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CHILDREN'S PAGE STORIES -- 1976

By Mrs. Paul E. King

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Story 1
CHANGE OF HEART

Sally tittered and cupped a hand over her mouth. Joey did it again. He squeaked something dreadful on his clarinet! Why would he ever try to play again, she wondered, after the way he squeaked last Sunday? She'd have been so embarrassed that she would never even think to try again. But not Joey. No sir! He sat with the orchestra and played (kept trying, at least) just like he was an expert on his clarinet. A professional.

She giggled again and nudged Sarah. "Did you hear that?" she asked in a soft whisper. "Joey's squeak, I mean? Wouldn't you think he'd be ashamed? I know I would . . ."

Sarah never answered a single word. She looked straight ahead, just like she hadn't heard a solitary thing Sally had said... A quick sideways glance at her father and mother showed her that they were deeply engrossed in congregational singing and enjoying the service thoroughly.

Sarah lifted her hymn book higher and, wanting to be like Father and Mother, joined in the singing, trying to forget Sally's giggles and her remark. And she did real well..., until Joey squeaked on a high note again!

"Hear it!" Sally exclaimed, giggling (this time more loudly) as she nudged Sarah again.

"Sh-h!" Sarah cautioned discreetly, leaning toward Sally's ear.

"It's funny!" Sally declared. "Oh, if I did that I'd never, never try again. I'd be so-o-o ashamed of myself!"

"Mother said God doesn't expect anything more from us than our very best and I'm sure Joey's doing his best, so I guess God is very pleased with him."

"Well, I'd be ashamed of myself!" Sally declared emphatically.

"That's 'cause you're proud. And God hates pride. It can never enter into Heaven," Sarah declared, whispering ever so softly in Sally's ear.

"What makes you think I'm proud?" the blonde-haired sister asked quickly, anger arising in her heart. "It's just that I'd be ashamed -- making all those horrid squeaks."

"Joey's just learning to play and I think we should be thankful that he's learning. Someday we may be real proud of him."

Sally giggled again; very, very quiet like; but she giggled none-the-less. "I'll never be proud of him," she affirmed stoutly, "and I'm going to Heaven the same as you!" she added as an afterthought.

Sarah looked at Mother and Father again. They were still singing. Very carefully she leaned over toward Sally and whispered, "God had to cast Satan out of Heaven. Remember? That was because of pride..." She let the sentence dangle in seeming mid-air right in front of Sally before she again turned to her hymn book.

Joey Cooper was doing his very best on that clarinet and God was going to reward him someday for trying to labor for Him. One thing was sure, Joey was "dead" to people's opinions of him . . . Sally's included! Sarah was more sure than ever that Joey really got sanctified in their last revival meeting in the church. He had been so proud before... proud of his dark, wavy hair and his fine voice... Joey could sing parts ever since he was four! But something happened to him in the last revival meeting and Sarah was sure it was because he had gotten sanctified wholly. Joe was a perfectionist; and just four months back he would not have thought of squeaking on a new clarinet in front of everybody in the church. But now.., well, Joey's face had a shine all over it. Even when and if he squeaked!

Sarah bowed her head. If only Sally would get sanctified. Oh how different she would be . . . and feel.

Oops! Mother and Father and Sally... and everyone in the church... had sat down! Sarah's face felt hot and flushed. She was in such deep thought that she hadn't even heard when the singing stopped.

Mother glanced her way, but only for a moment. Next she reached over and gave Sarah's hand a warm little squeeze of understanding. Sally stifled a giggle by stuffing a kleenex over her mouth.

Poor Sarah. She felt as if everyone in the whole church was staring right at her. But of course they weren't! She scarcely heard anything the preacher was saying. It was Joey's clarinet that brought her quickly to her senses. Joey was playing a solo! Or at least he was trying to play a solo! He was squeaking "dreadfully," as Sally had phrased it. "My Jesus I Love Thee," Joey's clarinet played sweetly and nicely . . . except for the once in awhile squeak.

It was the shine on Joey's face that caught Sarah's eyes again, Joey was playing from his heart! And what was within his heart was showing up on the outside, namely, Joey's face!

Before Sarah knew what was happening almost, she saw Sally rush from her seat, down the aisle to the altar.

Sally! Of all people, Sally!

Sarah's heart did a big flip-flop of joy. She felt so happy that she could cry. Yes, she did! And suddenly, she found that she wasn't merely crying, she was sobbing! In a single motion, she was out of her seat and kneeling down at the altar beside her sister. "Pray, Sally! Pray!" she encouraged softly, brokenly in the other's ear. "Pray clear through..., like..., like Joey did and..."

Sally turned tear-filled eyes on her sister. "I did, Sarah; and I'm sanctified. Just like Joey! My pride's gone. Every single bit of it is gone. Oh, I feel so good and all clean and pure and..., and Holy within!"

"If ever I've loved Thee, my Jesus, 'tis now." Joey's clarinet finished, with the tiniest hint of a squeak on the next to the last note, but this time Sally didn't giggle ... and she wasn't ashamed of Joe Cooper either. No indeed. In fact she thought he was doing very well for not having his instrument more than a month. What's more, she may just ask her father and mother if she may take piano lessons so she could begin to play for Jesus too. Like Joey!

* * * * *

February, 1976

Story 2

THOU SHALT NOT KILL

LoraLe tossed her long blonde curls saucily over her shoulders and marched quickly to her father's car in the church parking lot.

Why LoraLe, whatever is the matter with you?" Mrs. Erickson asked as her little daughter shut the car door with a loud slam and bang and plopped down on the back seat moodily and all pouty-like.

LoraLe straightened her petite shoulders and sat quickly on the edge of the seat, her hands resting on the back of the front car seat.

"Oh, that Miss Roberts!" she exclaimed, giving her beautiful curls another haughty toss. "She says the stupidest things!"

Mr. Erickson turned and looked hard and long at his daughter. "Careful! Careful!" he warned in a stern tone of voice. "No little girl shall ever be allowed to criticize! Not anybody/And that includes Miss Roberts!"

LoraLe pursed her lips in a sort of pout. "Well, it isn't fair. It isn't! And then Reverend Brinkley picked it up and said almost the very same thing Miss Roberts said. He did!"

"Hush!" Mr. Erickson ordered. "Our pastor is a wonderful man of God. He gets his messages from God and I will not allow you to criticize him."

"Just what did Miss Roberts say that upset you so terribly, LoraLe? She's a true, spirit-filled person," Mrs. Erickson asserted, her sweet face grave and troubled over her daughter's bad attitude.

"She said people could murder without using a gun or anything like a gun. That's exactly what she said." "Well?" Mr. Erickson prodded. LoraLe was silent for a long time.

"She was right, of course, LoraLe!" Father said. "So very, very right."

"I don't agree!" LoraLe answered cockily and angrily.

Mr. Erickson got out of the front seat and went to the back seat where he used a bit of parental authority and persuasion on his 'smart' little girl. It had a marvelous effect for good upon her personality and attitudes.

"Just one thing more, LoraLe," he said as he settled himself behind the steering wheel and started homeward, "the dog that's hit always howls the loudest."

Between her sniffles and tears LoraLe blurted, "But I can't help it if I hate Bitsy and... and if I've talked about her. She's selfish and hateful and she's jealous and... and I know it and I told her so. I told Michelle too!"

There! It was finally out! Every single bit of what she had said and how she felt. And according to Miss Roberts and Reverend Brinkley, she was a murderer!

Mrs. Erickson turned about to look at the little girl on the back seat.

"LoraLe," she began, "Miss Roberts is right. John tells us in his very first epistle . . . verses 9-11, 'He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother, (that means Bitsy as well) is in darkness even until now.

" 'He that loveth his brother (or Bitsy) abideth in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him.

" 'But he that hateth his brother (or Bitsy) is in darkness, and walketh in darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth, because that darkness hath blinded his eyes.' "

"O Mother, you too!"

"It's God's Word, honey; and this is what we must go by... and what we'll be judged by. I John 3:15 states it plainly: 'Whosoever hateth his brother (or Bitsy) is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him.' That's as plain a truth as was ever stated. Don't you think so, LoraLe?"

LoraLe's voice was suddenly saddened. "Is . . . is that what the Bible says, Mother?"

"It certainly does. And it's frightening; when you know someone hates someone else, I mean."

After a long, long pause LoraLe asked humbly, "Do you think Jesus would forgive me if I prayed and asked Him to?" Her lips trembled and bright tears were flowing. "I truly hated Bitsy. But it's because I was jealous of her. She has so many friends! And... and I'm just not happy one single bit the way I am."

"We'll pray just as soon as we get home. I know Jesus will forgive you, dear. Then after you are converted, you need to get sanctified wholly. This will take the jealousy out of your heart and fall. you with Divine Love until it will be easy to love Bitsy."

"Oh Mother, I can hardly wait until we get home!" LoraLe exclaimed "I don't want my heart full of hatred and don't want to be called a murderer.' "

"Thank God!" Mr. Erickson said, as he pushed harder on the accelerator.

* * * * *

March, 1976

Story 3

WHO KILLED COCK ROBIN?

Shawn and Shane were twins. They lived in a lovely White house in the country and slept in bunk beds in the same bedroom.

Shawn awoke with the first crack of dawn and stared with pride at the ceiling from where his latest airplane model hung and moved ever so slightly in the early morning breeze which came playfully into the boys' bedroom and played hide-and-go-seek with the drapes at the windows.

"You're a beauty!" Shawn exclaimed aloud, surveying the model.

"Huh? You say something?" Shane asked, sitting suddenly up in bed and stretching his legs.

"Just talking to my airplane," Shawn said, laughing in his good-natured way. "That's the most perfect model yet, Shane!"

"Yes, I feel the same way about mine. But say, aren't we awake a bit early this morning?"

"Guess so," Shawn admitted, "But something got me awake. It was a sort of pecking sound and . . ."

His conversation was cut short by a loud and distinct 'thud' from somewhere near the living room.

"What was that?" Shane asked, jumping out of bed and running to the living room. "I . . . I don't know, Shane. Maybe something dropped off the mantel or..."

Mother, hearing the commotion, hurried to the picture window in the living room. "I think I know what it was, boys," she said, looking through the window to the sidewalk.

"Wh . . . what?" the twins asked excitedly.

Mother's index finger pointed to a telltale mark on the window. "See all these feathers against the window?" she asked.

The twins nodded.

"Look on the sidewalk," Mother advised, "and you will have the answer."

"Why, it... it's a... a robin!" the twins exclaimed in unison. "Right!"

"But, Mother, he looks . . . sick!" Shane cried out.

"He . . . he's dying!" Shawn lamented. "See him gasp for breath, and look how his body quivers all over!"

"He's a very sick robin, and in a bad way, indeed!" Mother admitted.

"But... but why? What happened to him? Did someone throw a stone and hit him? Or shoot him with a BB gun?" Shawn asked, frowning in perplexity.

"Cock Robin killed himself!" Mother asserted positively as she and the twins saw him give a last, final struggle for breath and life, then roll over on his side and lay forever still, his legs stretched pitifully in the air.

Killed himself? But how? Why?" The questions came thick and fast from the astonished twins.

"Look at the window again, boys. See the feathers? Poor, foolish robin! He saw his image in the window and thought it was another robin., a rival robin . . . invading his territory. He became extremely angry and jealous and decided to fight his rival away. Only yesterday I chased him away from the window; he was flying against it and flogging and pecking fiercely on it."

"So that's what awakened me!" Shawn exclaimed suddenly. "I heard a loud, pecking noise and . . ."

"So you did, Son. I heard it, too," Mother admitted.

"But I still can't see how Mr. Robin killed himself," Shane said, looking at the feather-bespattered window.

Mother looked sad. "Jealousy and anger are dreadful traits of carnality," she explained. "It is this that made Cock Robin kill himself. "He flew into a rage ...a rage that killed him! Many a good man, in a fit of jealousy and anger, has murdered another. We have a record in the Bible of a certain man named Cain, who slew his brother., because of envy and jealousy."

Shane swallowed hard. "His . . . brother! Why, he did, didn't he?" In shame he bowed his head then hurried over to his identical twin. "O Shawn," he exclaimed, "I... I guess you and I are just like Cock Robin. Leastwise, I know I am. I got angry at you yesterday and.., and I almost punched you . . . good..." His head dropped low as tears fell unashamedly.

Shawn's lower lip began to tremble and quiver violently as he looked upon his brother's broken and contrite spirit. It quivered and trembled some more... then more, and more. "It... it wasn't your fault, Shane!" he blurted out. "I... I'm to blame. I teased you until you just couldn't help but get angry."

"No. It wasn't you, Shawn. It was I. My heart, I mean," Shane cried, hurrying to his brother and throwing his arms about him. "Forgive me. My heart is exactly like poor Mr. Robin's. But Mother, you and Father said we could have our heart changed . . ."

"Through Jesus' precious blood you can!" Mother said, dropping on her knees and leading the way in prayer and on to complete victory for the twins.

* * * * *

April, 1976

Story 4-a

THE SECRET OF THE TREE HOUSE

Chapter 1

"Hey, Trent, what do you think of it? Now that it's finished?" Wesley's eyes were shining bright with excitement as he asked the question of his little friend.

Trenton stood back and surveyed the tree house with a look of pride and admiration. "It's beautiful!" he exclaimed. "When'd he finish it?" he asked, a broad smile turning the corners of his mouth upward, making his merry eyes look like they were smiling too.

"Who?" Wesley asked, "My dad? When did Dad finish it? Is that what you mean, Trent?"

"Uh-huh."

"Last night. We worked till almost ten . . .,"

Trenton gave a loud whistle. "I like it, Wesley. Really like it! Now we'll have a house all our own."

Dad thought it would be great to have it here in our back yard, where your folks and Jeff's and mine can oversee our play and our activities. Wait till it's painted! Jeff's dad's giving the paint."

"What color?" Trenton asked. "Red, of course. Bright, bright red." "Why not trim the windows white?" Trenton asked. "I know my dad would give us some white paint. He has some left over from when he painted our house." He scratched his head thoughtfully. "Say, Wesley, our dads may even allow us to do the trim work all by ourselves," he added, hopefully.

"We're going to paint it all!" Wesley exclaimed brightly. "Every inch of the tree house! Dad thought it would teach us how to be neat and how to respect property."

Trenton was excited. He jumped up and down with eager excitement and anticipation. "When can we start?" he asked. "You know, Wesley, it makes a fellow feel kind'a grown-up, doesn't it? Helping with the building, I mean, and now the painting."

Wesley laughed pleasantly. "My dad's great, Trent! So is yours, and Jeff's."

"I guess sometimes we forget just how lucky we are..., to have parents like we have, I mean," Trenton said seriously.

"Mom says it isn't luck; it's God, " Wesley replied. "And I believe Mom's right. Since I got saved and sanctified I see a lot of things differently from the way I used to see them."

"Me, too." Then, dropping his voice to a bare whisper, Trenton said, "What about that man Jeff's dad saw hanging around his barn?"

Wesley dropped his head. A frown creased his brow. "I don't know," he replied. "Jeff said they haven't seen him since last Tuesday,"

"Do you think he knows Mr. Hill saw him go into the barn?" Trenton asked quickly.

Wesley was thoughtful for a long while. "They don't think so," he answered finally. "But Jeff's folks are keeping a sharp look out for him."

Trenton let out a long whistle again. "In a way, it's kind of exciting!" he said.

"Scarey, too!" Wesley countered. "That's another reason Dad thought we'd better build the tree house here instead of at Jeff's the man hasn't been seen near our farm. ' "

"But Jeff's place isn't far from here. How can you be sure he hasn't been in your dad's barn too?"

Wesley looked full in Trenton's face. The color drained from his cheeks. "I.. I guess I never thought about that, Trent! Maybe . . ." he paused and looked toward the barn. "Maybe the man has been to our barn too, That's even more frightening!"

Always optimistic and cheerful, Trenton shrugged his eight-year-old shoulders and said easily, "I sure hope not. Perhaps by now Mr. Stranger's in some big city and we'll never, never see him again. Maybe he was hungry and thought he'd find something to eat."

"In a barn?" Wesley asked quickly, shaking his sandy-haired head vigorously. "Never! I'd never go to a barn for food. Would you?"

"We . . . ll . . . no. I guess you're right, Wesley. I'd go to Mother's kitchen, 'cause I know I'd get something good to eat there."

Wesley kicked at a clod of dirt with his shoes, his eyes great pools of concentrated thought. "I'm not too sure I'm going to want to sleep in our tree house after all," he told Trent.

"Aw, Wes, you can't mean it! Not after the way we planned on it all these months," Trenton pleaded.

"It's not safe, Trent. Not with a suspicious looking man hanging around so close . . ."

"But we haven't done anything sinful or wrong, so why should we be afraid? Don't you remember what Miss Prennie told us?"

"About the wicked?" Wesley asked. "Yes. She said the Bible said it was the wicked who fled when no man chased them . . . or 'pursued' them."

"That's 'cause they have a guilty conscience," Wesley answered. "But that still doesn't mean that the man... whoever he is... wouldn't want to try to hurt us!"

Trenton picked up a stone and twirled it around in the palm of his hand. "We read in family worship," he said, "that 'my times are in His hand.' And the verse before that says, 'But I trusted in Thee, O Lord: I said, Thou art my God.' I tell you, Wesley, those verses made me feel strong. In fact, the entire 31st Psalm gives me courage and strength."

"That is a great promise, Trenton an' ... an'... I guess I shouldn't be scared at all but..., well... I am! A little bit, at least. I can't help it. If we knew who the man is and what he's looking for..., well ... I know one thing, it would certainly put my mind at ease," Wesley admitted with open candor and frankness.

"Me too," Trenton confessed. "But let's forget about the strange man and think of all the fun we'll have in the tree house," he said, swinging into an easy stride as he hurried away on an errand for his mother.

For a long time after his friend was gone, Wesley stood near the tree house, thinking. Should he tell Robyn about the strange man, or shouldn't he tell her? He wanted her to know, but he didn't want her frightened. But then, Robyn was a brave sister. Not at all like some girls he knew who screamed and squealed and carried on something dreadful every time a mouse so much as ran across the garden or flower bed. No, Robyn wasn't like that at all. She was brave! He must tell her.

Thus thinking, Wesley hurried toward the house to find his sister,

(See Chapter 2 next month, Lord willing)

* * * * *

May, 1976

Story 4-b

THE SECRET OF THE TREE HOUSE

Chapter 2

Robyn was nowhere to be found when Wesley rushed into the house, calling her name.

Where could she be? he wondered in alarm as he thought about the strange man who was seen lurking about the Hill farm.

"Where's Robyn?" he asked, racing up the stairs to where Mother was running the vacuum cleaner.

Mrs. Snow turned the cleaner off and wiped the perspiration from her brow.

"Where's Robyn?" Wesley repeated his question.

"She took Jonathan for a walk. I don't know where she went nor what direction."

Wesley let out a groan.

"Thanks, Mom,," he called over his shoulder as he took the steps downward, two at a time. He must find Robyn. He must! Suppose she went to the woods to gather flowers and the man..., whoever he was! . . . caught her and Jonathan.

"Oh no!" he groaned aloud, thinking how awful and dreadful life would be without Robyn and his dear little brother, Jonathan.

He stood on the back porch and looked across the lawn to the cornfield where the slender corn stalks stood at attention like soldiers in strict formation, row upon long row, waving their long green leaf blades like proud banners of victory. Suppose the man was hiding somewhere in the tall corn, watching his house!

Wesley shivered. He must do something. ,But what? WHAT?

He hurried off the porch to the side of the house where the lilac bush grew thick and tall, then he dropped to his knees and while tears fell from his eyes, he prayed, "Help me, dear Jesus, to find Robyn and Jonathan and . . . and . . .please help me to trust in You and to not be afraid . . ."

He felt wonderful when he got up from his knees. Just like Jesus was right there by his side, helping him; and when he walked to the edge of the woods he was whistling, "God Will Take Care of You" in his usual unperturbed manner.

He took the little path that Robyn and he often traveled when going after the wild flowers that grew in profusion and abundance in the woods, stopping every now and then to call her name. But the only sounds he heard were those of the twittering birds and the scolding squirrels. He walked deeper into the woods. A grouse, drumming his stout wings on a near-by stump, startled him momentarily. He felt like turning and running back to Mother and the safety of his home, but the thought of Robyn and Jonathan... alone, perhaps captured, even! . . . made him push forward.

Wesley paused at a big rock. He knew the delicate and fragrant arbutus grew around its base (he and Robyn had often gathered them here!) but seeing the dry leaves, which afforded a perfect covering for the lovely flowers, were undisturbed, he knew Robyn hadn't been there.

He continued walking upward, the narrow trail barely visible in places. A deer, fleet of foot and extremely agile, broke brush at the sound and smell of man invading his territory and darted across the trail directly in front of him with the swiftness of a shot arrow, disappearing as quickly as he had emerged.

Wesley stopped abruptly and leaned his back against one of the many tall white pine trees. Its needled limb seemed to wave him a warm welcome to the shelter of its ferny foliage. He shut his eyes and listened hard. The pines were whispering to him. Talking to him. Almost as if they were trying to console him or tell him something.

He listened. He was almost afraid to breathe lest he miss the story the pines were whispering. O it was wonderful Wonderful!... the quiet and peace of the woods. He dropped on his knees and thanked God for it all.

After his prayer of thanksgiving he sat at the base of the pine on its thick, earthbrown carpet of soft needles. He closed his eyes and pretended he was a shepherd boy in far-off Kedron

minding his father's sheep. He remembered reading how a lion and a bear had come out and taken a lamb and how God had helped the shepherd-lad to slay both animals.

A chill of excitement raced through his young body. It was God who had wrought that victory through David. Not only was he able to kill the wild beasts of the forest but God had helped him to kill a giant. Yes, a giant! A giant who had defied the God of Israel.

Wesley shuddered when he thought about anyone defying God. That was dangerous, he knew. Very, very dangerous, and wicked. Whoever did such a thing was sure to meet with certain doom, unless he repented and sought God earnestly and sincerely.

The pines were whispering to him again. He listened. "Go home. Go home," they seemed to say.

He smiled upward to the beautiful, gently-swaying branches, then started to get up.

A brush snapped along the trail ahead of him. He looked up in time to see a man cross the trail and disappear in a dense thicket of buck laurel.

"Go home. Go home," the pines whispered softly.

Wesley swallowed. His lips and tongue felt dry and his heart fluttered like the leaves on the cottonwood tree below the house when they were shaken by a mighty wind. Fear seized hold of his heart. He must get away. But he was afraid to move. The man! He would see him. Hear him.

"What time I am afraid, I will trust in Thee."

The promise.., one the shepherd lad had written . . . flooded Wesley's soul with calm assurance and security.

Rising to his feet, he stepped out on the trail.

Where is Robyn? and Jonathan? Will Wesley get home all right?

(See Chapter 3)

* * * * *

June, 1976

Story 4-c

THE SECRET OF THE TREE HOUSE

Wesley hurried down the trail, quoting the beautiful promise God had given him and careful to make as little noise as possible. How very thankful he was that his father and mother had

taught him to memorize the Scriptures, else, how could he have known it was in the Bible if he had not read it and memorized it!

Coming out of the woods a half-hour later, he hurried to the house, thankful that God had protected him, but eager to find Robyn and Jonathan.

He was ready to climb the steps to the back porch when he heard Jonathan's merry laughter float to him from the cornfield. In a little while Robyn's tawny hair, blowing playfully about her face, emerged from the edge of the field. She was smiling down upon Jonathan, whose chubby-fisted hands held bouquets of daisies and brown-eyed Susans from the meadow which lay beyond the cornfield. "You shall give them to mother," Robyn was saying tenderly. "O won't she be pleased with your flowers!"

"Robyn! Robyn!" Wesley called rushing across the lawn to his sister. "Where've you been? You had me frightened for you..."

"I took Jonathan for a walk," the girl answered simply. "Yesterday I promised him that we would gather some daisies for Mother. And I wanted to show him where the mother blue bird has a nest of babies in one of the rotting fence posts and..."

"Well, you had me scared!" Wesley exclaimed again.

Robyn threw her head back and laughed. "Scared? Oh Wesley, how funny! Why would you be scared? Why should anybody be scared out here on the farm? There's just nothing for anyone to fear. Absolutely nothing!"

Wesley watched until Jonathan was well on his way to the kitchen door, then he said, "Promise you won't tell Mother just yet . . ."

Robyn gave her brother a look of astonishment. "But Wesley, we never keep anything from Father and Mother. We always tell them everything . . ."

"Right. But not this time. At least not until we're sure . . ."

"Sure? Of what?" Robyn asked, shaking her head in a puzzled manner.

"It's like this," Wesley began, stooping and picking a blade of grass and winding it around his finger, "there's a strange man around here."

Robyn gasped. Her hand flew to her heart. "A . . . a . . . man . . .!" she stammered.

"O don't go getting all panicky. The Lord will take care of us, just like Trenton said. But... well.., maybe you'd be safer staying dose to the house for a while. At least until Jeff's dad can find something out about him."

"Does Mr. Hill know the man? Where'd he come from? Why's he here and and...?"

"Whoa! Wait a minute, Robyn. One question at a time, please! No, Mr. Hill doesn't know the man. I told you he's a 'strange' man. Remember? He was seen around the Hill barn late one evening..

"Maybe he's a thief! Or... or... an arsonist; or a... a . . . murderer!" Robyn's last statement was barely audible and came out in little more than a faint whisper.

"We mustn't judge him, Robyn, for we don't even know the man. And even if we did know him Jesus told us not to judge another . . ."

"I... I know. I'm sorry, Wesley. But suppose . . .

"No 'supposing' either, Robyn. If he stays around long enough we'll all know for sure what or who he is. I just wanted you to promise that you'll stay out of the woods and the barn and the cornfield. It may not be safe; for a while at least. And don't tell Mother till we have more concrete facts. No need to worry her. Dad knows all about it. So does Mr. Pennyweather."

"Does... Jeff know? and and Trent?" Robyn wanted to know.

"They know. It was Jeff's father who first saw the man, as I already told you. Now, will you promise?"

Robyn shook her head sadly. "Promise? Of course I'll promise! Who wouldn't? It's real scary, Wesley."

"Perhaps, But we have nothing for which to be afraid. Not if we trust God, and then are careful not to do anything to aggravate the man in any way..., if he does come around here again," Wesley admonished his sister, deciding then and there not to mention the fact that he had seen a man in the woods when he was out looking for her and Jonathan.

Still shaking her head sadly Robyn walked toward the house exclaiming, "It's a sad state of affairs when one isn't safe in the country, isn't it Wesley? I'll be real glad when Jesus comes back for His Bride... the purified ones..., and takes us to be with Him. We'll never have anything to frighten us in Heaven, for no wicked people will ever enter there. O, won't that be wonderful!"

Wesley agreed that it would be wonderful indeed, and when Robyn was safe inside the house he sat down on the porch step to think. Should he tell Jeff and Trenton about seeing a strange man in the woods or not? Would it help matters in any way? he wondered, pushing his chin deep into the palms of his cupped hands.

He made a quick decision: he would tell no one but his father. Whatever Father decided to do about it would be fine.

After supper, and when the boys' chores were done for the day, they converged on the tree house with paint brushes and paint. What fun they had dressing the house up brightly in a coat of

shiny red paint. The strange man was completely forgotten in the round of work and merriment and even Wesley, when he crawled into bed for the night, forgot about the man.

He was sleeping soundly, dreaming that he and Jonathan and Robyn were wading in the shallow stream that ran merrily through the south meadow. They were watching the tiny minnows dart in and out among the smooth stones and rocks. O, it was such a splendid dream. Suddenly, in the midst of his perfect dream, a hand came down upon his shoulder and a voice pleaded urgently, "Get up, Wesley! Get up and get dressed!" It was a command. From Robyn!

"Aw, go away. I want to sleep," he answered groggily.

"But you can't, Wesley!- You can't!" Robyn declared emphatically.

Wesley jerked himself up with a start. He knew Robyn well enough to know that when she spoke with that certain tone of voice something terribly important was happening. He threw his pajama-clad legs over the edge of the bed, now wide awake and alert.

"What is it, Robyn?" he asked quickly, trying to read her face in the darkness. "What is it?"

Robyn's breath was coming out in quick little gasps. "A . . . a light!" she exclaimed with a shiver. "A... light..., in the tree house!"

Wesley darted out of his room, down the hallway to the window that faced the tree house. Kneeling in front of the window, he peered into the darkness. A screech owl screeched a weird, wild tune from a near-by tree, sending cold shivers up and down the boy's spine. Suddenly, from inside the tree house, a light shone through a window. A tiny, tiny sliver of light it was.

"Whew!" was all Wesley could exclaim to his sister.

(Now what, boys and girls?)

(See Chapter 4)

* * * * *

July, 1976

Story 4-d

THE SECRET OF THE TREE HOUSE

Chapter 4

Wesley and Robyn watched the tree house for a long time. Neither one spoke. When they finally saw the thin sliver of light., with whoever was holding it... descend the tree and then walk so many feet this way from the tree, and so many feet the other way, it was more than Wesley could endure.

"I'm going down there!" he announced grandly to Robyn in a hushed whisper.

"O don't! Don't" she begged. "It's not safe. It isn't! Let's tell Father and Mother. They'll know what to do"

"No!" Wesley's voice was positive. No mistaking what he meant. "I don't want Mother worrying every minute of the day over you and Jonathan and me. I'm going down to the porch and... and

"What good will that do?" Robyn asked sweetly, tears filling her eyes. "What if... if he captures you...!"

"I'm a pretty good runner, Sis. Or had you forgotten that? No, I'm going down. Maybe I can hear something that will be of help later on," and before she could protest any further Wesley started down the stairway, his feet making absolutely no sound whatever on the steps.

"I'm going with you!" Robyn asserted positively, following her brother. "Two of us will be better than one. ' "

"No noise, please! We'll sneak out on the porch. You ready?"

Robyn whispered a weak, faint, "yes," feeling more scared than she could ever remember having felt. Her heart was beating wildly. Fiercely. She hoped the man..., whoever he was... couldn't hear its loud pumping. Her breath came out in short, hard gasps.

Wesley opened the door without making the slightest bit of noise. Robyn was sure that someday he'd make the best detective ever. Of course, he'd have to make sure that that was what God wanted him to be, she thought quickly, not at all sure that God would call him to something like that.

Once on the porch, her hammering heart calmed down considerably as they stood in the deep, dense shadows of the wisteria vine that grew every which way up and down the trellis along the entire length of the porch. It was frightening, Robyn thought, but exciting, too. She breathed a prayer for protection.

They sat, almost breathless with excitement, listening. Listening. The night breathed and sighed. Soft, gentle breathing, it was. Kind of like Jonathan did when he was sleeping peacefully. The wind whispered a tender lullaby through the pines and rustled the dresses of the maples and a night bird tossed a song of praise on the winds, stopping almost as abruptly as he had begun.

The crickets, cicadas and katydids chirped and droned relentlessly, the staccato rhythm of their mingled "voices" filling the still night with sound. Like on so many other occasions, both children felt as if God was very near. He was real. Very, very real to their hearts. Not dead at all, like they heard some people were trying to make others believe He was.

It was Robyn who broke the beautiful silence.

"Isn't God wonderful!" she whispered ever so softly, but directly in Wesley's ear.

"He sure is. But listen, I hear something. Can't you hear it?"

Robyn became instantly silent and alert. She was listening. Then she heard it. She sat up very straight and tall. What she heard sounded like Father did when he dug after worms to go fishing. That was it! she decided quickly. The man... whoever he was! ... was digging! And that right around the base of the big oak beneath the bright red tree house too!

"He... he's digging, Wesley!" she exclaimed in a subdued but excited whisper. "The man's digging!"

"Sh-h-h!" the brother cautioned. "Exactly. That's just what he's doing; and I wonder what could be there..." His sentence drifted away and his whisper died with the night sounds.

Robyn became ecstatic. Excited. "O Wesley, do you suppose . . .? I mean, what if gold is buried there! I remember reading that people in old days did bury their money. They felt it was safer that way . . .

"Whew!" was all Wesley could answer. What if Robyn was right! he thought.

Robyn was speaking again. "Mrs. Willikins always did say that something very important was hidden here in the valley and that only those who searched diligently for it would ever find it. I wonder what it is. O, I do wonder! I wish I knew..."

Wesley turned abruptly and faced his sister. "Say, you're right! She did say that. Funny that you and I never thought of it before."

"I know what, Wesley, you and I'll ask her. We'll go to see her as soon as it's daylight and we'll ask her."

The sound of a pick hitting something hard made the conversation come to an abrupt halt.

Wesley and Robyn jumped to their feet. Stepping closer to the wisteria vine, they peered through a small opening in the leafy foliage."

"He...lifting something out of the ground!" Wesley exclaimed. "Oh I do wonder what it is? I'm going to find out!" he said, when he could endure the suspense no longer. With that he bounded off the porch and raced toward the big tree and the tree house.

Robyn stood like one paralyzed. She wanted to scream but the sound froze within her throat. She knew that if "curiosity killed the cat" it could just have the same effect upon her brother. She felt suddenly very, very hot, then cold. Like she was freezing almost.

Voices reached her ears then. One of them was Wesley's. Maybe he needed her! She stepped down off the porch steps and picked her way along the path across the dewy lawn. Seeing her brother kneeling beside the man, she advanced forward.

"And you think you'll find it?" she heard Wesley ask the strange man.

"I've got to!" was the quick but kind rejoinder.

"Find what?" Robyn asked, surprising herself at her bravery as she knelt beside her brother.

The man was breaking clods of dirt and sifting them through his fingers. Involuntarily, and only briefly, he glanced in her direction. "I've got to find it!" he declared emphatically. "I've got to!"

"Find what?" Again Robyn asked the question.

"A little note of paper." Wesley supplied the answer.

"Paper? In the ground!" Robyn exclaimed in utter disbelief. "Why?" she asked impulsively.

The man lifted his eyes and gave her a single look.

(See chapter 5 for conclusion)

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August, 1976

Story 4-e

THE SECRET OF THE TREE HOUSE

Chapter 5

"A piece of paper! And in the ground!" Robyn exclaimed again. "Why, it would be all dirty and... and rotted and . . ."

The man stood up. He wasn't at all had looking nor fierce, the children noted. No, sir. He had a kind looking face and... and nice. He didn't look at all like he'd do anyone any. harm.

"See this land?" he asked, raising his arm and extending it eastward toward the Hill's farm and southward toward the Penneyweather's, bringing it finally into a wide circle as he included Wesley and Robyn's father's farm. "Once upon a time ... a long, long time ago, it was ... my grandfather owned all this land. He got sick and had to move into a big house in a city far, far from here but every year he returned to see this valley, the farms and the land . . ."

"But the farms belong to Jeff's dad and Trenton's dad and our dad," Wesley said, puzzled that the stranger would say such a thing.

"You're right, lad. The farms were sold. But my grandfather never was one to put stock in banks. He buried all his 'treasures' and valuables here..., on his yearly pilgrimages to the valley, the mountains and the farms he loved so dearly."

"He... he had gold? And... and he buried it . . . here?" Robyn's voice quivered with excitement and eager anticipation and expectancy.

The man laughed. It was a soft, musical kind of laughter that makes every boy and girl feel relaxed and unafraid. "No gold, my little lady, but a deed! And unless I can find that deed my dear grandfather will be homeless within a few weeks."

"Whew!" Wesley exclaimed.

"What makes you think the deed's here?" Robyn asked philosophically.

"Because grandfather keeps referring to a farm . . . a tree."

"But didn't he ever live anywhere else?" It was Wesley's turn to be realistic now. "After all, the world's full of farms and trees."

"But only three farms, so far as Grandfather's concerned, for he never lived anywhere else besides here. And now the city," the man answered sadly.

"Maybe Jeff and Trenton and Robyn and I can help you," Wesley volunteered. "But why didn't you tell us about this before? You wouldn't have needed to do your work by night . . ."

"Most folks don't appreciate a snooping stranger on their place. I wouldn't either," the man admitted. "So I decided I'd have to work at night. Most people wouldn't believe my story."

"You don't have to work at night anymore," Wesley declared. "Robyn and I'll get the word around and we'll all help you. We're Christians, the Hills, the Penneyweathers and us. I know our folks will all be glad to help you."

Robyn burst out with, "What does Mrs. Willikens mean by saying that something very important and valuable is hidden in this valley and in these hills? Do you know?"

Once more the man laughed. "Is she still living?" he asked. "Why I remember her from when I was a child and used to come here to visit Grandfather and Grandmother. And she's still alive, you say?"

"She's very much alive!" Wesley answered, smiling in the darkness at remembering the spry little old lady. "She does all her own work and keeps a garden, too. One of the prettiest gardens around," he added.

It was the man's turn to be surprised. He let out a soft low whistle. "Wait till I tell my grandparents!" he exclaimed.

"What did you hit when you were digging just now?" Robyn asked quickly, "It sounded to Wesley and me like your pick hit a metal pot or... or something like . . ."

"It did," the man said, laughing softly again. "But it was only a stone. How I wish it would have been the box in which Grandpa's deed is hidden."

"Box!" the children exclaimed simultaneously.

"Somewhere near, or in, one of these trees, is Grandpa's 'strongbox.' In it are many important and valuable papers. I must find that box or my grandparents will be without a roof over their head. The man who owned the house in which they live., a long time ago, that was is claiming it for himself again. He has a sort of 'bogus' deed; but Grandfather has the real deed. The genuine, for-sure deed., if I can find it. My grandparents are praying that the Lord will help me to find it. To locate it.

"You're a Christian!" both children cried out in glee. "Oh, you'll find it, I'm sure. We'll all pray and God will lead you."

"Do you know of any holes in the trees you've climbed?" the man asked Wesley.

"Oh yes!" Wesley cried. "There are different holes that I can think of. The squirrels build nests in some of them and hide their nuts for the winter months in others."

"Are there any holes in this tree?" the man asked. "Any that are big enough to hide a box about fourteen inches long and nine inches wide inside of it?"

Wesley gasped. There was a big hole in one limb of the tree. And it was beneath the tree house, to be exact. "There sure is!" he exclaimed aloud. "It's right beneath the tree house. On this side," he added, pointing to his right.

"I'd like to investigate that hole if I may."

"May we help?" both children asked.

"Nothing would suit me better," the man replied. "And if we find the box I'll give each of you a reward. I'd like to begin now. I have reason to believe it's right here, in this very tree! or near it." "N . . . now?" Wesley gasped.

"The sooner the better. I have a very limited time in which to search before getting back to my place of employment. Could you show me where the hole is located? Beneath which boards of the tree house, I mean?" The man climbed the ladder to the tree house as he asked the questions.

Wesley was right at his heels. "This one," he said, pointing to a board on the floor. "The hole's right beneath this board. It's a big one. We wanted to cover it . . ."

"Mind if I saw through it? I'll take care of all repairs after I've had a look

"Go ahead. I'm anxious for you to find that deed, and Jeff and Trenton will be happy to know we were able to help."

The man set to work and when, after a time of sawing and working, he saw the hole by the light of his flashlight, he let out another of his soft whistles. "That's the hole I do believe," he exclaimed joyfully, running his hand and arm deep into its hollow and coming out with a box, A "strong-box! This is it! This is it!" he cried aloud, patting Wesley on his head and ruffling his hair.

He sat crosslegged on the floor and opened the box. There, by the dim sliver of light held in his hand, he found the deed. "Thank Thee, Lord God!" he breathed heavenward, while tears spilled down his cheeks. "Thank Thee!" he said again."

Robyn and Wesley looked on in awe. "Now hadn't you both better get back to bed?" the man asked. "I'll sleep here in your tree house, if you don't mind, and in the morning I'll repair all damage and give each of you a handsome reward, then be on my way. My dear grandparents must get this as quickly as possible. Goodnight. I'll see you later in the morning, the Lord willing."

"Goodnight, kind sir," Wesley said, going gingerly down the ladder alongside the sturdy oak.

"Goodnight," Robyn called as she and Wesley hurried into the house and into their beds.

It was almost too good to be true, Robyn thought, as she crawled between the sheets, and was soon sleeping soundly, dreaming she saw the man's grandfather and grandmother smiling down upon her and Wesley.

The bright red tree house seemed to be smiling too.., its secret was out!

The End

* * * * *

September, 1976

Story 5

YOUR HEART IS SHOWING

"I'm not going with you, Ruthie, and no, you can't play with Pepper. She's my dog!" Brenda announced in no uncertain tone of voice as she straightened her shoulders and gave her long blonde curls a defiant toss.

"But... but Brenda... Betty and I

"Betty can't play with Pepper neither!" the saucy little girl exclaimed before her friend had time to finish her sentence.

"But... but . . ."

Brenda turned and laced Ruth. Stomping her foot angrily she said, "Go home! And be sure you tell Betty what I said, too. Just because Pepper seems to like you better than she does me doesn't mean you can play with her."

"B-bu-but, Brenda, who said we wanted to play with Pepper?" Ruth stammered, her eyes filling with tears.

Brenda didn't wait to hear what Ruth was trying to tell her. Instead, she rushed inside and slammed the door hard, shutting the other little girl out.

"Whatever are you doing, Brenda Knight?" Mother asked, coming down the stairs and almost dropping the furniture polish and dust cloths she was carrying. "You go out this instant and apologize to Ruth."

"I'm tired of her wanting Pepper all the time and..."

"But she may not have wanted Pepper, Brenda. Hadn't you stopped to think of this? And if she did, what difference would it make? You can't blame Pepper for wanting to be with Ruth and Betty. I'd much rather play with them, too . . . especially when you're so hateful and pouty and cross. Now run along, and be sure you apologize! I'll be listening."

Brenda was ready to stomp her foot, but she remembered how hard Mother could whip, so she marched to the door and, stepping outside, she slammed the door hard.

"Brenda!"

There was no reply.

"Brenda, come back. This minute! And close the door properly. Now, after you have made a full and proper apology to Ruth come back to me."

Without hesitation Brenda dosed the door properly. She knew only too well what was waiting for her when she disobeyed and when her mother employed that certain tone of voice.

Brenda walked down the porch steps, her lower lip hanging out far and ugly in a nasty pout. She looked up the street and down but there wasn't the slightest sign of Ruthie. Good! she thought. Now there would be no need to apologize! With that thought in mind she made a slow retreat to her mother.

"I didn't hear you apologize," her mother said before Brenda's feet touched the porch steps even.

"She's not around!" the little girl retorted, not nearly so hotly and loudly as she felt on the inside.

"Come inside," Mother ordered, opening the door and ushering the angry child to a chair. "Sit down," she commanded. "Your heart is showing!" she exclaimed. "And that which it reveals is black. Very, very black!"

Brenda gasped. Her heart showing! It couldn't be. Mother had no way of seeing her heart; it was deep inside her body, away from the eyes of everyone.

"I wonder what dear Jesus thinks!" Mother was talking again and she sounded so sad until Brenda almost burst out crying.

Jesus! Oh-h-h-h! She had forgotten all about Jesus, and that He saw everything she saw and thought and did. That all, and everything, included her heart and its attitudes and feelings; its outbursts of anger and its pouty spells.

"What will you answer when Jesus asks you why you have never done anything about asking Him to come into your heart and to make you a brand new creature in Him?"

Mother's voice stabbed deep into Brenda's conscience, but it was the voice of the sweet Holy Spirit Who sent a sharp dagger of conviction to her heart. A hot tear slid out of the corner of her left eye, then her right, and soon there was a great fountain of tears that just couldn't be stopped.

"My heart... is... wicked... Mother!" she stuttered and stammered brokenly. "I... forgot that Jesus saw. I feel all mean and ugly on the inside and honestly, Mother, I'm not one bit happy feeling this way. Will you pray for me?"

In front of the deacon's bench in the dining room, Brenda and her mother knelt together to pray and when the little girl got to her feet some time later it was with a wonderful new heart. A saved heart.

Skiping lightly and happily down the street, she started out to find Betty and Ruth. It would be easy to apologize now. What's more, she could apologize from the very bottom of her heart, in love!

She felt like singing and shouting. Her heart would be showing again, but this time it would be a different kind of "showing" and after she got sanctified it would "show" even more... for Jesus. For the first time in her life Brenda was happy. Really happy!

* * * * *

October, 1976

Story 6

LITTLE BOY LOST

"Hold on to my hand, Kenneth and don't turn loose of it!" Mother cautioned as she led her freckle-faced boy off the bus and on to the busy street.

Kenny puckered his lips and wrinkled his brow. Who did Mother think he was? Baby Shawn? Well, he would show her how big he really was and that he could take care of himself. He tugged on Mother's hand. "Hold tight, Kenneth!" Mother admonished again, feeling the slight tug on her hand. "We're on Fifth Avenue, dear, and that means people. Many, many people. If you get lost in this crowd it will be hard to find you."

"I'm no baby anymore," Kenny said, with just a hint of harshness in his voice and a shrug of his young shoulders. "I don't see why I couldn't have stayed home with Daddy and Shawn. I don't like to go shopping."

"But you need a pair of new shoes, dear, and you must be fitted. Your foot is too long and narrow for Mother to bring home just any pair of shoes."

"Well I don't like to go shopping!" Kenny declared sulkily, giving Mother's hand another jerk.

"Don't say another word!" Mother warned sweetly. "You know you are not allowed to talk back to either your father or me. You must learn to obey without having to know why all the time."

"But Mother"

"Kenneth! I said no more back-talk. I'll have to take care of you when we get home. You know that Daddy and I want only what is best for you. Now hold on tight or you'll get lost in this crowd,"

A salty tear slid out of the corner of Kenny's eye and dropped on his coat. O why did he have to go shopping? He hated it. Hated it! And

Oops! A tall lady bumped into him, breaking his hold on Mother's hand.

The crowd went on. Always, there were people coming and going, going and coming. Where was Mother? And where was everybody going? he wondered.

He lifted his little head and looked up but he couldn't see Mother anywhere. No sir. All he saw was strange faces. Strange and unfamiliar and unfriendly. People who looked cross and irritated and angry; people who looked sad and lonely, and people who were laughing so loudly that it almost frightened him.

He turned and started walking. He would find Mother and the big department store all by himself. He would show her how grown-up he really was.

He walked on and on and when the crowd stopped and waited for the light to turn green Kenny stopped and waited, too.

He crossed the street and nearly fell over when a man, rushing madly by and carrying a heavy briefcase like his father's, almost knocked him down.

He rubbed his head where the man hit him and turned, expecting the man to say, 'I'm sorry, little fellow. Forgive me,' but the big man never even turned and apologized for his rudeness. No sir! He whizzed by so fast that it shocked Kenny.

His head ached and no amount of rubbing could ease the pain the way Mother's loving hands could and did. Oh, if only he had had a better attitude toward her a few minutes ago and would not have been stubborn on the inside! Perhaps he would not be lost

Lost! The thought suddenly hit Kenny hard. He was lost! No matter how hard he pretended to be big and grown-up and know where he was, he was lost!

Another big salty tear formed in the corner of his eye and fell to his coat. Then another and another. What should he do? he wondered, feeling suddenly very frightened.

Remembering what Father and Mother always did when they didn't know what to do, Kenny bowed his head and prayed. But his prayer was a prayer for forgiveness for the rebellion he felt in his heart when Mother told him to keep a tight hold on her hand, and for the many times he had disobeyed that dear mother, too.

On and on he prayed till he knew way down inside his heart that the blessed Jesus had forgiven his sins and all his naughtiness. Oh, it felt so grand and glorious to know that he belonged to Jesus again. Now he had a Heavenly Father who would take care of him.

"Please help me to find Mother," he prayed softly.

"Where's your mother, young man?" a Voice asked almost before he had finished praying. Looking up, Kenny saw a kindly looking policeman smiling down upon him. "I don't know," he replied. "We were on our way to the department store when a tall lady bumped into me. It broke Mother's hold on my hand and I'm lost now."

"Hm-m!" was all the policeman said as he took hold of Kenny's hand. Next he lifted Kenny up to his big broad shoulders. Then he did a funny thing. Yes, he did! At least for a policeman it was funny. He sat Kenny on his shoulders and brought his legs around his neck and started walking. Down Fifth Avenue!

"Watch for your mother," he told Kenneth. "She can't help but see you now. ' "

Kenny laughed. He almost felt like he was sitting on top of the tallest building. He could see over the heads of the men and women who rushed past him in such a mad frenzy and now, riding the nice policeman's shoulders, he could look down upon the worried looking passersby. And then he saw Mother.

"Mother! Mother!" he called happily. "I'm not lost anymore. I'm saved. Saved! Jesus forgave me of all my sins and took me back into His fold and then, in answer to my prayer, He sent the policeman who helped me to find you. ' "

"Kenneth!" Mother exclaimed, with tears of joy filling her eyes. "Thank God you're safe!" she said happily as Kenny was lifted down to the sidewalk.

"Thank you, Mr. Policeman," Kenny said politely. "Thank you for helping me to find Mother." Looking up toward heaven Kenny said softly, "Thank you, dear Jesus, for sending the kind policeman to me."

The policeman blew his nose and brushed tears from his eyes as, turning, he said hoarsely, "God bless you, little lad. God bless you!" Then he walked away.

Without a word, Kenny looked up into Mother's kind eyes. Next he smiled at her. Then, taking hold of her dear, gentle mother-hand, he said sweetly, humbly, "I'm ready, Mother. Let's go to the shoe store." And away they went, up Fifth Avenue.

* * * * *

November, 1976

Story 7-a
MANY VOICES

Chapter 1

"You lied, Betsy Turner! Lied!" Rose Ellen exclaimed in tearful awe and sadness. "O Betsy, you know where all liars are going! Why did you do it . . . again?" Rose Ellen's voice trailed off into a pitiful moan.

"Who cares!" Betsy shouted within herself as she started running away from baby Joan who was screaming fiercely. "I'm tired of caring for Joan. Tired of it!" she said aloud as she ran.

She would go away. Away from Rose Ellen's righteousness and Joan's crying and screaming. But where could she go? she wondered, stopping suddenly under the aged apple tree in the meadow and leaning her back up tight against its stout old trunk.

Betsy was breathing hard; like she always did when she was angry and cross and pouty and upset.

The ravine! Why hadn't she thought of that before? She would run down to the ravine and hide. Let father and mother and Rose Ellen worry over her! Soon they would see how much work she actually was doing. Maybe . . . just maybe! they would appreciate her more. Betsy's legs ran as fast as an eight year old's legs can run and before too long she was at the ravine.

She was panting for breath, and tears (angry tears, really!) ran down her cheeks in little trickles, making dirt smudges on her freckled face.

"I hate you, Rose Ellen! Hate you!" she shouted aloud, now that she was far from the farm house.

"I hate you Rose Ellen!" An angry voice shouted back to her. "HATE YOU!"

Betsy's face turned pale. Someone besides herself hated Rose Ellen and was shouting it too. She brushed a hand across her tear-stained cheeks and listened.

"I hate you, Rose Ellen! Hate you!" Someone else was shouting from a different direction, only this time it wasn't quite so loud as that first voice that answered her own.

"You're a tattletale, and of course I lied. I did pinch baby Joan. So there!" Betsy shouted angrily when the other voices died away in the distance.

She stopped long enough to get her breath when a loud voice across the ravine screamed back at her, "Of course I lied! I did pinch baby Joan. So there!" The big, loud voice was followed by two other voices, each screaming the same words at her but growing fainter and fainter all the time.

"Shut up!" she demanded angrily of the voices. Betsy was never, never allowed to talk this way at home and her naughty, naughty heart now gave vent and expression to forbidden things . . . now that she was alone.

"Shut up!" the loud voice across the ravine demanded back to Betsy.

Who did they think they were, those across the ravine? Betsy wondered indignantly.

"I said shut up!" she cried loudly, feeling more angry than ever.

"I said shut up!" the voices replied. "Who do you think you are? Betsy screamed, throwing a real temper tantrum, something she never could do at home!

"Who do you think you are?" the voices screamed back, sounding really very, very angry.

Betsy was almost beside herself with carnal anger and impatience. Angry tears poured down her cheeks. Exhausted, she found a clump of shade trees and dropped to the ground beneath their shady branches.

How good it felt to sit down, away from the eyes of whoever was on the other side of the ravine shouting and screaming at her.

Betsy gathered a handful of sand and let it run through her fingers Ah' that was better. It seemed to quiet her angry thoughts a tenny-tiny little bit. She would do it again. Who cared what Rose Ellen thought! SheBetsy Turnerwas running away from home and she could do just as she pleased, now that no one was watching.

Betsy was soon tired of playing with the sand so she looked around for something more interesting to do, but the sun was too hot to go much farther and besides, she felt suddenly very sleepy and hungry.

She put her head on a clump of grass near a tree trunk and stretched her body out on the ground. She would find something to do after she had rested awhile, she decided. Closing her eyes, Betsy's mind began to ask questions. O not out loud; but real real quiet-like: 'What does a little girl do when she runs away from home? And where does a little run-away-girl get her breakfast and dinner and supper? or where does she sleep? Where? What? Where... where? what... what?'

Betsy blinked her eyes hard and swallowed a lump that seemed to be stuck right in the very middle of her little-girl Adam's apple.

A wave of humility washed over her but she crushed it immediately with a stubborn resolution. She was not going home! At least not until Rose Ellen and Father and Mother realized her worth and begged her to return!

Betsy's eyes felt suddenly very, very heavy and soon she was asleep, with the good brown earth for a mattress, a thick clump of grass for her pillow and a blue summer sky as a sheer, dreamy coverlet or quilt.

She slept on and on, into the afternoon and past the Supper hour at home and then suddenly, it was night.

Poor, poor Betsy, Asleep and alone beneath the trees by a dark, dark ravine!

(See Chapter 2)

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December, 1976

Story 7-b
MANY VOICES

Chapter 2

Poor, poor Betsy! Asleep by the dark ravine! She was exhausted. Little wonder why. Her anger vented and spent upon the soft errant breezes, the open sky and warm land, Betsy was positively and absolutely exhausted. She had a bad attitude, too. A very bad attitude. And what Betsy didn't know was that one's attitude affects one's physical well-being, not to mention what it does to one's spiritual well-being!

If only the little girl had known that "a merry heart doeth good like a medicine," and practiced it like Rose Ellen, how different things would have been. But then, Betsy didn't have Jesus living in her heart, so how could she be joyful and loving and good and kind like Rose Ellen!

Betsy was a backslider. A miserable backslider. And the Bible says that "the backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways." Oh-h-h! That's dangerous. Frightening, too!

The sun hid its face over the last ridge in the west, lingering almost two hours with a soft rosy-pink light, as though hoping Betsy would awaken and hurry home as fast as her legs could carry her. But when kind, silvery Mr. Moon began his journey and showed his big round face high in the sky, warm Sunshine had to leave Betsy. He knew she would get cold, lying on the ground without his warm rays helping to keep her warm, but he had other lands and places that needed to be warmed besides just Betsy's little corner of the world.

A howling coyote called and yapped from across the ravine but Betsy didn't hear. She was dreaming, O it was a horrid dream. She was in a land of many, many people and everybody was hollering and screaming and fussing and fighting and quarreling with each other. "I HATE YOU!" Everyone shouted to the other. "HATE YOU!" Not one single face could Betsy see with kindness and love and patience written on it. NOT ONE! There was absolutely nothing in that land except hatred and strife.

Betsy tried to hide behind a big bush, away from the yelling and fighting and angry words, but someone spied her.

"Hey, you! Behind that bush! Come out!" The ugly looking man shouted. "Come out! You belong here! You hate your sister. Out with you!"

"NO! NO!" Betsy protested as the man grabbed her roughly by the arm and dragged her bodily out into the open... right into the middle of a group of fighting, screaming, angry children.

"We hate you!" they shouted in her face. Her ears. "Hate you! This is the land of Hate. Welcome. Be hateful..."

"NO!" Betsy tried to scream but her voice seemed locked. No sound would come. "No!" She tried calling out again but her efforts were futile.

A woman wearing the awfulest scowl on her face that Betsy had ever seen, grabbed her by the arm and led her toward a big building. "You're new here," she said, hissing the words through pinched lips. "Get to work. We need flour for bread. Grind!" she ordered angrily, leading Betsy to a heavy wheel that went round and round only as someone turned it.

Again Betsy tried to protest, but as before, no sound came.

"Grind!" the woman ordered, shouting so fiercely that Betsy trembled violently. "We're all hungry. The land of Hate keeps one totally exhausted and ,...miserable and dissatisfied all the time. Get busy and grind!"

Betsy trembled with fright. Putting her hand on the handle of the heavy wheel she tried to turn it but it refused to move.

"GRIND!" the woman shouted, bringing a heavy whip down across Betsy's slender shoulders.

"Oh! Oh-h!" Betsy groaned. "I can't grind. The wheel won't turn. It won't!"

Again the whip fell across Betsy's shoulders and back. Harder, this time. "Please!" she begged. "Please! Have .mercy! Oh-h-h!"

"Stop your moaning!" the woman shrieked. "You chose to come here, didn't you?" she bellowed, lifting the whip for a third blow.

"NO! No, I didn't choose to come here. I didn't! Didn't!"

"But you did. We heard you shout this afternoon: 'I hate you, Rose Ellen! Hate you!' And you did run away from home, didn't you?"

Betsy's mouth opened wide. Tears rained down her cheeks, "Just... for ... a little while, I meant to run away. Not for always. O I didn't! I didn't mean to . . ."

Again the whip came down on Betsy's shoulders and back.

"Don't! Don't! D-O-N-T-T-T!! Oh-h my shoulders! My shoulders!"

Betsy's scream rent the still night air. She sat up with a start. Where was she? she wondered. And where was that horrid woman? She rubbed her eyes. Why, she was crying. She was!

Across the ravine the coyote's sad cry echoed and re-echoed up and down the ravine, making the night sound like it was full of coyotes.

Then Betsy remembered! She stood up. Rather, she tried to stand up; but her legs were stiff and cold and her shoulders ached miserably. O how very sore they felt. Was it from the beating the wicked woman had given her? she wondered suddenly.

Betsy blinked her eyes. Then she began to cry. Real hard. She wasn't in the land of Hate. Indeed not! At least not physically. For this she was glad. But in another way, she was there . . . in

her heart. This frightened her terribly. More even than the dark night and the howling, yelping coyote.

"O Jesus," she prayed out loud, trying to hobble home on her sore legs and aching muscles, "forgive me, please! And take away my sins. Save me. I'm so sorry, I will ask father and mother and Rose Ellen to forgive me. I will! Just come into my heart and make me Your child..."

"Betsy! Betsy!" Voices were calling in the darkness. "O, Betsy, where are you?" But Betsy didn't hear those voices. She was too busy praying and crying, trying to get her heart right with God.

And the Lord Jesus heard her cry for mercy. Yes He did! He saved that once-hateful, spiteful little girl and gave her a brand new heart of love.

Stumbling through the darkness toward home, Betsy's heart was happy. So very, very happy. Now she had peace with God. And after she got sanctified wholly she knew she'd be just like Rose Ellen was . . . patient and holy and righteous and upright.

With a happy heart and a shining face, Betsy hurried on.

Then she saw it... a light! Someone was coming with a light. And they were calling her name. "Betsy! Betsy...!"

Why, it was Father. Dear, sweet Father. He was out seeking her. Just like her Heavenly Father had done until she yielded her heart and life to Him.

"Father! Father!" she answered. "I'm coming. I'm saved, Father! Saved!"

"Yes, thank God!" her father replied in little more than a hoarse whisper, rushing forward and lifting Betsy into his arms. "O my dear little girl!" he exclaimed, hugging her to him. "Thank God, we found you..."

Betsy wrapped her arms around her father's neck. How wonderful it was to be coming home!

She would tell them all what happened just as soon as she got home. Yes, she would. She could hardly wait.

And dear sweet Rose Ellen! She must tell her that it was she who had lived conviction on her heart. She would tell dear Rose. Yes, she would! And that soon!

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THE END