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This Is The Way

By Mrs. Paul E. King

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The sky hung low, a spangled velvet shawl flung round the earth to keep it from the high winds of heaven. Tom felt his way to the old cedar stump and sat down. A boat was coming round the far bend of the river, its lights reflected in the water, elongated and broken, like bright crooked claws. He leaned over, elbows on knees, chin in hand. He would stay till the boat had passed and surely by that time he would have thought through the sermon Rev. Patterson had preached on entire sanctification.



"My Father is a human derelict," she said. "Drinking, smoking, and drugs are His gods now!"

What struck him with such force was the fact that the minister had preached the sermon as though he knew every inward struggle and fierce battle he was having. It was frightening, this double nature within him. Since his recent conversion, he had experienced indescribable joy and peace until the past several weeks when he realized with sudden fear that there was another nature within him: a nature bent on doing mischief to his inner peace and joy; a nature which at times (under pressure especially) strove fiercely for the mastery.

Tom sighed deeply, trying desperately to rationalize what the preacher had said and preached. He would never forget that Sunday morning when he sat in church beside his wife and five children.

The Spirit of God smote his heart with terrible conviction and, without waiting for a sermon, he had stood to his feet and rushed down the aisle to the altar. Mildred followed

close behind him. The children, too. And they had all been gloriously converted. It had been only the third time he had ever attended church but it marked the beginning of a new life for him and his family. If anyone would have told him, while he was living in sin, that man's life could be changed so radically and drastically and wonderfully he would have told the person it wasn't so. But now he knew! Salvation was something one had to obtain and receive and experience in order to believe the glory and peace one felt, he thought silently, deep in thought.

The sound of the tugboat, pushing its barges upstream, came over the water with a steady rhythmic beat. Below Tom the current nibbled at the shore. Around him were small sounds in the bushes... a rabbit moving haltingly, a bird stirring on its branch. Suddenly through these sounds there broke the slow dip of a paddle. He could even hear the light fall of the drops that followed its motion toward another stroke, and the whisper of the boat's passing, like a snake weaving through grass. Then close under the bluff he made out the shape of man and boat. For a moment he considered calling, "Hi, Jed," just to startle him and have someone to talk to. But he gave up the notion and sat silent as the stump, knowing full well what Jed would say. The man never did have time for anything spiritual.

Tom watched till Jed passed downstream with the current. He felt suddenly like a small wild animal watching a human, wondering at his ways, pondering all the while what he should do; which course he should take.

In the midst of his ponderings and musings and, yes, rationalizing, a still small voice spoke, shattering to fragments and tearing to shreds his every argument against the minister's sermon: "This is the way; walk ye in it." The Voice spoke softly but with authority and a command. The tone carried with it awesome fear.

Tom stood suddenly upright. He looked around him. The struggle within was dreadful. A tender, pleading Voice bade him heed the minister's message and go on into Holiness of heart; still another voice urged that he needed nothing more than that which he had obtained at conversion.

Great beads of perspiration formed and broke out on his forehead. Troubled, he took an impatient hand and mopped them from his brow -- his face. He began pacing restlessly back and forth, scaring the rabbit that had bedded down for the night not too far away from the once-silent, seated figure of the man. With a startled bound the furry little creature darted away into the night, seeking shelter in a deeper, denser part of the woods.

"This is the way..." The Voice spoke louder now. Again Tom stood still, his eyes searching through the night shadows for a figure . . . a man, a person. He remembered in frightening awareness how in anger he had nearly drawn back and hit a fellow employee four days before Rev. Patterson's sermon. In his heart, the act was done! So angry had he been. He had repented of it. Oh, yes; and he knew he had been forgiven but oh, the

remorse he suffered over the incident; and his testimony was lost so far as witnessing to the man was concerned.

"God has an experience for you," Rev. Patterson said on Sunday, "that will completely eradicate the old man; take the 'want-to-get-even' spirit; the 'want-to-fight' feeling, and that proneness to wander and backslide out of your heart. Unless you get rid of the carnal nature it will get rid of you!" The message was like a thunderous echo to Tom's heart and his troubled mind.

He made his way back to the stump and sat down again. He remembered how God had dealt with him immediately after his conversion over so many things he was doing and how, with perfect yieldedness, he had joyfully acquiesced and said yes to each and every thing God had touched. He had had a giant bonfire -- made from all the filthy, sensuous, dirty magazines and books he loved to read at one time. In the same fire went slacks, shorts, mini-skirts and pant-suits his wife and daughters wore before they were converted, as well as lewd-looking pictures which once hung on the walls of their home. Cards and some games went up in flames also. With joy and a shout of victory and deliverance, the entire family stood and watched the hungry flames devour the grim reminders of their past life -- the old life. Oh, the new life was wonderful and so satisfying.

With a sudden jolt Tom stood to his feet. His body trembled violently as he realized that whatever he did, whether right or wrong, good or bad, his family would follow suit. He was the head of his home and was much loved and respected by his immediate household.

The struggle within him raged on. Two forces were at work... "when I would do good, evil is present with me. This is the way! This is the way." the Voice directed, seeking earnestly for a submissive, yielded heart. The other force and voice whispered subtly that the price of utter, total and complete submission and surrender was too great.

With set chin and a determined look, Tom turned toward the river where he stood for a long time, motionless. He would not go on into Holiness! He settled it. In the same instant, the Voice ceased speaking. With quickened steps he hurried home.

The glow and fervor within Tom's heart died out completely. No amount of preaching nor persuasion could move him. His inner peace and joy fled and with its passing went the desire to attend the church services.

Not infrequently was the third pew from the front now empty, and not infrequently did Rev. Patterson and the people from the church call upon the now-delinquent family; only to learn that they were no longer interested in spiritual things. "Don't bother us, Reverend," Tom requested. "We're having a good time..."

With bowed head and tear-filled eyes, the minister departed.

Weeks later, during the early morning hours, Rev. Patterson was summoned to a juvenile detention home. "It's the oldest Hardwick girl, Reverend," the matron explained. "She's in serious trouble. Ran away from home some time ago with a young man. She's expecting a child. Tried to commit suicide. Fortunately, for her and the unborn child, it wasn't successful. She's calling for you."

"Have you contacted Tom? Her parents, I mean?" he corrected. "The Hardwicks . . . do they know?"

"She refuses to see them," the matron explained. "Seems as if she blames her father for what has happened to her."

Rev. Patterson swallowed hard. "I... I'm sorry to hear that!" he exclaimed tearfully, following the woman down the tiled corridor.

"The girl is filled with bitterness and hatred. Against her father especially!" the matron said, leading the minister to the room where Rosemary lay.

He entered the room and the matron turned and with brisk steps retreated down the corridor.

"You wanted to see me, Rosemary?" Rev. Patterson asked.

Without turning to face him, Rosemary buried her face in the pillow and sobbed bitterly, brokenly. "Why did daddy do it? Why did he do it?" she questioned. "I hate him! Mother and I wanted to get sanctified but daddy said we couldn't go to church ever any more! O-oh!" she moaned into the pillow. "I wouldn't be in this mess if daddy hadn't rejected Holiness and forbade any of us to seek after it. I loved my daddy and believed whatever he told me; but he led us astray. O-oh...!" her voice trailed off to a high moan.

"But it's not too late for you to turn around and start over again, Rosemary," the minister pleaded. "You can make a new start. Get converted again.., come back to Jesus, then go on and get sanctified."

With a sudden movement the girl sat upright in the bed. She faced Rev. Patterson with a hardened look on her young face. "Start over again? Me?" she hurled the words out sharply. Mockingly. "Start over indeed! Ha! What a nice thing to say! It's a bit late for me; don't you think so, Reverend?" She said it in a mocking, jeering voice. "Start over, the man says! What a joke! When my life is ruined and I've drunk deeply of sin's deceptive pleasures! I'm going to become a mother. You may as well know it. And at the grand old age of fourteen years! Start over? NEVER! Never, Rev. Patterson!" She was nearly screaming now.

"Rosemary, unless one has committed the unpardonable sin, it's never too late to make a new start. A new beginning. I'm sure you haven't committed the unpardonable sin . . ."

"I may as well have: I'm headed for the same hell to which the apostate and infidel is going..."

"But you need not go to hell, Rosemary. Not if you will turn to God in true penitence and confession and sorrow for your sins. He will freely and truly forgive you and save your soul..."

"No, Brother Patterson. NO! I shall not return. My father decided that night.., many months ago.., that the price of total surrender and a death to self and everything and everybody was too great a price to pay. Mother and father are both backslid and, where once love was the reigning and ruling factor in our home, friction and tension and bitterness and unkindness now rule. My father is a human derelict, barely existing, drinking, smoking and drugs are his daily gods. Our once-happy home is broken and shattered to nothing but dreams. Daddy found another woman; a dirty tramp, really!" Her voice came out iced and bitter. "And mother has another man. You have no idea how we children have suffered. I ran away with a man who offered me love and security -- because of the hell in our home. Since my parents have gone to the bottom I decided it didn't matter too much what I did. Please forgive me for being bitter. I can't help it! You may go now, Brother Patterson. I had to talk to someone who knew us in better times and under pleasanter circumstances."

"I want to pray for you, Rosemary," the minister said tearfully. "The Saviour will save you if only you will yield . . ."

"PLEASE!" She raised a restraining hand. "My heart is too full of bitterness and hatred to discuss returning and yielding. Pray with me if you wish, but it will do no good. Oh, the influence of a father! My father decided and chose for us all that night when he set his heart against Holiness of heart! We're reaping for it, Brother Patterson . . . all of us! And the end is not yet!"

The prayer was importunate as the heart and soul of the minister was moved in travail for the girl, but it seemed to rise no higher than the ceiling above him.

With measured steps and slow he walked down the corridor to the door. Damned! A family damned because one man, the father, refused to walk in the light of Holiness and get a pure heart and clean, wholly sanctified!

'Follow peace with all men, and Holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord." Heb. 12:14

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