Horne?"

"Yes. Disobedience is sin, Mary Jane. But you can be different."

"I want to be different, Mrs. Home. I do. I don't want to be a sinner. I want to be a Christian like Jill."

"And Jesus died for you, Mary Jane... for your sins. We'll pray for you right now." With those words, Mrs. Horne left Jamie and the little puppet preacher facing each other as she dropped on her knees by Mary Jane.

"I want to get saved, too, Mrs. Horne." It was Patricia. "I took a quarter out of a bank daddy has on their dresser in the bedroom. I'm a thief. I don't want to go to Hell and burn forever and ever," and she knelt beside Mary Jane.

The front filled with unsaved girls who cried and prayed until Jesus came down and washed away their every sin and gave them peace in their hearts.

Mary Jane was so happy! She was laughing and crying and hugging Jill for joy.., all at the same time. "I'm going to tell mother how sorry I am that I lied to her and disobeyed her orders."

"And I'll tell father and mother it was I who took that quarter out of the bank on the dresser," Patricia said, after she had testified to the saving power of Jesus. "This is worth everything!"

"What happened to Jamie?" Mary Jane wanted to know later on. "Did he listen to the voice of the blessed Jesus or to the tempter?"

"Jamie did exactly what you have done . . . he confessed his sins and fully repented of them and got gloriously converted. He ran, with a broken and a contrite heart, into the tender, forgiving arms of Jesus and became a new creature in Christ Jesus. By reading the Bible and praying every day Jamie became a victorious overcomer. No longer did the devil pull the strings of Jamie's life. In Christ he found a new Master."

"Oh! I'm so glad," Jill exclaimed happily.

As Mrs. Horne put Jamie back into the big box the children heaved a sigh of deep relief. Jamie had come out victorious. They could too!

* * * * *

August, 1969

Story 6

HOW RAGS TESTIFIED

Timmy and Jeffrey were friends ... real friends; buddies, too, until something nasty happened . something Jeff knew nothing about, absolutely nothing.

"Hey, Tim!" Jeffrey called from his back yard. "Tim--my!" He waited and waited but no Timmy appeared on the back porch of the Hurliss house. "Ti-m-m-y!" He tried again. "Come over. Let's go to the store together."

"Go to the store with you?" Timmy stuck his head out long enough to say, "I'll never go with you again, Jeffrey Anderson; never; and I'll never play with you, either. So don't expect me."

"But... but, Tim, we're buddies . . . friends!" Jeffrey was in tears, "Whatever has happened to you?"

"What happened? You should be asking!" Tim scolded loudly. "And you profess to be a Christian, too!" he mocked. "Some buddy I am! Marvin told me everything!" he exclaimed, vanishing as quickly as his face had appeared.

Jeffrey hurried inside, too dumbfounded to speak. After awhile he spoke: "I... I'll go to the store for you, Mother, but I'll have to go alone."

"Tim didn't want to go?" and mother was surprised.

"I . . . can't figure out what I did nor what happened," Jeff answered in shocked tones. "Tim said he's never going with me to the store. He said Marvin told him everything. I can't figure out what he meant."

"We'll pray about it, Son," mother said softly. "Now run along to the store and don't worry about it. The Lord will make it all work out for good . . . because you are His boy, Jeffrey."

All the way to the store and back, Jeffrey prayed for Tim. He prayed, too, many days after that. How he missed Timmy's fellowship!

Some days later as Mr. Anderson sat reading the paper, Jeffrey heard his father's low, "Mm-m! Looks like the Hurliss family is having trouble."

"Trouble?" Jeff's mother asked, finishing the supper dishes.

"Yes, trouble. It all seems to be over Rags, too."

"Rags!" Jeffrey exclaimed:. "What happened to Rags? I love him!"

"Seems like some man doesn't share your likes, Jeffrey, says the dog's dangerous, vicious, and"

"But, Father," Jeff broke in, "Rags loves everybody. He wouldn't harm a soul. He's the nicest, friendliest dog in town."

"I hope that can be proven, Son. This man.., a Jake Blankenshift, is charging the Hurliss' with keeping a vicious dog. The case will appear in court tomorrow morning."

"Tomorrow morning!" Jeffrey was in tears. "May I go, daddy? Please? Will you take me? Tim's my buddy and I love him, even though he hasn't been playing with me anymore. He'll need us, daddy; and Rags will need us, too."

"We'll go, Son," Mr. Anderson said. "I'll take you. Both Tim and his father may need us for moral support Rags, too, as you said."

The following morning Jeffrey, dressed in his very best clothes, and his father drove to the courthouse. Very, very soberly Jeffrey entered the spacious stone building. When he saw Mr. Hurliss seated near the judge, his eyes filled with great tears. Timmy and his mother were seated so Jeffrey could see them but they couldn't see him.

A man.., a really big man, with a hard, sour-looking, critical expression on his face stood up. "Your Honor," he began, addressing the judge, "the dog owned by this man and his little boy, is dangerous, and vicious. He's a hazard to the public. I'd like to see that the dog be killed!"

Jeffrey gasped. How could the man tell such an untruth? It was evident . . . very, very evident that the man hated dogs . . . no matter whose dog it happened to be.

The judge, a kindly looking man, looked toward Timmy, then to Timmy's father.

Before he fully realized what he was doing, Jeffrey stood to his feet. "Mr. Judge," he began, his voice full of bravery and courage, "Timmy's my very best friend and Rags is our pal. I know Rags; and I know he wouldn't harm anybody . . . not anybody! Did you ever see Rags, Judge? You should see him! You'd know for sure, then, that Rags is a good dog and not at all vicious."

Timmy's eyes bulged. Suddenly they filled with tears. As Jeffrey sat down Timmy looked at him, then he smiled . . . a big, friendly, wonderful smile that made Jeff feel good and warm all over. He knew for sure that everything was going to be all right now.

The judge spoke, a half-smile playing sweetly across his kindly looking face. "The boy may not be on the witness stand, but he made a good suggestion. Mr. Hurliss, you and your son go home and bring the accused dog to the witness stand . . . we shall allow him to speak for himself. Fair enough, isn't it?" He chuckled softly and his eyes twinkled. All too well he remembered his own carefree boyhood days and the many wonderful times he had romped in the woods and fields with his dog, Rover. How could he accuse another boy's best friend? he wondered.

"Your Honor, I object!" It was the man, Mr. Blankenshift. "Can't you take my word for it? Is it not enough that the owner is present?"

"You are excused, Mr. Hurliss. Go bring the dog," the judge said with authority. "It is only fair that the accused be allowed to speak for himself."

It didn't take long for Timmy and his father to return. At Timmy's side was Rags, wagging his tail happily and looking for the world like he was smiling at everybody in the court-room. Seeing Jeffrey, he bounded happily to him. Jeff hugged the dog's neck and whispered softly into his ear, "Testify for yourself, Rags. Just be natural. The judge is going to like you. I know he is!"

Rags gave Jeff's hand a quick 'understanding-kind-of' lick, then, at the judge's soft, "Here, old boy; come here," he bounded playfully to the judge's side, stopping only long enough to lick the hand of cross Mr. Blankenshift. Wagging his shaggy tail fiercely, happily, from side to side and facing the audience with the friendliest look ever, Rags testified in the only way he knew how to... he was as natural now as he would ever be, and as unconcerned, too.

"Vicious dog!" the judge exclaimed. Looking at the jurors he smiled pleasantly. "The case is dismissed," he said happily.

The court room rang with loud applause and Rags, thinking it as exciting as the ball games the boys played on the vacant lot, ran to every juror, pausing long enough to verify his friendliness with a lick on the hand.

Timmy ran to Jeffrey. "I'm sorry, Jeff . . . truly sorry, that I believed what Marvin told me. I see now that it was all a lie. I'll never, never believe anything bad about anyone else again. Oh, I was so wrong! Forgive me, Jeff. Will you? From now on I'm going to be very, very careful what I listen to and what I believe. And Jeff, I'll be over to play with you . . . after I get things fixed up on the inside -- my heart, I mean. I've got a bad heart. But I want a heart like yours, Jeff . . . all clean and white and pure." Hurrying down the marble steps, he called over his shoulder, "Pray for me Jeff. You, too, Mr. Anderson. You're real peacemakers . . . real friends, too."

Everything was all right again, Jeffrey knew. In fact, it was the way the Lord had wanted it to be... all the time.

* * * * *

September, 1969

Story 7

THE ACID TEST

David hurried into the kitchen, frowning and scowling fiercely. "I'm not going to do it, Mother! I'm just not; that's all there is to it!"

"You're not going to do what, Son?" Mother asked, setting a hot apple pie on a metal trivet to cool for supper.

"Miss Fennstra wants us all to mail Freddy Kearns a 'get-well' card and tell him how much we miss him. Freddy had his tonsils and adenoids taken out," David added, by way of explanation.

"But I'm not going to tell a lie. I don't miss him..., not one bit. In fact, I'm glad he's not in school. We . . ."

"David Cooley! That's not nice at all. Suppose it were you lying in that hospital."

"But it's the truth, Mother. Freddy's a big trouble-maker and he lies terribly on everybody. None of the fellows like him."

"But what does the Bible say about returning good for evil?"

"I can't help it, Mom. That's how we all feel about Freddy."

"The old carnal nature within you makes you feel this way, David." Mother said softly. "I'm praying that you'll ..."

"Oh! Mom, I know I'm saved." David interrupted. "Every last sin has been covered by the blood. I know this. I really don't need anything more. I have perfect peace in my heart."

"But you won't have it very long, David, if you don't get sanctified. Already that feeling towards Freddy is going to trouble you. You do need holiness of heart, dear. It will take out that 'bent-to-sin' nature; and that 'bent-to-backsliding,' too."

David said no more. Donning his battered up, nearly-worn-out old straw hat, he headed for the garage where he was constructing a scooter out of some odds and ends Father had given him. Mother continued her supper preparation, smiling every now and then when she heard the loud 'clank' of a metal tool against the concrete of the garage floor. David was bound to be a handyman just like his father some day, she thought.

It was after supper when Sandy let out with a gasp and an exclamation,: "David Cooley! Whatever have you done with your pants? Look at those legs!" Just let it up to Sandy to notice everything, especially when it involved any work she had to do.

"Well?" David asked. "Just what did I do? Nothing! .Simply nothing! That's what."

"You've ruined a pair of the very newest pants Father bought you; That's what you've done. Why can't you be more careful and stay away from wire and nails or . . . or . . . whatever else could make all those holes in your pants."

"But I wasn't in any nails," David defended. Somehow, Sandy always had a way of irritating him. He felt his peace seeming to shrink or shrivel. Sandy was as fussy over him and his

sisters as a mother hen was over her brood of incapable young and David resented it. She was too, too exacting. Everything had to be just so!

"There's no way in the world I can mend those pants, Mother," Sandy lamented. "Why I'd have to patch Clear up beyond the knees. Look!" she exclaimed in greater excitement. "There's another big hole coming! Just like that! And right before our eyes, too! You'll have to be more careful, David. Why, I'll be darning and patching forever on that one pair. I'll certainly be glad when Jenny's old enough to do the mending."

"I guess I like scrubbing the wash house after you and Sally have done the week's washing and left the place in one grand mess!" David retorted.

"Hush!" Father ordered. "Each of you will continue with His special assigned household duties without further comment."

Father looked at David's pants for a long while. Examining the holes he asked, "Where were you working? What were you doing?"

"Putting the scooter together in the garage, Dad. That's all."

"I guess I'm to blame for this," Mr. Cooley admitted thoughtfully:

"No, you're not! Dad." David declared emphatically. "You never even touched me till now."

"Maybe not. But I left that old car battery in the garage: Right over where you're working on that scooter, too. I forgot to take it away when I put the new battery in. That's battery acid on your pants: See? Even the seat of your pants is being eaten out. You must have sat On the battery."

"I sat on something that was just the right height for me to work from," David said, innocently.

"Mother," father said, "You'd better get the pants off the boy and see to it that he takes a good bath. These clothes are full of acid. They'll soon be eaten off his body. Don't allow the clothes to touch anything else."

David turned pale and hurried to the bathroom. "But, Mother," he said, taking the once long pants that were now next to nothing, off his body and handing them carefully to her, "there's not a bit of noise nor any warning when another new hole appears. It's so silent and eats so unnoticed, doesn't it?"

"It's exactly like the ugly, subtle carnal nature in your heart,

"It... it is?" David gulped.

"Every bit the same. Carnality's a poison acid that will either be killed and eradicated by the Holy Ghost or it will kill the believer eventually. It's even more subtle than this acid. We can see the results of acid upon your clothes, whereas carnality eats like a cankersore within. It may even play opossum and deceive the newly-converted heart for a time; but when it manifests itself it's dreadful, fierce, and dangerous... and deadly! Unless we get rid of carnality, carnality will get rid of us. That's the thing makes you feel you don't want to mail Freddy a card, You don't need to lie, David: Just mail him a nice 'getwell' card and tell him you're praying for him and hope he's not suffering badly."

"I... I . . . believe I finally see what you mean, Mom. Can I get sanctified now., before I get my bath, even?"

"There's nothing more important, David. So we'll put first things first." And they did. How David did pray and ask God to burn out all the old deadly carnal nature! And God did it!

It was a sanctified David -- a clean David -- out of whose heart all the poison acid of carnality had been removed through the blessed Holy Spirit, that washed all the battery acid from his body then sat down at Father's desk and wrote Freddy a long letter of compassion and genuine love, adding, "I'm going to bring all my Sunday school papers over to the house when you get home and read them to you. I have some real nice picture cards you may look at, too until you get well. I love you and I'm praying for you. David Cooley."

As he sealed the envelope containing the 'get-well' card and the letter, David's heart felt wonderful. He had made it... he passed the acid test -- with love! He knew the Lord Jesus was smiling upon him!

* * * * *

October, 1969

Story 8

THE SECRET OF THE BIG STRIPED SQUASH

"It's awful, Mother! Simply awful! There's not the sign of a single pecan left in the garage. Somebody around this house is a thief! I think I know who it is, too," and Marilyn cast an accusing glance at her eight-year-old brother as she settled herself on a kitchen chair and cried.

"But I didn't do it, Mother," Peter defended, lisping pitifully with three of his front teeth out. "Honest, I didn't!"

"Who else would take them?" Marilyn demanded.

"I . . . I don't know, Marilyn, but I know I didn't."

"Just remember, Peter Devon, there'll be no nuts for cookies and candy this Thanksgiving and Christmas unless you tell me where you put them. Aunt Marie put forth a special effort to see

that those nuts were mailed here from the South in plenty of time for our Thanksgiving and Christmas cookies. She knows how high-priced they are up here and there won't be another box until next year again."

Peter stood suddenly upright. "But I tell you, I (didn't do anything to the nuts . . . absolutely nothing. I don't know where they are nor who took them." He was lisping worse now . . . he always did when he got excited. Oh, it would be good to have all his teeth back in his head again, he thought. He reached his index finger up to his mouth and felt impatiently of the two new teeth he knew were there. At least he would have two . . . that would help matters some until the third came through!

"No arguing, children." Mother spoke with authority. "Ours is a Christian home. Since Jesus is a constant guest at our house we speak only what is pleasing to Him."

"But I didn't take the nuts, Mother, and I didn't hide them, either -- much less steal them, as Marilyn accused."

"It's dreadfully wrong to have evil surmises, Marilyn," mother warned softly.

"But Peter's so full of boyish pranks," the girl defended.

"Pranks, yes: but not a thief," Peter said softly, wounded in heart. "I love Jesus too much to sin."

"Go out and clean the garage, Marilyn," mother said. "Sweep the corners well and get things tidied up out there. This is the day for that and the work will get your mind off your evil thoughts, honey."

Marilyn put an old coat on and started for the dusty garage. How she did hate the job! What a blessing when Peter was old enough to do the nasty thing, she thought. After all, something so dusty and dirty wasn't meant for dainty girls to do! Boys should have to do all such jobs! Her thoughts were almost as ugly as the job and Jesus, Who knows every secret thought that goes through our mind, was painfully grieved to think that Marilyn had such hateful thoughts toward her brother.

Marilyn swept furiously, stirring up a cloud of dust.

"I'll sprinkle a little water on the concrete." It was Peter. His heart of love felt nothing but pity for his oldest sister. He plopped his old, nearly-worn-out red hat on his little round head and began sprinkling. "This will settle the dust," he lisped, with a smile.

In spite of her resentment, Marilyn's heart was warmed. She smiled at her brother. He wasn't so bad after all! "Thanks, Peter," she said, "that really helps. My hair's going to be a mess from this dust."

"I know what," Peter said, a bright idea popping suddenly into his generous heart, "I'll sweep. Mother wants things tidied up a bit and girls are so much better at that than boys. You take care of that; I'll finish sweeping," and he took the proffered broom. "We'll finish in half the time," he said, laughing sweetly.

"You're a doll, Peter."

"You . . . you . . ." Peter stammered, "Do you really mean that, Marilyn?" he blurted out, ecstatic with joy. "I... I... thought you ... hated me."

"Silly boy!" Marilyn exclaimed. "I wouldn't part with you for all the boys in the world."

Peter's face was radiant! He felt good all over. If doing a good deed of kindness for his sister changed her attitude so drastically he would do it more often! He knew Jesus would be very pleased with him! Oh, he felt good.., he was at peace with God . . . and with his sister, too!

He was deep in happy thought when Marilyn's excited voice brought him instantly back to the moment.

"Peter! Peter!" she exclaimed, awe-stricken. Holding a big, green-gray striped squash in her hands she turned it sideways . . . pecans and more pecans began rolling out.

"Our nuts!" Peter exclaimed, as excited as an eight-year-old boy can ever get.

"Can you imagine!" Marilyn repeated over and over.

"How about that! Whoever hid them in there sure had a safe hiding place", and Peter tried vainly to whistle a note of excitement.

"Whatever it is, it hollowed mother's biggest winter squash out and stored as many of the pecans as it could get inside, in there. The other pecans can't be too far. This little furry creature was planning a real feast this winter and I can't deprive him of all the nuts. I'll put most of them back inside. The bulk of nuts are hidden elsewhere. See! Here's nearly a dozen empty shells . . . which proves the little fellow's not been starving since it turned so snowy and cold."

"How about that!" Peter exclaimed again, lispng frightfully again.

Marilyn turned and quickly put the squash in the cupboard where she had found it. Turning to Peter she grasped him by the shoulders, "Forgive me, Peter. I'm sorry I blamed you for something you didn't do. Mother was right about this business of evil surmising. I have been wrong . . . terribly wrong. I need help, Peter .heart help." She turned and started toward the kitchen door. "I'll be back," she said tearfully, "as soon as my heart's all fixed up with the Lord. I want a sweet spirit like you have."

"Take your time," Peter called, "this matter of 'heart trouble' is serious business. Yes, sir! Really serious business. I know I went through it once myself. But it's worth getting it fixed up,

Marilyn. It sure is!" He lisped 'Amazing Grace' joyfully as he got back to sweeping, happy that the mystery was finally being solved.

* * * * *

November, 1969

Story 9

CARRAWAY'S THANKSGIVING

Heidi skipped excitedly around her mother as she opened the letter. "Is it from grandmother?" she asked. "Is it?"

"It's from Aunt Ruth and Uncle Henry, Honey. They're coming down for Thanksgiving. Grandma and Grandpa will be coming with them, too."

"Oh, goody! Goody!" the blonde-haired, blue-eyed girl said, clapping her hands together with glee. "How many days till Thanksgiving, Mother?"

"Five. No more and no less. It's a good thing I baked my fruit cakes when I did."

"And before Daddy got hurt," Heidi injected, her ever-sunny face clouding ever so slightly at thought of her father. "Will Daddy come home for Thanksgiving?" she asked quite suddenly.

"Doctor Parris said not, Honey. He mustn't be moved for weeks yet."

"I miss daddy, Mother."

"We all do, Honey. But the Lord was good to have spared his life."

"Will... will we have turkey?" the girl asked, her voice faltering momentarily.

"I'm afraid not." Mother's face looked a bit worried. "We . . . we'll have to kill Carraway."

Heidi's eyes filled instantly with hot scalding tears that ran down her dear little cheeks in two thin streams. "Not my Carraway, Mother! Not really!" It was a soft little plea for mercy.

"I'm afraid so," Mother replied, turning quickly away from Heidi's look of disbelief and despair. "We have no money for anything else, dear," she added desolately.

"Couldn't we kill one of Carraway's chickens instead?"

"They're not heavy enough for roasting. And besides, they keep us in eggs," mother replied.

"But Carraway lays her egg every single day, too," Heidi defended sweetly.

"I know that, Honey, but Carraway's big, and plump, and fat. She's ideal for stuffing and roasting."

Heidi's bubble of excitement over the approaching relatives burst as quickly as it had formed and her little world came suddenly tumbling down around her. Carraway -- her very own dear Carraway must be sacrificed, and would be served on the enormous bone-white meat platter mother always used for special company! The thought was sickening. A big, hard lump jumped into her throat. She swallowed hard. It just wouldn't be swallowed!

"Mother," she spoke softly, a bright ray of sunshine suddenly injecting itself into her mind by way of a thought, "promise you won't kill Carraway till . . . till ... after I've prayed to Jesus about it for three or four days. Promise, Mother? Please?"

Mother's eyes now filled with tears. She could barely see Heidi's pleading, trusting face. She rushed quickly to the dear little girl whose features were all a blur and folded her closely, tightly to her bosom. "I PROMISE, HONEY! I PROMISE!" she exclaimed. "And I will pray too. Our Heavenly Father knows our needs."

"And HE WILL PROVIDE, MOTHER! If it's got to be Carraway then it's . . ." her voice trailed off in silence. Heidi settled herself on a kitchen chair. "How long have I had Carraway, Mother?"

"She'll be three years old in Spring."

"And she was such a tiny little fuzzy thing when Daddy brought her home for me. Remember how she followed me around like Candytuft used to do when she was a tiny bit of a kitten?"

"I most certainly do remember, Heidi. Carraway has become very, very dear to your heart, hasn't she, Honey?"

Heidi swallowed hard and merely nodded her honey-blond head in assent.

It was the day before Thanksgiving. What a day! All blustery, windy, snowy, and bitter-cold. Carraway was still laying her egg daily and singing her contented chicken song.

"Looks like the lane's drifted shut!" Rob shouted, bounding downstairs in his stocking feet. "Did you see that snow, Mother? It must have really peppered down during the night. I wonder if Uncle Henry and Aunt Ruth will be able to make it!" The thirteen-year-old exclaimed, settling himself at the kitchen table.

"Something smells good!" Bob exclaimed, sliding down the curved stair banister rail and seating himself by his twin. "I'm starved. Say, Morn, what are we having for Thanksgiving? Mr. Miller told me yesterday he has two rabbits for us. I could get them if you wanted me to."

"He said he'd bring them by himself today," Rob explained, pouring syrup over the stack of hot cakes. "I saw him when I was checking fence in the south section last night."

"He's sure a good neighbor," Bob said, as mother set a deep bowl of hot, thick milk gravy on the table.

"The Lord always provides for His own," mother said softly, bowing her head and offering thanks for the food.

Rob and Bob had gone to the barn to do the milking and other chores when Mr. Miller arrived.

"Some day, Mrs. Masters!" he exclaimed, stomping the snow from his boots and stepping inside the door at the woman's invitation. "Thought you might be needin' a few things so Mrs. Miller and I did some shopping for you yesterday. Tucked in a couple of rabbits for the boys. We raised them ourselves. Good, sweet, tender meat in 'em."

As Mr. Miller set the last big box of groceries on the table mother was crying softly, thankfully, saying they could never begin to repay such overwhelming kindness and generosity.

"Oh, I almost forgot," Mr. Miller laughed. "Your tears and thanks overpowered me, Mrs. Masters. I almost left without giving you this." He handed a letter to mother. "The mailman said he couldn't get through to you with the mail since the lane's drifted over tight. Don't worry none about the lane; the boys an' I'll plow it open as soon as the driftin' stops. The hospital called again. Said John's doin' fine. They may get him up in about ten days now. They said to tell you it's somethin' the way he's makin' progress. They can't explain it." Mr. Miller smiled then, his eyes all wet with happy tears. "Well, I'd best be movin'. Promised Bessie I'd help her with some odd chores inside for a change. The children will all be home tomorrow, you know. Happy Thanksgivin' to you, Mrs. Masters and Heidi. Same to those fine twins," he added, hurrying to the sleigh in front of the gate.

"It... it's an answer to prayer, Mama!" Heidi said reverently. "God sent this through Mr. and Mrs. Miller."

Seeing the big hickory-smoked, country-cured ham and pork side mother laid on the table, and the dozens of cans of canned goods, the sugar, flour, and cheese, Heidi fell to her knees by the kitchen chair. Raising her happy glowing face heavenward she began a simple prayer of praise and thanksgiving to her Heavenly Father Who provided so abundantly for them while their dear father was sick and in the hospital. Mother was by her side, praising and thanking too.

When the praise and thanksgiving meeting was over mother remembered the letter she had laid on the cabinet top. It was from Aunt Ruth and Uncle Henry -- an air mail letter!

"Listen to this, Heidi!" mother said, laughing for joy. "Aunt Ruth says she forgot to tell me in the other letter that they were bringing a big turkey, some oranges, cranberries, celery and nuts. She says they'll be in sometime this evening."

"Tonight!" Heidi said, jumping and laughing for joy! "Oh, Mama, I'll never doubt God. Never!" she exclaimed jubilantly. "He's sent meat for us and I still have dear Carraway. Thank You, blessed Jesus!" she said aloud.

"Listen to this, Honey. Aunt Ruth says, 'Please tell Heidi we're bringing Carraway a hundred-pound-sack of chicken feed for her Thanksgiving dinner. Of course she will have to share this with her offspring!'"

"Oh, Mama! God not only provides for us, He also looks out for my dear Carraway and her family of young pullets. It's wonderful, Mama! Wonderful! Instead of us eating Carraway she'll be having a fine Thanksgiving dinner too. I'd better run out and tell her how good my Heavenly Father is and just how thankful she ought to be that He took care of her," and the little girl ran quickly to the closet for her heavy wraps and boots, then hurried out to the hen house to her very special Carraway.

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December, 1969

Story 10

MARY LOU'S CHRISTMAS

Mary Lou sprinkled colored sugar generously over the cookies Mother had cut out for baking.

Making cookies was so much fun, she thought.

"Isn't Christmas wonderful!" she exclaimed, looking into her mother's sweet face.

"Indeed it is, Mary Lou. If Jesus had not been born there never would have been a Calvary or a resurrection."

For a long while Mary Lou was silent. Then she raised her sweet face to her mother. "God and Jesus were so unselfish, Mother. I love Him very, very much and this Christmas I will prove how much I love Him and want to please Him."

"My little girl has always been sweet and unselfish," mother said, patting the long golden curls. "What would you like for Christmas?"

"Could I have anything I want?" Mary Lou's eyes were bright and eager with excitement.

"Mother's very poor, Honey. I can't promise my little girl very much but I'll do what I can for you."

"It doesn't take money for what I want," Mary Lou answered brightly. "I want to do something special on Jesus' birthday."

"Like what?"

"May Ellen stay here with us all of Christmas week?"

"Ellen Peabody?" mother asked, wonder filling her eyes.

"I'd like very much to have her, Mother. She needs love and kind words. Mrs. Pebbles is nasty to her and scolds her all the time and dresses her in the awfulest, raggedy old dresses and worn-out shoes that you've ever seen."

"That's a wonderful idea, Mary Lou," mother congratulated, smiling broadly. "Ellen will love it here and we shall fill her entire week with love and deeds of goodness and kindness."

"Mrs. Pebbles doesn't want her over Christmas, anyway," Mary Lou continued. "Last Friday night, while coming home from school, Mrs. Pebbles told me she wished Ellen had some place to go over Christmas. She said her children and grandchildren were all coming home and she didn't want Ellen and them mingling. I nearly cried. I wish we could keep Ellen for always, Mother."

Mary Lou's mother was silent for a long time. Poor little Ellen deserved a good home. Mrs. Pebbles was doing nothing at all for the child. She had even been brazen enough to admit at one time that the only reason she kept the little girl was because of the monthly check the welfare sent her.

Mary Lou broke in upon her mother's musings. "May I give Ellen the dolly you said you had made for me for Christmas, Mother? This would make me very, very happy and I believe blessed Jesus would be happy if I did it."

"Out of the unselfishness of your heart you may give, Sweetheart."

"We'll say it's from you and me, Mother," and Mary Lou's eyes were aglow with happiness. "Oh! Ellen will be so happy here with us. I wish Daddy could be here, too. But he sees us, doesn't he, Mother?"

"Daddy's very happy in Heaven, Darling," mother answered, bright tears shining in her eyes. "He wouldn't want to come back here to live. His sufferings are all over and I do believe he sees us."

This answer seemed to satisfy the mind of the little girl.

The week before Christmas came quickly. Mary Lou was all a-flutter with unselfish ideas and plans for Ellen. Across the door, in bright bold red letters, a sign read: "WELCOME, ELLEN!"

"I'm glad you're taking the girl," Mrs. Pebbles said softly to Mary Lou's mother as the two came after Ellen. "I wouldn't want my children and grandchildren to play and a...ah!..., er ... associate with one so... so... poor and outcast as she. The child doesn't have decent clothes to put on." Mrs. Pebbles furrowed her brows when she said it.

"We are happy to have Ellen," Mary Lou's mother said softly, wondering what Mrs. Pebbles did with the monthly checks that were sent to clothe Ellen. Wrapping Ellen's thin little body in her arms, she said lovingly, "We love you, Ellen, and we're proud to have you come home with us."

Christmas eve came and went. Oh! How wonderful it all was! The wonderful Christmas story was read and each one prayed before retiring for the night. Ellen thought it was all a great, beautiful dream from which she would suddenly awake and find herself back in Mrs. Pebbles' house. This was too much like Heaven to be real! Mrs. Love treated her just like she treated Mary Lou. She felt like a daughter! What's more, she even helped bake fragrant Christmas cookies and string popcorn and red, red cranberries.

"Wouldn't it be wonderful if we were sisters?" Ellen exclaimed, as she snuggled down beside Mary Lou beneath the warm covers for the night.

"Let's pretend that we are," Mary Lou suggested. "Let's pray about it, Ellen. Mother says that nothing is impossible with God."

"Nothing? Are you sure, Mary Lou?"

"I'm positive, Ellen."

"Then I'm going to tell Jesus about it, Mary Lou."

The following morning the girls were awakened by a soft, sweet voice: "A Blessed Christmas to you, darlings! Get up and dress. I have a lovely surprise waiting for Mary Lou's Christmas for you." Pointing to two lovely velvet dresses hanging on the door knob, mother explained, "The green one's yours, Ellen; the blue is Mary Lou's. Put them on, then come downstairs."

"OH!" was all the girls could say. Rushing out of bed they encircled her in their arms. "I love you so, dear Mother!" Mary Lou exclaimed.

"And I love you, too . . . Mother!" Ellen said shyly, almost afraid to use the word she hadn't been able to use for so many years. But she had prayed, and Mary Lou said that nothing was impossible with God!

"I love my girls," Mrs. Love crooned, hugging them both soundly. "But you'd better hurry. I have a wonderful surprise waiting for you after breakfast."

The girls dressed hastily, then tripped daintily down the long flight of stairs. Ellen's well brushed auburn-colored hair floated gently down the back of the new green velvet dress while Mary Lou's long golden curls danced merrily down the steps with her. They looked like dolls, with their shining eyes and full, round, well-scrubbed faces.

After breakfast mother brought two boxes from their place of hiding. She set one box before each girl.

"Oh-h-h!" Ellen squealed with delight as she hugged the homemade rag doll to her bosom. "Is she really mine?" she wanted to know. "To keep? . . . Forever?"

"She's all yours, dearest Ellen; from Mary Lou and me, as the card says."

"Oh! Mother! One for me, too! But how...? Oh! I love her! I love her! And her dress is just like the dress I have on!" Mary Lou was laughing and crying at the same time now. "Look, Ellen!" she exclaimed, "your dolly's dress is exactly like yours! Oh! Mother, I love you so!"

"And I love my girls," Mother was crying for joy now. "I made you a dolly just like the one you so unselfishly gave to Ellen. But here, this is the best surprise of all." Almost reverently Mrs. Love drew a big brown, important-looking envelope from her apron pocket. "This is to certify," she began reading, "that Ellen Louise Peabody is legally adopted by Mrs. Christian Love and her daughter, Mary Lou. The said child becomes a legal member of this household from this day, Christmas, 1968, forward, to never again be placed in foster homes."

"Do you . . . can I . . . does that mean . . .?" Ellen's eyes were searching, pleading. She was all questions.

"It means that you'll never, never go back to live with Mrs. Pebbles again. You are my girl now. You will be living here with Mary Lou and me. The legal papers are all in this envelope. The judge merely wrote what I read to you as a special Christmas present so two of the dearest little girls in the world could better understand the meaning.:'

Ellen was so happy she was jumping up and down and crying and hugging everybody at the same time. "Remember what you told me last night, Mary Lou? 'With God?' Nothing's impossible with Him! Oh! I thank Him! I thank Him! And I love you, Mother!" It all sounded too wonderful to be true!

"Get into your coats. I hear the church bells ringing. We will start our new life as a family by going to church and worshipping Him together."

Too overcome with emotion, Ellen dropped to her knees by a kitchen chair. "Thank You, dear Jesus," she exclaimed sweetly, heavenward. "Thank You for my mother and my sister. I love You!"

The snow made a loud crunching sound as the three started for the village church. Mrs. Love's grip tightened lovingly about the thin little hand of Ellen on her left and Mary Lou on her right. Truly, this was a BLESSED CHRISTMAS . . . all because of Mary Lou's unselfishness!

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THE END