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CHILDREN'S PAGE STORIES -- 1982

By Mrs. Paul E. King

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Story 1-a
THE EXPLORERS

Chapter 1

Holly sat on a rock that jutted far out into the sea, watching ships as they plowed through the water and listening to the soft mewling of the sea gulls as they scooped and swooped and dived around her. The evening was so beautiful and peaceful that she hated to see the sun set and night time draw its curtains snugly in about her. Sometimes she wished that a day like today would never need to end.

A gull landed on the rock near her side and Holly, fearing that the slightest movement would drive it away, sat motionless and remained deathly silent. The bird moved closer, studying the slight wisp of a girl with cautious scrutiny and when its wings almost touched her side, it was all Holly could do to keep from reaching out and stroking the smooth-looking feathers. She remained motionless, however, knowing the results if she tried to do so. The gull, after apparent appraisal of its silent observer, walked slowly to the edge of the rock then sailed gracefully cloud-ward.

Holly laughed with glee then got to her feet and looked toward the cove and the shore. Chanda and Danny should have been here by now, she realized, wondering at their delay, especially since they were always punctual and kept their word. Something must have happened to delay them, she reasoned, as she walked toward the shoreline.

A ship's horn reached her ears and just as she turned around to have a look at the vessel, she heard Chanda's voice.

"Holly! Holly!" the girl cried excitedly. "Guess what? I heard that a mystery ship sails through these waters. Imagine! Robin said people have seen it. It's all shiny-white like silver moonlight. It glows in the dark; kind of like the clock by my bed."

Holly ran toward her friend. "Really!" she remarked. "But why would anyone call it a mystery ship? Why, there are hundreds and hundreds of ships that sail the seas."

"But this one's different. Robin says so. It's in-can..., incan... O well, I think you know what I mean even if I can't pronounce that big word. It glistens, Robin says, all shiny silver-like."

"Chanda means it's incandescent," Danny said, coming up beside the girls. "Dad says the ship's a sort of legendary thing in these parts."

Holly sat down on a near-by rock and dropped her face in the palm of her hands. "Well," she said, "if it's just some sort of ghost story I don't care hearing about it, because there aren't any ghosts. The Lord would be displeased with us if He thought we believed in ghosts."

"But this isn't a ghost," Chanda insisted. "Robin says it's real. Really real! Every bit as real as you and Danny and I are real."

"And if it's so," Danny said seriously, "then I feel that something evil and wicked is connected with its comings and goings and with its weird color. Dad said people say it's never been seen except on dismal, foggy and rainy-dark nights. Usually around two or three in the morning, too!"

Holly shivered. "Then there is something wicked going on!" she declared. "And I think we should get down on our knees right now and ask the Lord to uncover whatever sin there might be that's connected with that awful ship. We know God hates wickedness, and the Bible says He is of purer eyes than to behold evil, so I think we should pray about it. After all, Calm Port's our home. And Mother says the Lord loves to hear little children pray. She says He often answers their prayers more quickly than big peoples' prayers, because children don't doubt God, like grown people do."

Danny took his baseball hat off his head and held it in his hands while the three of them prayed for God's protection on their respective homes and families, as well as all the residents of Calm Port. Then they asked the Lord to break up anything and everything wicked that might be connected with the ship, which had suddenly taken on a frightening aspect for them.

Just as they got up off their knees, Hollister Murphy said, "Say, what's all this about? You praying or something?"

"We sure were," Danny replied, surprised to see Hollister. "We were just talking to the Lord and telling Him about a mysterious and strange-looking ship that's supposed to sail these waters on foggy and rainy nights."

"Well it's true," Hollister affirmed. Giving his head a toss, he said, "Praying won't do any good. At least, I've never known of any answers to prayers."

"Then you should live at our house for a while," Holly told the curly-haired, red-headed boy. "God answers prayer after prayer for us. All the time, too."

"Same at our house," Chanda and Danny Leoni answered simultaneously.

"Well, one thing's sure;" Hollister insisted positively, "it'll be a real miracle if anyone ever discovers the meaning of the ship and why it launches here at Calm Port. Talk about weird looking and frightening! Whew! Dad and I saw it early one morning when we were camping out. Two men, dressed in funny-looking, shiny outfits that matched the ship's exterior, were walking on the shore and then a little man just suddenly vanished into this big rock right here. When daylight came, Dad and I searched and searched for an opening in the rock but never found a thing. Naturally, we never camped out here again. In our back yard, yes, but never again along the beach."

Holly shivered with fright. Then she straightened her shoulders and said, "Then you, Hollister, are going to see a miracle. We're going to pray and pray until God solves this frightening mystery which, I believe, is wicked men doing wicked and illegal business of some kind. Chanda and Danny, you must join me in praying. God still hears and answers prayer today just the same as He always has. He still works miracles, too. I'm going home to pray." With that, Holly disappeared along the path toward home.

(See Chapter 2)

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[The Missionary Revivalist ceased placing a coma between the month and the year shown with the Children's Page. Therefore, henceforth, except for the month of January, which is shown differently in our "header" I have decided to also omit the coma between months and years February through December. -- DVM]

February 1982

Story 1-b
THE EXPLORERS

Chapter 2

The next few days Holly and Chanda met regularly for prayer and for long discussions about the strange ship and its eerie color.

"Danny's sure it's real," Chanda told Holly as they walked toward Robin Bradley's house on a cloudy, misty, rainy summer afternoon. "And Hollister's convinced that it's more than a...a...myth or... or a legend. Know something, Holly? I believe Hollister's really expecting a

miracle to happen. He told Danny you scared him by the things you said. About God answering prayer and doing miracles, I mean. "

"Well, one thing's certain; I'm expecting an answer to our prayers, "Holly replied quickly. "I really and truly am! I believe God. Father and Mother said we must always believe that God is going to do exactly what we ask Him to do. We must never doubt, not under any circumstances. This displeases God and hinders Him from working."

The two walked on in silence for some time, each deep in serious thought.

Calm Port was a small, rugged fishing village. Its narrow main street ran steeply down to the pebbly beach where boats were moored and gulls flew overhead. Always in summertime, Calm Port thronged with visitors who loved its rugged beauty and quiet ways and atmosphere. But in winter, when the sea pounded restlessly on the shore or broke in mountainous beauty over the rocky quayside, there were few people who ventured forth. Only the fishermen, when they could not put out to sea, sat around in sheltered places telling wondrous tales and exchanging varied and sundry tid-bits of news.

Robin Bradley's house, small and stone-built, was one of many in a row built into the cliff-side, each seeming to cling to the other for support from the violent storms that pounded the Port. The house had only five rooms and a small pantry and, although such modern amenities as electricity and a bathroom had been installed, it was much the same as those in which fishermen had lived hundreds of years ago. To the girls--the villagers, too--the houses were as much a part of Calm Port as were the villagers themselves.

Chanda knocked on the door of Robin's house but received no answer. Pursing her lips in thoughtful contemplation, she said, "That's strange; Robin's almost always home. At least her mother is, I mean."

"Yes, I know," Holly replied, wearing her most pensive and thoughtful look. "I thought you said you told Robin we'd be coming over today."

"I did," Chanda answered, throwing her sun-browned hands outward in exasperation. "Honest, I did, Holly. And Robin seemed real excited about going with us to the cliffs." Dropping her hands to her hips, she asked, 'Now what'll we do?'"

Without a moment's hesitation, Holly said, "Go, of course. Both your mother and mine said we may go."

"Then let's go!" Chanda exclaimed enthusiastically. "I'll knock one more time, just to make sure that Robin's not in."

"No use," Holly said, when they received no response from inside the house. "Let's go. It's quite a climb up there and I feel half-starved already."

Chanda laughed, "Me too!" came her emphatic answer. "I'm sure glad you suggested taking a lunch. Mother said I packed enough for two people. But I told her I'd rather have enough than to wish I'd have taken more."

"I always did say you were smart, Chanda, and now I'm more convinced than ever that you are."

"I guess it's kind of like Father's and Mother's giving," Chanda replied softly. "They always see how much they can give or do and not how little. Oh Holly, you and Danny and I are so lucky to have parents like we have!"

"I know it, Chanda. Only, I guess "lucky" isn't the proper word to use. Daddy says luck has nothing to do with what happens to us; he says it's God, and God's providences. So I guess you should say that we're blest, you and Danny and I. Blest by God."

Chanda's dark brown eyes were shining. "Why, Holly, you're so right!" she agreed, as the truth of her best friend's statement broke in upon her with light. Squeezing Holly's hand, she exclaimed softly, "I'm so glad you're my friend!"

"And I'm glad you're mine, too," Holly answered. "But the best thing of all is that Jesus is our very dearest and best-of-all friend."

"And that means that we can go to Him for anything," Chanda added as they walked toward the cliff.

"I have an idea," Holly said, stopping quickly and facing Chanda. "An idea? Like what?"

"Like, let's sit here and rest for just a tiny bit before we start our climb. Who knows, Robin may come along."

They sat together on the beach, their eyes centered on the rock through which Hollister had declared the strange little man had disappeared and vanished. How peaceful everything seemed. Here, where they were resting, fishing boats had been beached, nets were put to dry and lobster pots were mended. Then, the level of the shingle had been much higher and sloped up to the fishing hamlet nestled against the cliff. That was before the great storm had done its damage. Still, it was peaceful and calm and, save for the loss of some of the shingle and the wharf, it was a beautiful site for sitting and relaxing and simply looking out to sea.

Holly, inclined to dream, gazed out to sea then back to the rock again. Her eyes were as clear and as quiet and as blue-green as the sea itself on a clear, still day. Strands of wavy nut-brown hair blew against her cheeks as a breeze blew up over the waves of the sea.

"A penny for your thoughts," Chanda said, smiling at Holly.

Holly picked a sea shell up from the beach floor and tossed it toward an incoming wave. "I was just wondering what could have happened to Robin," she replied. "She always keeps her word when she promises a thing."

Chanda, sifting sand through her fingers, said, "It is strange, isn't it? I hope nothing's wrong. Do you think we should go back and knock again?"

Holly's countenance was unusually thoughtful looking. "I doubt that it would do us any good," she told her friend. "But I do think we should pray; after all, Jesus is our dearest Friend."

Chanda smiled. Then she got on her knees.

(Where IS Robin? Don't miss Chapter 3!)

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March 1982

Story 1-c
THE EXPLORERS

Chapter 3

Holly and Chanda stumbled up the path, feeling much relieved after they had talked to God about Robin. Holly drew in a breath of tangy salt air. "It'll rain soon, I'm sure," she said prosaically and matter-of-factly.

"Let's walk faster then," Chanda proposed. "I'd sure hate to get drenched. Just think how cold it will be when we get to the top of the cliff if we're soaked and dripping wet!" She shivered at the thought.

The path grew steeper and by the time they reached the top, they were both panting for breath. Chanda dropped down on the grass. "Let's rest," she suggested, quite out of breath. "Whew! That's some climb! I wouldn't want to do it everyday."

Holly laughed, saying, "But the view's worth the climb."

She dropped down on the rugged terrain and gazed far out to sea. Below them the water murmured quietly as it crept in and deposited a straggling line of seaweed and shells across the sand. Seagulls, white against the heavy gray sky, swooped gracefully down to settle in a bobbing fashion on the white-capped waves. The stretch of sand, visible from the cliff top, was deserted. In a way, the girls felt like they were in a vast world of sea and sky all their own.

"I wonder if the sea goes out far beyond the point," Chanda said, hugging her knees to her chest "Because if it does, we could walk around the end into the next bay."

"I really don't know," Holly admitted. "But now that we're here we may as well find out. It looks like it's a long way out there, but I believe it will be worth the walk, once we get there"

Chanda jumped to her feet. "Then let's go," she cried happily "We can do a bit of exploring all our own."

Catching the enthusiasm and contagion of her friend's statement, Holly got to her feet quickly. "I'm ready," she declared, starting toward the point.

It was windy on the cliff and they walked with quick, brisk steps, thankful for a stand of shriveled-looking scrub trees which they reached on the headland and which sheltered them slightly from the bitter cold.

With the thrill of being a kind of real explorers, they followed a narrow footpath along the top which ran gradually downhill all the way like a run-away serpent. On either side, the woods dropped steeply to the different bays. A cold rain-nipped air now stung their cheeks, bringing a healthy flush to their faces. In spite of the nippy-cold air, they were warm, the brisk walk and the wind-breaker jackets doing a good job at keeping them thus. After some time, they came to a clearing and Chanda suggested they take a break and eat an apple.

"OK," Holly answered kindly. "But don't you think it may be better if we keep going a while yet?"

Chanda laughed. Then, falling on a clump of grass like a giant rag doll, she declared sweetly, "I feel starved, and no matter what you do or don't do, I've got to have something to eat."

Digging into her bag, she extracted a large red apple. "Have a bite," she invited unselfishly.

Holly, feeling suddenly very hungry herself, sat down on the ground and took a banana out of her sack. "I'll take a bite of your apple," she agreed, "if you'll eat half of my banana. "

"Will I ever!" Chanda exclaimed. "I love bananas. The only reason I didn't bring any was because Mother didn't have any."

"That's good; sharing's so much fun."

"It really is," Chanda agreed. They looked down into the bay facing them. It was much smaller than Calm Port and far more deserted-looking. A road ran alongside the shore, turning inland and disappearing at the far end of the bay. A few bungalows dotted its length, bespeaking the fact that it was not totally uninhabited. Chanda, staring fixedly at the road beneath them, suddenly clutched Holly's arm and pointed through the trees.

"Look!" she exclaimed in little more than a frightened whisper. "A . . . a man. And he's carrying something."

Holly sprang to her feet. "Where?" she asked, peering in the direction Chanda was pointing.

"Right down below us. Oh, Holly, I'm not at all sure that I want to go any farther Suppose that ship comes along And suppose there are ghosts!"

Holly put her hands on her hips. She looked shocked "Chanda!" she cried in disbelief. "There are no ghosts . . . as such. You shock me. Really shock me! YOU know Christians don't believe such things. We're told in God's Word that we're not to become involved in the . . . the supernatural and . . . and..."

"But suppose there is something to all this; then what?"

"There's something to it all right, but it's not a ghost. It's someone trying to scare everybody away . . . for reasons yet unknown to us but which I believe God is going to make known one of these days."

"Oh, Holly," Chanda cried, "I don't want to believe in spooks and ghosts. I don't. But old Weston Chambers believes in them."

"He's not a Christian, Chanda. When one is not a Christian, and if he doesn't belong to Jesus, well, then he must belong to the devil. There are no other persons one can belong to; it's either Jesus or the devil So you can see why he may choose to believe in such things. I still say that all this talk about that ship and those strange looking men is a . . . a camouflage for sin of some kind."

"O, Holly, I do wish I was as smart as you; you use such big words! "

Holly blushed "I'm not brilliant or . . . or smart," she said humbly, "it's just something I learned by listening to father while he and Brother Aiken were talking one day. And now I think it's time we decided if we want to go on or if we should go back"

Chanda looked at Holly then she scanned the road that ran along the shore beneath them. "I believe I'd rather go back," she admitted, her dark eyes filled with fear. "That man looked funny Strange Like . . . like Hollister described the men he and his father saw that early morning."

Holly sucked her breath in quick-like. "No kidding, Chanda?" she asked.

"No kidding."

"Then maybe we'd better leave But what are they doing down here?"

They turned to leave, and just as they did so, a brush cracked nearby.

(NOW WHAT? See Chapter 4)

* * * * *

April 1982

Story 1-d
THE EXPLORERS

Chapter 4

Chanda screamed and covered her eyes with the palms of her suntanned hands, afraid to look lest she come face to face with one of the fearful legendary men of the ship. Holly, dumbfounded, stood in shocked, stunned silence. Again, the bush cracked nearby and in the next minute Hollister and Danny stepped out of the woods into the clearing. Chanda felt like she was going to faint with relief.

"What's wrong with you?" Hollister asked, with a frown on his face. "Must you always scream when you're frightened? Suppose that man heard you, then what?"

"Don't be too hard on them," Danny countered kindly. "After all, they're girls, and I guess this is as much a part of their makeup as it is for them to giggle over things you and I call stupid. Daddy says God made girls this way. He said it's really quite nice and very wonderful if one stops long enough to think things through. They're different, Hollister. We'll just have to be patient and get used to this."

"They're different all right!" Hollister agreed emphatically. "And now," he demanded impatiently, "maybe you'll tell Danny and me what you're doing so far from home! Don't you know it's not safe for you to be here?"

"We got permission," Chanda said in a voice that trembled. "Oh, I'm glad you're here!" she exclaimed. "I was so scared when I saw that man. I thought it was he who was coming here after us. That's why I screamed when the brush cracked."

"A man? where?" Hollister asked quickly, all eyes and ears now. "Where was he, Chanda?"

"On the shore road beneath this cliff."

Hollister looked at Danny and Danny looked at Hollister. "You mean they're down this far, too?" Hollister said. "Whew! They cover a lot of territory. But then, it's deserted down here."

"How come you're here?" Holly asked quickly. "WE got permission from home to come. Why are you here?"

Danny looked toward the ground. Dragging his tennis shoe over a pile of rotting leaves, he said, "Then you mean you haven't heard?" His voice sounded sad and sort of faraway.

"Heard?" the girls asked simultaneously. "Heard what?"

"Robin's gone," Hollister blurted without preamble.

Holly felt the blood drain from her face. She felt faint and light-headed. "Gone!" She made the exclamation in little more than a whisper. "What do you mean?" she asked quickly, scarcely able to take in what she heard.

"Please tell us!" Chanda begged. "We were to meet her at her house and come to the cliffs together. I packed extra cookies in my picnic lunch just because I knew she loved Mother's homemade cookies so well. Tell us, what happened? How do you know she's gone?"

A tear slid out of the corner of Danny's eye. It plopped to the ground before he had time to brush it away even. He felt all choked up on the inside.

"Please! Please!" the girls begged. "Tell us what happened. Robin's our very special friend."

It was Hollister who mustered up the courage to tell what he knew. "Her mother's afraid she went exploring and that something happened to her," he stated as simply as he knew how to. "At least, she told her mother that she wanted to check on something down by the big rock. " Robin and Chanda gasped. "You... can't mean the..., the rock where...?" It was Holly who asked the faltering question.

"The very one," Hollister admitted, looking out toward the sea and shivering at the knowledge of the fact.

"Then . . . then Robin may have been... Oh no! No!" Chanda cried, burying her face in her hands and letting the tears fall unashamedly. Weak from the news, Holly sat down on a tree stump. At last she spoke. "This is no way to act," she declared. "We're carrying on like a bunch of heathens; almost like we don't believe God's concerned over Robin and what happens to her. I think we should pray and ask God to show us what we can do to help find her. Then we must believe the Lord to answer this prayer. Faith will bring the results."

It was a challenge, and Danny and Chanda immediately accepted it.

"That's the only sensible and safe thing to do," Danny told Holly. "David told us in the Book of Psalms to cast our burden on the Lord. It seems that most of the time we forget to do this."

"Let's begin practicing it right now," Chanda said, dropping to her knees and leading out in prayer.

Baffled, Hollister looked on as his three companions prayed. They were so different from his other friends, he thought. But in spite of their radical difference, he preferred their company and companionship to all his other friends. For one thing, they were truthful and honest and he could always depend on their word when they told him anything. Also, they had befriended him

when his parents moved to Calm Port and he hadn't known a soul. Danny immediately made him feel welcome and much-wanted when he started to school, and from that day on, they were fast friends.

Looking at the bowed heads now, and sensing the fervency and the earnestness of the ascending prayers, Hollister felt tingles of something or other race up and down his spine. How he wished he knew God the way his friends did!

(See Chapter 5)

* * * * *

May 1982

Story 1-e
THE EXPLORERS

Chapter 5

"Know what I think?" Danny ventured, getting to his feet after prayer. "I believe the Lord would be pleased with us if we gave up this idea of exploring and let this mystery be solved by big people. Strong men. What do you think?" he asked, facing the others.

"I think it's a good idea," the girls agreed. "In fact, we were just ready to start home."

"I'm all for it, too," Hollister said stoutly. "This can get dangerous."

"How about taking a different route?" Holly asked.

"Sure thing," Danny said. "Who knows, we may find Robin."

"We prayed that we would," Chanda reminded her brother as they set out along the southern route home.

It was cool and damp and the rain which had been an off-again-on-again drizzle for some time, now seemed to be pouring buckets of water from the brooding, gray, overcast sky. With quickened pace, they hurried ahead. Not until a large rock loomed ahead of them did they pause.

"Hey," Hollister exclaimed in a muffled tone of voice, "we're standing right on top of where that strange-looking little man disappeared into the rock. Only Dad and I never could find any entrance when we looked for it."

"Sh-h-h!" came a loud whisper from somewhere nearby.

Turning, the group came face to face with Robin. She looked like some delicate little wood creature, with her dainty little pixie face, her tiny pug nose and her damply-wet, curly, flaxen-colored hair framing her face in a sort of halo.

"Rob-in!" Holly and Chanda almost screamed their friend's name out of pure joy and delight over having found her . . . safe and well. But their loud exclamation was cut short by Danny and Hollister who cupped a hand over each mouth.

"Sh-h!" Robin whispered again, this time more urgently than the first time. With her slender index finger, she pointed toward the side of the rock below where they were standing.

"Men!" Danny gasped, dropping to the ground on his stomach and motioning for the others to do the same thing. "Just one little glimpse of those men seeing us and we're goners," he said, trembling with fear.

"Just what are they doing?" Hollister asked in a muffled whisper. "Whatever it is, they must be planning for a big night of it . . . men here; men down along the deserted shore of the far cliffs."

Hollister was scared--really and truly scared. Everything now brought back those memories of the time when his father and he were camping out and when they had seen the little man who seemed to actually disappear into the side of the rock. When he spoke again, his teeth were chattering. "One thing's sure," he said quickly, "they're being true to the legend about them

"What do you mean?" Robin whispered.

"Doing their dirty work when the beach is deserted and lonesome and when it's dark and foggy and rainy and no one's around to watch them and what they're doing, that's what I mean," Hollister said.

"I think we should go and get help. Mr. Carlton and the men from the village would know what to do," Holly suggested, shivering both from fright and cold.

"Hey, that's a great idea!" Danny exclaimed. "Mr. Carlton's a super-good policeman. Why don't you girls go? Hollister and I'll stay here and keep an eye on things until help comes from the village."

Getting to her feet, Holly said, "Let's go, Chanda and Robin. Danny and Hollister will keep an eye on those men, and this is no place for girls anyhow. Not with wicked men all around."

"Okay by me," Chanda agreed, jumping to her feet and standing by Holly.

"Not I," Robin said softly. "I'm going to stay here. I followed two of those men here . . . from Calm Port's Main Street . . . and I feel I have a duty to stay here and see what happens. Please go by the house and tell Mother and Father that I'm all right, will you?" she asked, moving cautiously but slowly closer to the edge of the rock.

"I wish you'd come with us," Holly told Robin, who was inching her way forward for a better view of what was happening and going on below her.

"No, I believe I'll stay. Hollister and Danny may need help. I'd feel dreadfully mean and selfish if something happened to them and I..."

Before they knew what was happening, Robin vanished. Just like that! She was gone. Gone!

Holly felt the blood drain from her face and Chanda, only by a surge of strong will power, stifled the awful urge to scream. Danny's face became ashen white and Hollister looked like someone who had seen an apparition of the most frightening kind.

"Wha . . . I mean, could that rapture you told me about have taken place?" Hollister asked Danny seriously and quickly. "You said it was going to happen some day and that it could be any time now. Oh, Danny!" he cried, "I'm not ready to meet my God. But I'm finally a believer in each and every: thing you ever told me, that's in the Bible. Robin's gone, and I . . . I . . . well, I'm not ready to die! What will I say when the Lord Jesus Christ asks me why I didn't give Him my heart before now? Please, Danny, will you pray for me? The rapture's taken place and I . . . I . . . missed being a part of it. Oh-h-h!" he moaned into his hands.

"It couldn't have been the rapture," Danny declared positively, "else Holly and Chanda and I'd have gone up, too. We're ready to go to Heaven. We're washed in Jesus' Blood and sanctified wholly. But that's just how it's going to be when the rapture does take place, Hollister; two shall be working together in the field; the one shall be taken, the other left behind; two will be sleeping together in one bed-one shall be taken, the other left behind."

"Well, whatever happened, I know I'm not ready to meet God and go to Heaven. But I want to be, Danny! Oh, I do, I do! I want to know that all my sins are forgiven, too . . . like you and the girls know."

"Hurry home and get help," Danny told the girls. "We're going to need it. Meanwhile, I'm going to pray with Hollister. He needs the Lord badly. What's more, he wants Him. So while I pray with Hollister, you run to the village and get help for Robin. She's just plain disappeared. We're in dangerous territory. Now go. And please, don't forget to pray for us."

Holly and Chanda looked at Danny, then they looked at the sobbing, kneeling figure of Hollister. Something was about to happen. It was. It was! Hollister was going to get saved. And Robin?

Like birds on the wing, the girls almost flew downhill toward Calm Port.

(See Chapter 6)

* * * * *

June 1982

Story 1-f
THE EXPLORERS

Chapter 6

Holly and Chanda raced down the narrow, twisting, winding trail, their minds filled with fear for Robin. Oh, if only she had come with them! What had happened to her? Where was she? Would Danny and Hollister be safe until help arrived?

"O Holly, I'm so frightened for Danny and Hollister and Robin!" Chanda exclaimed, panting for breath and forgetting that the rain hadn't let up the least little bit and that her clothes were wet and soggy.

"I know how you feel," Holly confessed, " 'cause I'm scared for them, too. Those evil-looking men, Chanda! What if they capture Danny and Hollister?"

Tears stood in Chanda's eyes. "Danny would go straight to Heaven if something happened to him," she said quickly, " 'cause Danny's a real Christian."

"I believe by now Hollister is one, too," Holly commented. "Did you see the look on his face? He meant business when he said he wanted to get saved."

"Yes, I saw it Holly, and I felt it, too. He was sincere. But this is the only way we can ever be saved; by being sincere and meaning real business, I mean. Finally, Hollister has seen the light."

"In answer to many prayers," Holly added. "Hey look!" she cried. "Someone's coming up the trail path. No, no!" she corrected. "Not just one person but a whole group of men. I wonder what they want. They're men from the village."

The girls stood and stared down the trail.

"Mr. Carlton's one of the men," Chanda said joyfully, feeling like God had answered their prayer before they had had time to ask Him to send the police chief from their village. "And I see Mr. Bradley and.., and your father and mine, Holly. I wonder what's wrong," she said, wearing a troubled frown on her ordinarily sunny brow.

"Searchers out hunting Robin, no doubt," Holly concluded, hurrying down the trail toward her father. Oh, she was glad he was coming. So glad! She always felt safe and unafraid when her father was anywhere nearby; much the same way that she felt toward God and His constant care and love and protection for her.

"Holly! Holly!" Mr. Graybar exclaimed when he saw his daughter running toward him. "O but I'm glad to see you!" he added. "You all right? Where's Robin and the boys?"

"Robin's gone!" Holly said with a catch in her voice. "Danny and Hollister are still up by the rock. They need help, father."

"You mean that biggest, tallest rock, Holly?"

"Yes. Yes, the one where Hollister and Mr. Murphy saw that weird-looking little man vanish into its side."

Mr. Graybar looked at the men. "There's been a lot of strange happenings taking place at that rock,," Holly heard Mr. Carlton tell the men in a soft voice.

"Not any stranger than Robin being swallowed up by it!" Chanda declared quickly, keeping fast hold of her father's hand. "She was talking to us one minute and the very next she was gone. Vanished! Oh-h!" she pleaded. "All of you must help to find her. Something dreadful has happened to her. I'm afraid those evil men whom we saw got Robin."

By now Chanda was sobbing. The emotional strain was too much for her. Holly, trying to console her friend, found warm tears trickling down her own cheeks. "Oh why does God allow these wicked men to... to ... do whatever it is they're doing?" she sobbed aloud.

Mr. Graybar drew the girls to him. Stroking their wet heads he said, "Why does God allow wickedness? you ask. Why doesn't God stop them? Simply because He's a God of love and mercy and compassion. A God who extends His kindness and goodness and gentleness to those who least love Him. You see, Holly dear, it is because of the Lord's mercies that none of us were cut off in our sins. "

"But Daddy, those men are really wicked!"

"All unrighteousness is sin, dear," Mr. Graybar told his daughter.

"But what if Robin's dead!" Holly lamented. "Or... or what if she's being tortured!"

"You girls run along to the house now," Mr. Graybar said kindly.

"We'll take care of Robin. And Holly, be sure to tell your mother not to worry if we're not home by night. fall. We have work to do. It may take a long time and require much waiting. But God will help us. Now hurry home, both of you. And do change into some dry clothing," he added. "You're both like a couple of near-drowned rats."

"Oh Daddy, do be careful!" Holly cried after the rapidly disappearing figure of her father as he hurried upward on the trail.

"Know what I think?" Chanda said quickly. "I think they're out to do more than to find and help Robin. Did you see the look on their faces when we mentioned about the rock?"

"I sure did, Chanda. And I believe you're right about them going to do more than search for Robin. I feel all shaky and trembly. I guess I was far more frightened than I realized."

"Who could help it, after seeing Robin vanish before your very eyes!" Chanda replied. "Really, I sort of felt like I was having a horrible nightmare; like it was all a dreadful dream or... or something. But I guess the truly frightening thing about it is that it is true; that it wasn't a dream at all and that Robin is gone."

Brushing the rain from her eyes, Holly said, "You know, the hardest things of all to face are the real things. Like now, with what happened to Robin. But Mother says God's grace is great enough for anything and everything that we must face, and I believe it's true. So let's pray and then believe God to help the men with whatever is about to happen."

"OK. When we're in dry clothes, we'll talk to the Lord about Robin. Oh, I do hope she's all right. Why did she ever follow those wicked men?" Chanda asked.

"I guess, perhaps, we should all learn a lesson from Robin..." "What do you mean?"

"That it's best not to get too curious. I'm guilty of this, Chanda."

"Me, too," came Chanda's humble confession. "But I believe I've learned my lesson," she added quickly, as they hurried down the winding path. "My days of exploring are finished!"

"Mine, too," Holly answered. "At least this kind of exploring. It's too dangerous for little people like us."

(See Chapter 7)

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July 1982

Story 1-g
THE EXPLORERS

Chapter 7

Long after the girls were in dry clothing, they sat in Holly's house near the windows that faced the cliffs, watching for anyone who may come down the trail. Hours passed, however, and not a single sign of life did they see.

The rain continued its relentless downpour, drumming its chilly fingers against the window panes in a sadly melancholy way and sending cold shivers up and down the spine of both girls.

Mrs. Graybar, after hearing about Robin and her sudden disappearance, insisted that Mrs. Bradley come to her house and stay until they received further word from some of the searchers.

Then, fearing lest Mrs. Leoni go down under the strain and shock of not knowing whether Danny was all right or not, she invited Chanda and Danny's mother over also. Hollister's folks came to the house, too; this at Mrs. Graybar's kind insistence.

The little group sat in the comfortable living room conversing in soft tones, their ears attuned to any sound that might indicate the return of the men. But the afternoon wore its way into an unusually early twilight and a midnight-black night, still no word from nor sign of the searching men and Robin or Danny and Hollister. Holly and Chanda dozed and nodded in their chairs near the windows, speaking in muffled tones to each other between naps.

"Why don't you go to bed?" Mrs. Graybar asked her daughter. "After all, dear, you're not being one bit of help to Robin by staying up," she added, gently-kind. "Both Chanda and you should be fast asleep in your beds by now instead of merely dozing and nodding."

Holly's eyes opened wide. "Chanda and I pray between naps," she informed her mother seriously. "I'm sure it's helping. I'm sorry I go to sleep," she apologized. "But sometimes my eyes get so heavy that I can't hold them open one minute longer; then they nap."

In spite of the serious overtones of the atmosphere and of the group who were gathered in the room for emergency purposes, Holly's honest statement and confession brought a ripple of laughter into the house. It eased the tension caused by the long dreary hours of waiting and gave a spurt of unexpected hope to Mrs. Bradley and Hollister's folks, especially.

"Let's have prayer," Mrs. Graybar announced quickly. "More miracles are wrought by prayer than by any other thing." And with those words, she dropped to her knees and led out in earnest, fervent praying.

It was a comforting and comfortable feeling to Holly and Chanda and when the prayer was ended the girls were wide awake and felt strangely warm and refreshed.

"Let's pop corn," Holly suggested.

"I'll help," Chanda volunteered. "That's a good idea," Mrs. Graybar declared. "And I'll peel potatoes and get a roast in the oven. Those men will be hungry as bears when they return. I look for them home soon."

"You . . . you do?" Mr. Murphy asked quickly. "How do you know?"

"I know because I asked the Lord to send them home, safe and sound and free any injury. I believe in the God with whom I just finished talking," Mrs. Graybar answered softly, sliding a lean roast into the oven and preparing vegetables to go along with the meat.

"And we forgot to tell you the good news about Hollister," Holly said, addressing the Murphys. "He was on his knees praying to be saved when Chanda and I had to come home for help. So I know by now he's saved."

"Our Hollister? Praying?" Mr. Murphy could scarcely believe his ears.

"Yes, and just wait until you see him, Mr. Murphy! He'll be all new! From the inside out, new! Being saved and sanctified is the most wonderful thing in all the world!" Holly added brightly and joyously.

"I wish you and Mrs. Murphy were saved, too," Chanda said quickly as she looked at Hollister's folks with tear-filled eyes.

Mr. Murphy gulped; Mrs. Murphy sniffled.

"It would be wonderful to be as calm and as at peace as you folks are," Mrs. Murphy confessed.

Stepping into the doorway, Mrs. Graybar said, "You can be calm, too. Open your heart to Jesus and ask Him to come in and to take over your life. Just tell Him you want to be saved. Confess your sins to Him and tell Him you want to be made new in Christ."

Mrs. Murphy searched her husband's face. Tears stood in his eyes.

"We must become as little children," Mrs. Graybar continued gently. "Jesus said that unless we were converted and became as little children..., humble, forgiving, tender, meek and mild..., we could never enter into the kingdom of heaven."

Mr. Murphy cleared his throat. "Is . . . is that really in the Bible?" he asked in a hoarse voice.

"Really and truly, it is, Mr. Murphy. In Matthew's Gospel, chapter 18 verse 3."

"Except I become converted..." the man repeated solemnly. Lifting his head, he said, "I've made many a terrible statement about God and His followers; but . . . well . . . tonight I see how wrong I've been. How very, very foolish and deceived I was. You folks have something that keeps you calm and . . . and anchored when these storms come. My wife and I have nothing. We go to pieces and feel all shaken up within. Now that we're facing a crisis, we have nothing to hang on to; no place to hide nor to turn. Our son may be dead for all we know, and what are we doing about it? Nothing! You know how to pray and talk to God. I... I'd like to change my life and be able to have a private communication with Him, too . . . like you just did, Mrs. Graybar. Do you suppose your God would be interested in helping the likes of us? Could He change us too? I've been an exceedingly wicked man. But I'm sorry for my sin. SORRY!"

"Him that cometh unto Me I will in no wise cast out.' Those are His very own words to the repentant sinner, Mr. Murphy."

"Then I'm coming. I wonder if you'd be kind enough to pray again, please? If Hollister's saved then I think it's time his mother and I do something about our souls, too."

A holy hush settled over the group as Mrs. Graybar led in prayer.

(See Chapter 8)

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August 1982

Story 1-h
THE EXPLORERS

Chapter 8

How mysteriously and wondrously God leads! Holly and Chanda thought as the little group cried out to God for mercy upon the souls of the Murphys. So much had happened in one day that it seemed almost unreal. It was as though God had allowed the events of the day to happen so He could draw Hollister's folks to Himself. Hollister, too. It all seemed more like a dream than a for-real life happening.

It was Mr. Murphy's healthy shout that caused the girls to open their eyes. What they saw was a real miracle. A really real miracle! Mr. Murphy was pacing back and forth across the living room floor with his hands raised high toward heaven, shouting for all he was worth that he was saved. Saved!

Holly's tears fell in small puddles onto the floor and Chanda was sobbing for pure joy. and thankfulness.

A loud stomping of feet on the porch made the girls rush to the door.

"It's Daddy! It's Daddy!" Holly cried with delight.

"And everybody!" Chanda added, squealing eagerly, "Robin! Robin!"

"What happened to you?" Holly asked Robin quickly. "You disappeared; what happened to you? Where did you go? and how long were you wherever you went? Did those evil men grab you and pull you down? or...or...?"

"One question at a time," Mr. Graybar teased, giving Holly a tight little squeeze.

"Please, Daddy, tell us what happened. Did you get those wicked men? What were they doing? and did they hurt you or... or Robin?"

Mr. Graybar looked tired, the way all the men looked. Danny and Hollister, too.

"None of us here will ever forget this day and this night," the man of the house declared solemnly and frankly.

"And that old ship's not been a legend at all!" Hollister said seriously, looking at his father. "It's real. Real! Same way with those men. Whew! You should have seen them up close, Dad, like we all did."

"They're creepy. Weird!" Danny broke in, shivering with fright. "Were we ever glad to see help coming, Hollister and I!"

"Bu . . . but . . . where are the men now?" Holly wanted to know. "Didn't Mr. Carlton and you all get them? What were they doing?"

"Smuggling!" Mr. Bradley answered quickly.

"Of the worst kind, too," Howard Leoni declared. "But their smuggling days are over. The police and the F.B.I. have them in custody. They'll take care of them."

"Smugglers? In Calm Port? Imagine it!" Mr. Murphy exclaimed.

Everyone in the room seemed to be in a state of shock over the news.

"And they operated almost beneath our noses!" one of the party declared.

"Right near where we play," Danny told the group.

"What were they smuggling?" Mr. Murphy asked, keeping a protective arm around Hollister's shoulders.

"Drugs," Mr. Graybar answered quickly. "Illegal drugs. And if Robin hadn't vanished through a well-concealed but faulty trap door of theirs., and if the boys hadn't kept their eyes on the very spot through which she vanished and disappeared . . . well, their secret hide-out might never have been located nor found."

"Oh, yes, it would have been!" Hollister declared with a positive tone of voice. "Danny says sin always finds one out; that God uncovers it sooner or later."

"True enough," Mr. Graybar replied. Turning to Mr. Murphy, he said, "Say, Ed, you can be right proud of your son. He's going to make a real soldier in the Lord's army. He was saved yesterday afternoon. "

"And his mother and I got saved just a short while ago. Truth of the matter is, if you heard any shouting and loud praising the Lord, it was I. I just couldn't contain myself. Hollister's not going to be the only good soldier in God's army; his mother and I are in those ranks now, too."

Mr. Graybar wiped tears from his tired eyes.

Turning to Robin, Holly said, "Do tell us what happened to you. Please!"

Robin shivered. "It was dreadful," she replied. "Dreadful! If Jesus hadn't helped me I'd have screamed something fierce. When I felt myself dropping, I grabbed for anything I could feel or touch. One thing was a sort of root, the other was a thing that felt like a thick string or cord. I held on to both for dear life. Then I saw that a light had been turned on and I was really scared. I knew that lights didn't just 'happen' underground..., nor anywhere, for that matter..., someone had to put them there.

"I began to pray. Hard, too! Then I heard a funny sound somewhere beneath me, and the next thing I knew, I saw one of those awful-looking men running through a tunnel in the rock. He had something shiny-bright all over him. Oh, I was scared. Next, I felt someone grab me from above. And I guess I must have fainted after that, because I don't remember anything except that when I opened my eyes, I saw Mr. Bradley and Danny and Hollister looking anxiously down at me.

"They told me I was safe, that Mr. Carlton had lifted me out of the hole and then went down it himself. We had to stay hidden until all the men got back to us; that's why we're so late."

"And that's when the law officers stepped in full force and took over the operation of handling the dangerous situation," Holly's father added. "They've been watching the rock for a long time, and Robin's disappearance gave impetus to their actions. The ship's hull, as well as the men's clothing, has been painted or treated with something that gives it its luminous, eerie, ghostlike appearance."

"So that's what we saw when we camped out that night!" Ed Murphy exclaimed to his son.

"Well, it's the final chapter to a very wicked and evil business," Mr. Graybar told the group. "The reason none of you could find an entrance into the rock is because they had a well-concealed, camouflaged trap door leading into the rock's side. The interior of the rock itself was made into a storage tunnel as well as a get-away tunnel. And now it's about time that we turn our thoughts to more lofty and holier things."

"And, my dear husband, it's time to eat. Time for a bit of nourishment," Mrs. Graybar said, inviting everybody into the kitchen.

"Is this supper or breakfast?" Mr. Bradley asked, consulting his watch and smiling.

"Both," Mrs. Graybar said, hearing the clock on the mantel strike the early morning hour of four o'clock.

"Mr. Gilpin's roosters will be crowing any minute now," Holly declared factually.

"And our little explorers are still not in their beds," Mr. Graybar said with a smile.

"No more exploring for me!" Hollister and Danny exclaimed together.

"Nor us!" Chanda and Holly stated emphatically.

"Never. Never!" Robin added with a shudder.

The older people nodded in agreement. And just at that moment, Mr. Gilpin's roosters began crowing. Everyone laughed.

The End

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September 1982

Story 2

THE RIGHT DIRECTION

The dry leaves crackled and rattled beneath the bicycle wheels as Justin, Jason and Joseph pedaled their ten-speed bikes along the narrow trail toward Crystal Lake.

"You sure you know what you're doing?" Justin called to his older brother Joseph, who was well in the lead along the trail.

" 'Course I do," came the curt rejoinder. "I've been to Crystal Lake scads of times."

"Scads of times?" Justin questioned, "You sure of that, Joseph? Scads of times means a lot of times, and we haven't been here long enough for any of us to have been there 'scads' of times."

Joseph turned his head around and gave his brother a withering look. "You think you're smart, don't you?" he hurled the sentence question across his shoulder. "I guess I know where I'm going and what I'm doing, Smarty. You wanted to go to Crystal Lake, didn't you? Well, if you do, follow me."

When Joseph was a safe distance ahead, Jason said to his twin, "I wish I knew what's wrong with Joseph, Justin. He's not at all like he used to be."

"You can say that again[" Justin exclaimed sadly. "We can't say anything to him anymore without his getting angry and nasty. It grieves me."

"Me, too. But I guess all backsliders feel mean and miserable and ugly on the inside."

"Backslider, did you say?" Justin asked quickly

"Well, what else could be the matter?" Jason wanted to know, asking a question of his own.

Justin brushed a hand across his face. "I guess I just never thought about such a thing with Joseph. But I'm afraid you're right.,'

"A real Christian doesn't act the way he does . . . nor talk like he does, this we know. And the Bible says one is known by the fruit he bears. Say, Justin, I'm not at all sure that this is the way to that lake."

Justin brought his bike to an abrupt halt. "I can't see Joseph anywhere. Now we're in real trouble. Which way did Joseph turn; to the left or the right? I didn't see the turn in this road till I came up on it."

Jason slid off his bicycle and looked down the narrow trail to the left, but not a sign of Joseph could he see. Nor any to the right, either.

"Now what do we do?" Justin asked.

"Pray," was Jason's instant reply. "God knows we're lost and we know it. But He's not lost, Justin. I mean, He knows where we are and how to get us out of here and back to the cabin again."

"Then I guess we're not really lost, are we, Jason?"

Jason scratched his head and thought about his brother's question. Then he said quickly, "Yes, and no. Between us... you and me . . . we're lost; we don't know how to get back to the cabin and we don't know which way Joe went. But since God knows where we are, no, we're not LOST, lost, if that makes sense. "

Justin nodded his head knowingly, then they knelt to pray.

"Okay, Twin," Justin said after the prayer time, "I'm ready to start back to the cabin."

The boys rode in silence, checking for familiar landmarks and praying for guidance as to which turns to make when they came to any forks in the road, and when the cabin finally came into view, they sighed with relief.

"Am I ever glad to see that cabin!" Jason exclaimed, thanking God for leading them safely back to their parents.

"Me, too!" Justin exclaimed as he parked the bicycle beside his twin's at the side of the house.

"Joseph's lost," they said in unison as they entered the cabin door.

"Lost!" Mr. Blake exclaimed, dropping the book he was reading and looking at the twins.

"Yes, and we were lost, too," Jason said. "But we prayed and asked the Lord to show us the way home, and He did."

"And now you'll have to show me which way Joseph went," Mr. Blake told the boys. "We must find him as quickly as possible. He doesn't know his way in these mountains."

"But he said he did, Dad!" Jason answered. "He told us he knew how to get to Crystal Lake. Said he knew the right direction and all."

"Crystal Lake!" Mr. Blake exclaimed, hurrying toward the door. "Crystal Lake! Why, that's the opposite direction from where you came! Hurry," he urged, "we must go and find Joseph. What a sad, sad thing, thinking one is traveling in the right direction when all the time it has been wrong! Boys," he said meaningfully, "this is a perfect example of Proverbs 14:12 . . ."

"There is a way which seemeth right unto a man," the twins quoted together, "but the end thereof are the ways of death."

"Very good, boys. And now, let us kneel and ask God's guidance as we search for your brother. He needs to learn the truth of that verse. And, unless I miss my guess, I think we will all see a new Joseph when we find him. I believe God has used this to bring him back to Himself again."

Long after the prayer was ended, the twins thought about the way which seemed right but which was wrong. They searched their own heart for anything evil that might be there and which they were not aware of. But each found nothing but perfect peace and perfect love there.

The minute Joseph was found, they knew he was saved. The glory of the Lord was shining through his every feature. It was a grand reunion.

Suddenly Justin and Jason forgot that they were tired. Joseph was back in God's fold. He was headed in the right direction this time. The entire family would have a wonderful vacation. They were all one--in Jesus.

* * * * *

October 1982

Story 3

THE SINGING WITNESS

"Running over, running over; my cup is full and running over. Since the Lord saved me, I'm as happy as can be. My cup is full and run--"

"That's a dumb song. Just what do you think you're singing?" an angry voice demanded of John David as he poured sand into his dump trucks.

At that instant, a freckled face emerged through the spired bushes and came into the yard where John David was playing. "I don't like singing," the boy announced indignantly. "In fact, I hate it! And what a dumb song! I don't see a cup, and I can't see any water, either. So how can your

cup be full and running over? I don't like you!" the boy exclaimed, frowning. "And I don't like the way you seem to be happy all the time."

John David looked up. "Hi," he said, with a smile for the boy with the red-brown hair and the freckled face. "What did you say?" he asked, dropping the sand scoop into the sand box and getting to his feet.

"I said I didn't see any cup nor any water, and I don't like that kind of singing. So why don't you stop?"

John David gasped. "Why, I couldn't stop if I tried, even!" he declared. "No, sir. My heart is all happy and peaceful inside since Jesus came to live there. Know what He did for me?" he asked quickly. "He saved me of all my sins and then He sanctified me wholly. I just have to sing. The song's there, deep inside my heart."

"Well, I hate it!" the boy declared again. "I hate the birds songs, too," he added, tossing his head until the red-brown unruly cowlick bobbed in place on top of his head.

John David gasped again. One of his very favorite pastimes was to sit beneath the lovely willow tree and listen to the beautiful music the birds made by singing for him. He knew the different songs and how each of the singers looked, too..., if their coat of feathers was a bright orange with black on the wings or a scarlet-red, a sunny yellow or bright blue or chocolate-brown. Yes, he did. His father and mother had taken time out of their busy days to sit quietly with Esther Ruth and him and teach them the names, the colors, the habits and habitat of each cheerful songster as it came near them. Oh, how he loved the birds! They were like pleasant, happy friends to him.

"That your dog?" the boy asked sulkily, seeing a bouncy cocker spaniel hurry down the path toward John David, followed by a singing, pleasant-faced girl.

"That's Minuet, our dog," John David replied, opening his arms wide to receive the rapidly approaching spaniel.

"I don't like dogs," came the terse declaration "That's some name for a dog... Minuet!"

Talk about a complainer and someone hard to please! Whew! John David thought suddenly about the Israelites and of their wicked murmurings and complainings. He remembered how displeased God was with them, and how He would have destroyed them if Moses hadn't interceded for the people.

"You, too!" the boy hissed at Esther Ruth when she came down the path singing. "I hate singing! Hate it! Stop it!" he ordered sternly.

Esther Ruth's mouth opened wide in astonishment. Then she threw her head back and laughed. "Oh, you must be Claude Clarence Clack," she said, smiling down into a pair of pretty blue eyes. "I've heard about you from Grandma Hennessey. She said you'd be moving in next door. We're glad to have you here, Claude."

"Don't call me Claude; I'm the Brat. Mean, tough, hateful, unkind Brat."

Again Esther Ruth laughed. "No, you're not," she answered. "You're Claude Clarence Clack and I like your name. It has stability about it. God made you in His image, Claude, and that means that you're not a brat."

"I am too a brat!"

"God made you in His image, Claude," Esther Ruth repeated again. "So that makes you someone very special and wonderful and not a brat at all. Everything that God made He made beautiful, including you."

"You... you . . ." Claude stuttered and stammered. He didn't know what to say. No one had ever talked to him like this before. Wonderful!! Did this girl mean it? Was it true? Was he wonderful? "My . . . my dad says I'm mean and... and hateful," he blurted brokenly. "A brat, he says."

Esther Ruth sat down on the cool grass. Motioning for the boys to join her, she told Claude, "From today on, you are going to remember what I just told you about God making you someone special. And Claude," she added softly, "if you really want to be different, I know Someone who can help you and change you."

"No kidding? Do you mean that I ... well.., that I can be like I wish I were?"

"How would you like to be, Claude?"

A tear slid out of the blue eyes. Then another, and another. "I . . . I wish I could be happy like you and your brother are. Ever since we moved here three days ago, I've listened to you sing and talk kindly to each other and it made me want to be like you so badly until it . . . it hurt me in here," Claude confessed, pointing to his heart.

"Then you're ready for prayer?" Esther Ruth asked kindly. "I'm ready. Now!"

Claude Clarence was a different boy when he got up off his knees. He had a new heart; a Bloodwashed heart. "Now I know why you said you had to sing," he told John David and Esther Ruth. "I have a song, too. It's in my heart and.., and all over me. Oh, I'm so happy! Let's sing that song,,, the one about running over...

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November 1982

Story 4

GORDON LEARNS TRUE THANKFULNESS

Pumpkins, pumpkins; everywhere, pumpkins. There were big pumpkins and teensy ones; bright golden-orangy pumpkins and paler gold-yellow ones. There they sat... or stood.., in the big yard beneath the eight tall pine trees on Hillcrest Farms.

"I almost hate you!" Gordon told the innocent pumpkins lamentably. "My legs are nearly run off because of you."

The tallest, fattest pumpkin seemed (to Gordon) to straighten his already-broad pumpkin shoulders and sort of smile at the ten-year-old boy.

"Don't look so smug!" Gordon said, giving the pumpkin a sound kick with his shoe. "Ouch-h-h!" he cried, grabbing his foot and dancing around the yard. "You hurt me. You hurt me!" he cried. "Oh, why did I have to be born in the country; and on a farm at that?"

He hurried to an overturned apple crate and sat down on it, nursing his aching foot and glaring at the offending pumpkin.

A car drove into the yard.

"Any pumpkins for sale, Sonny?" the man called brightly, getting out of the car.

"Plenty of them," Gordon replied, limping up from the apple crate. "But I hate pumpkins."

The man spun around fast (from where he was looking at some apples) and looked at Gordon. "You can't mean it!" he declared quickly. "But I do!"

The man studied the boy for a brief moment. "That seems strange," he commented. "Yes, very strange; a young, healthy boy hating pumpkins. What is better than a golden-yellow, creamy-custardy pumpkin pie topped with melt-in-your-mouth whipped cream? Um-m, it makes me hungry just to think about it."

"I didn't say I didn't like pumpkin pie, Sir; it s the pumpkins that I hate," Gordon said defensively.

"So that's it--you dislike the giver.., the pumpkin.., yet you'll take the gift . . . the bounty of goodness that comes from its heart. How selfish. How utterly selfish! Just like so many other people I know. They don't want the dear Lord Jesus to live in their heart... because of the evil things they'll have to give up, and stop doing... yet they gladly partake of the rain He sends and they eat the good food He so graciously provides for them. It's a shame. A real shame!" the man exclaimed sadly.

"Look, Mister, I'm not ungrateful to God for all the good things He gives me; it's just that I hate the pumpkins because of all the work they make. In the summer, I weed the fields.., guess you think that's fun! And when they're ready for selling, I must help Dad to get them out of the fields. Once they're here, it's my job, after school, to see that new ones are put out as fast as other sell.

And some days they sell by the loadsful. You think you'd like that?" Gordon asked. "They nearly run the legs off me, those pumpkins do. That's why I hate them."

The man's eyes seemed to bore a hole through Gordon. Turning toward the car, he called, "Jonathan, come here, please. You, too, Tammy. "

Gordon looked toward the car. He was surprised when he saw a boy, much his own age, work with the door handle and try unsuccessfully to open it.

"Keep trying, Jonathan," the man encouraged kindly and gently. "This time you'll make it, see if you don't."

The door opened suddenly. Gordon gasped. Jonathan all but fell out of the car.

"You're doing great!" The man encouraged the badly-crippled boy. "Yes, just great. I'm proud of you. You, too, Tammy," he added as a dark-haired, bright-eyed, deformed girl followed her brother in a sort of lop-sided walk.

Gordon stared at the children who were making slow and painful progress at reaching their father.

"Jonathan," the man said, speaking kindly to his son, "how would you like to be able to trade places with this young man, who has two good arms and two strong legs, but complains about all the work he has to do because of these beautiful pumpkins?"

Tears came to Jonathan's eyes. "Oh, Dad, I've love it. I'd love it!" Turning suddenly to Gordon, he said, "You don't know how blest you are! You have legs that can jump and run, and you have strong arms that can pitch a fast ball or lift heavy loads. And you go to a regular school, instead of one for the handicapped. Oh, you should be so thankful. And not just at Thanksgiving time, either, but every single day of each and every year. What Tammy and I wouldn't give to be able to stand here and help you all the time! But, of course, our legs wouldn't hold us up that long. Still," Jonathan continued with a smile as he looked into the face of the kind man, "we are truly blest, Tammy and I. God had Mr. and Mrs. Harris to adopt us and make us their very own. We are so happy and so thankful!"

Gordon gulped and choked back the tears that threatened to run down his ruddy cheeks.

"Now that you're here," the man told the children, "how about each of you picking out the pumpkin you want. And how about a bushel of apples and some cabbage and squash?"

Jonathan and Tammy were delighted.

Long after the man was gone, Gordon sat on the apple crate and thought and thought. He felt ashamed of himself. He had strong, healthy arms and legs and he had never even thanked God for them. No, he hadn't! He had just taken them for granted. Like so many other things.

Tears trickled down his cheeks. "Dad," he called over his shoulder, "I'll be back just as soon as I get something settled."

Away he hurried to the apple shed . . . to pray. As quickly as he could, he was going to ask Jesus to forgive him for all the complaining and grumbling he had done over the pumpkins. Then he was going to have a time of thanksgiving and praise. He had everything to be thankful for. Yes, indeed! And from here on out., for the rest of his life . . . he was going to have an every day Thanksgiving; a three hundred sixty-five days a year Thanksgiving.

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December 1982

Story 5

MANDY, AND GOD'S GIFT

Jodie stood framed in her bedroom window, looking at the pretty soft-orange glow of the candles. Every single window in her house had one of the lovely candies standing up straight and tall on the window sill. Theirs was the prettiest house on the block, she was sure.

She looked through the window to Mandy's house. It was very pretty, too, she decided. Oh, if only Mandy would notice the beauty of the candies, and of the snow as it drifted around the house and the bushes and piled itself into neat, high marshmallow drifts. Mandy was so dissatisfied. All the time, too.

Jodie felt like she was going to cry for Mandy. She had prayed for her little friend. Over and over, she had prayed and told the Lord all about Mandy, asking Him to help her to see her need of the Saviour. But nothing happened. OH, what could she do? Jodie wondered sadly.

She stood with bowed head, and prayed again. She felt the good, cozy warmth of the house wrap around her like a toasty-warm sweater then, touching the base of the candle lightly with her finger, she tip-toed to the kitchen.

"How quiet my little girl is!" Mother commented, smiling down into Jodie's sweet face.

"I was afraid I might lose the magic of what I feel if I got noisy," Jodie confessed in a small, soft tone of voice.

"The magic of what you feel? What do you mean, honey?"

"The candles, Mother. They remind me of the many stars that twinkled and blinked in the sky on the night when Jesus was born. I was standing at my window, remembering. Then I thought of Mandy. Oh, Mother, what can we do to help Mandy? Jesus has been so good to her."

"Keep praying for her," Mother replied. "And speaking of Mandy, here she comes now. What a pretty new coat she is wearing!"

Jodie rushed to the door to welcome her friend. "Come in, Mandy dear," she said, opening the door wide. "Mother and I were just talking about you."

Ignoring Jodie's comment, Mandy exclaimed sullenly, "I hate this old cold weather! I wish we'd have summer all year long. Just look at that snow! It blows all over my face and sneaks down the collar of my coat, and I . . . I hate it. O, why do we have to have snow, anyhow?"

" 'Cause God said we'd have it, Mandy dear. He made the winter the same as He made the summer. In winter, the earth seems to rest an' . . . and sort of catch up with all the excitement and the . . . the hurry of summer. I like winter, and I like snow. Why, Mandy, there's ever so much we can do in the winter time."

"Like what?" Mandy asked crossly, tossing her coat on the floor.

"Oh-h, no, Mandy!" Jodie cried. "Don't throw your pretty coat on the floor; let's hang it up on a hanger so it will stay nice and new looking."

"That old thing; I hate it! I told Mother I wanted the gray one but she bought this blue one instead. I almost didn't wear it. Where are your Christmas catalogs?" Mandy asked, changing the subject quickly. "I want to show you what I'm going to get for Christmas. It's such a lot of things!"

Jodie hung the coat inside the closet on a hanger, then she got the catalogs. "Here they are, Mandy," she said brightly, settling herself beside her friend on the sofa.

"See this big, beautiful doll, Jodie?" Mandy asked, turning the pages to where dolls were located. "Isn't she just be-au-ti-ful! I told Mother I must have her. And then, I wanted a brand new play stove, a refrigerator and cupboards. And I want a microwave oven, too. Look at this baby buggy; isn't it lovely! It looks like Mrs. Maiaby's. You know, the one that..."

"That Amy sleeps in their yard," Jodie finished the sentence for her friend.

"That's it," Mandy agreed. "Sara Jane has one and I want one, too. I guess Christmas is the only thing I like about winter-time. I get ever so many new things then."

"But, Mandy, you already have a stove and refrigerator. Why do you want another one?"

Mandy looked at Jodie in a sort of disgusted way. " 'Cause I'm tired of my old things, that's why."

Jodie shook her head sadly. "Know what I think, Mandy? I think the only reason you like Christmas at all is because of the many new things you get. Don't you remember why we have Christmas? I mean, don't you even think about the wonderful Lord Jesus, and thank Him for coming down to earth to bleed and suffer and die for you? You know that's why He was born..., so He could die for our sins. Yours and mine, Mandy.

"Christmas didn't happen so we could get all the toys and pretty things we may like and . . . and want. Father and Mother said Jesus really made a sacrifice when He left His Heavenly Father and all the beautiful things up in Heaven, and came down to us. Why, Mandy, He was born in a cow stable; think of it! And Him God's Son!"

Mandy was silent for a long while.

Jodie, seeing her friend's serious mood, said quickly, "You want all the new things you can possibly get, Mandy, and still your heart is never satisfied. I know, 'cause I know how my heart was until I asked Jesus to come into my heart and be my Saviour. "

"Wh . . . what do you mean?" Mandy asked quickly, forgetting about the catalog on her lap.

Jodie sat on the edge of the sofa now. "You'd be so happy, Mandy, if you'd ask the blessed Lord Jesus to come into your heart and to save your soul. You won't feel so dissatisfied and unhappy, like you do. You'd have Jesus, God's Gift, living in your heart all the time."

"Is that what makes you so happy all the time, Jodie."

"Yes, Mandy dear."

A tear trickled down Mandy's cheek. "Well, I'm certainly not happy," she confessed. "Not with any of the toys or things I get. Oh, Jodie," she cried, "I want God's Gift! I do, I do! Will He want me, do you think?"

"He will, Mandy. He will!" Jodie declared positively, dropping to her knees beside her little friend and leading out in prayer.

And from that day on, Mandy was happy. She got saved!

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THE END