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## The 'New' New Year

By Mrs. Paul E. King

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A full moon, silver but cold looking, shone bright that night as Andrew Somers stumbled drunkenly down Merry Lane toward the river. The snow beneath his feet crunched loudly and crisply and glittered and shone like so many million diamonds and jewels.

" 'S no use," he muttered miserably, slurring the words painfully. "I'm rotten. No good. No good, tha's all..."

He stumbled and fell over the root of a tree that had stubbornly grown in spite of the hard concrete all around it... grown, and persisted in pushing its way farther and farther along in the earth until the sidewalk had cracked and split and dropped away bit by bit and piece by piece until now, exposed to both sunlight and air, the root had mastered, conquered.



Slowly he raised his body.

" 'W's 'smatter?" he exclaimed. "Who made me fall?"

Slowly he raised his body while his alcohol-soaked and inflamed brain declared that someone had deliberately tripped him. "Don' make fun o' me!" he shouted, thinking he heard subdued laughter nearby. It was nothing but the cold wind whistling shrilly and shivering in and out among the trees.

With half-numb hands he brushed the snow off his coat and trousers only to reel drunkenly and fall down again. This time his hand gripped the root... the stubborn, persistent root. "Oh, ho! S' you're the culprit what made me fall!" he exclaimed aloud, seeing the broken sidewalk and the protruding root. "Well, you have better sense than I; you won in your battle. The sidewalk lost. I'm a cow'rd!" He said it bitterly, all the while running cold, ungloved hands up and down along the root. "A cow'rd, I said! An' t'night... well... I'm gonna end it all. Mis'r'ble life, mine! Lonely life! Alcohol's m' god. It bosses m' ev'ry wakin' hour and plans m' life an' ... an' . . poss-ess-es me. I hate it... but... I can't do wi'out it."

Sliding slowly along the root, he found the tree trunk. Closing his eyes, he leaned his head against the stout tree. "'m tired. S' weary!" he exclaimed sleepily as his eyelids fell over his eyes. "But I mus' not sleep. No! T'night I end it all. Forever!"

Pushing hard against the tree he eased his frame up. Still fondling the trunk, he stood for awhile, feeling dizzy, tottery and unsure of himself; then slowly, very slowly, he stumbled out on to the sidewalk again.

He was getting close to the river. The bridge. He could tell it. He must time it perfectly: when no cars were crossing and when old Tom Peters wasn't looking. Tom watched the bridge like a hawk. Night and day. But nights especially. More than once he had rescued a would-be suicide and had even gotten them converted. That's what Andrew wanted to avoid. He was too dirty and mean for conversion, for God, he thought.

He felt the wind bite fiercely at his ears and nip his nose and cheeks painfully and knew with certainty that the river lay just ahead. Always, it was colder in winter right on this particular corner before turning and heading in a straight course down Shoreline Drive to the river. If only Tom wasn't watching... patrolling the bridge like he usually did nights!

Andrew turned the corner and stumbling, tottering and reeling he almost bolted down Shoreline Drive to the bridge when, from somewhere near by . . . was it at the edge of the bridge? It sounded as if it were! he heard music. Soft music, it was. The kind a mother might croon to her baby or the kind that might be sung to a dying loved one.

He found a tree and tried to hide in the shadows of its stout trunk as he listened. The music was growing louder now and there was singing. What were the words? He strained his ears to hear.

"Then why will ye die? O why will ye die?  
When Jesus the Saviour is so near by,  
O why will ye die?"

Andrew straightened up his full six-foot-two-and-a-half inches tall. He felt like he was just awaking from a dream. "Then why will ye die?" they were asking again in pleading tones. He wanted to scream, to run away, but stood glued to the spot. He was as one charmed -- hypnotized.

Without warning, memory did a double-take. He saw Edna. Yes, he saw her. Dear, dear Edna. So sweet, so plain and holy and so full of confidence and trust in God. Her face came before him as clearly and plainly as if she were there beside him. She was seated in a sturdy heirloom rocker. On her lap lay their first-born, Andrew Jr. and in Edna's hands rested on open Bible.

He remembered the night. "Read to me, dearest," he had said softly. "You read so well and the Word seems to come alive when you read it." And she had read aloud to him -- to him and their first-born infant. Oh, those were good days. Happy days. They were walking hand in hand on the highway to Heaven and they were taking tiny Andrew with them.

Less than three years later Elizabeth was born. How delighted and excited he had been when he saw the dainty, almost fragile looking tiny bundle of femininity and had held her in his stout arms. He felt he had a double duty now. He must walk more circumspectly than ever, before his God and his family. He must conduct himself most carefully and discretely, for two pairs of tiny footprints were following him down life's highway. With this thrilling thought following his every waking moment, he arose an hour earlier than usual and spent that hour alone, in communion and fellowship with the Lord. His weekly paychecks were then slim and poor, but he and Edna were happy beyond words in the Lord and with each other and the children.

It's when promotion came that things started changing. Painfully, he again felt the tender checks of the Spirit of God as He urged him not to take the lucrative position offered him and he remembered how he had stalled and stalled and stalled in giving the boss his answer.

"All right, Somers," his superior had barked, one morning some five or six weeks later, "Do you want the job or don't you? Will you take it or won't you? I've got to know! Now!"

That's when he had consented. At first, things went along well. Then, many months later at one of the business meetings held in a fashionable hotel, he had his first encounter with alcoholic beverages.

"I don't drink!" he had said firmly when a glass of the detestable stuff was set in front of him. But gradually, and little by little, his superior was breaking him down . . . giving him more and more work to do which required much overtime. Of course his weekly pay-checks had soared stupendously., almost unbelievably so; but the time spent with God and reading from the Word was almost nil now, so over-worked was

he. Under just such conditions and circumstances the devil laid the snare and Andrew Somers entered . . . like a fool; or a lamb dumb before her handlers, being led to the slaughtering block, he entered into the devil's snare and fell! Almost immediately, he became a slave to alcohol.

Feeling unworthy now of such a holy woman as Edna and too ashamed to face her and the children, he moved out of their lives. Forever, he thought.

But no! Tonight was different. Something was pulling him. Drawing him. For nearly two years he had lived this lonely life away from those he loved; but now he was being drawn . . . With heavy heart and stumbling feet he staggered toward the music, the singing. It soothed something in his alcohol tortured brain and comforted him much like Edna comforted the children when they were sick and cried and needed attention.

He was near the river now, and the music. Where it came from he had no idea but it was sweet. Sweet! He stood and listened, allowing every single word to sink deep into his tormented and tortured heart and mind.

Sudden unannounced, unashamed tears fell which soon erupted into a volcano of convulsive sobs. "Why'd I ever do it, Lord? Why?" he sobbed aloud. "I'm so unhappy . . . an'.., an' s' lon'ly wi'ou You an' Edna an' the chil'ren! Why'd I do it?"

"You sorry, Andrew?" a kind voice asked nearby. A gentle hand fell upon his shoulder. It was Tom Peters! Andrew knew it immediately and from somewhere deep inside he was glad that Tom was watching. That he had been alert! He didn't want to die. He wasn't ready to die. Tom had found him . . . Andrew Somers! And Tom wanted to help him. He did!

"I'm sorry t' the bottom, Tom! So I am!" Andrew exclaimed brokenly. "Why'd I ever go back on Him? Why, Tom?"

"God wants you to make a clean start, Andrew. Tonight He's calling you to begin anew. I knew God would bring you around, dear man. I knew it!" Old Tom's voice was exultant, expectant.

"Ya' did, eh?"

"Yes, Andrew; just like He did me . . ."

"Bu . . . but you were never a hopeless ol' drunk!" Andrew spat the words out with bitter contempt.

"Until Jesus found me, I was, Andrew. And worse. The Bible says, 'whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved,' and . . ."

"I know. I know. Edna an' I used to read the blessed Words together often..."

"Then what are you going to do about it? Die and lose your soul and go to hell or repent like a man and start back on the road to heaven and eternal bliss and happiness? I know why you came down to the river, Andrew," Tom spoke softly. "I've been watching the bridge especially carefully. I tried it once, too. Would have worked, except for one thing..."

"Wha's that?" Andrew asked anxiously.

"God guided a Christian man's steps across the bridge just when I was perched and ready to jump."

Andrew was listening. Hard. Eagerly.

"That man gave my coat-tail a hard jerk and threw me backward on to his broad chest; then from his lips I heard the sweetest message of love a sinner ever heard. He told me the story of salvation and redemption. And he told me there was hope.., for, of all men, . . . me!"

"An' ya listened, Tom?"

"Listened? I literally devoured every single word I didn't want to die. Ah, no! Not any more than you do, Andrew. I knew I wasn't prepared to die and that by jumping off the bridge I'd damn my soul in hell for sure. And I've been watching the bridge . . . for you. You can't lose your soul, dear boy! You musn't! Why don't you do what I did that night so long ago?" Tom asked tearfully.

"I will, Tom! I will. I'm ready. Right now."

"Come inside the cottage, Andrew; it's warm there and I'll pray with you."

Like a loving mother leading an ailing child, Tom Peters led the staggering man up the steps to his humble but clean cottage. Outside, near the edge of the bridge the singers continued asking other passers by:

"Then why will ye die?  
Oh, why will ye die...  
When Jesus the Saviour is standing by,  
Oh why will ye die?"

Once inside, Andrew fell across a simply home-made cane bottom chair and poured all the wickedness of his heart and life out to a loving, forgiving and

compassionate Christ. Soon he found peace and rest to his weary soul. He was shouting for joy and happiness. He was forgiven. Pardoned!

Somewhere in the moonlit distance a tower clock gave forth with twelve sonorous chimes. As if it were a signal eagerly awaited, bells, horns and whistles joined together, as well as what seemed like a loud shout of voices from everywhere.

The streets were suddenly crowded with exuberant people, weaving about, waving all manner of things. Slapping one another on the back they shouted, "Happy New Year! Happy New Year!"

Between Tom's, and his own loud praises to God for deliverance from sin and from alcoholism, Andrew heard the wild commotion. Then it dawned upon him. Looking upward, he said with perfect clarity, "This is the beginning of another New Year, Tom!"

"That it is, Andy Somers! Praise the Lord, you're new!"

"Yes. Yes! New desires; new appetites and new tastes! A new heart, Tom. I'll get me another job . . . a clean job; and I'll get sanctified too." Then as a sudden thought passed through him he said, "Say! They're having a watch-night service in the little church .... !"

A tear trickled warmly down Tom's old wrinkled face and his eyes were shining, too. "And Edna's there as sure as anything!" he exclaimed, catching on immediately. "The babies, too, Andrew! Better hurry, you'll still have time to testify."

Hugging Tom soundly, Andrew headed down the street for the little church on the corner. Edna would be waiting. Expecting him! Hers was just that kind of faith.

With the old thrill and excitement of her lover, Andrew ran. This would be a wonderful year for them! A new New Year! A new beginning... in Christ!

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**THE END**