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## No Even Path

By Mrs. Paul E. King

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"I hate parsonage life! I hate it!" Ken exclaimed derisively. Why was I ever born in a parsonage!" He tossed his books on the kitchen counter top with a slam.

"Sh-h! Not so loud, Ken," Alice whispered. "Mother has a headache. She might hear what you're saying."

"And who cares if she does hear!" the eighteen-year-old youth said with scorn. "Oh to have been born anywhere.., anywhere, I say... except in a parsonage. Believe me, I'll never be a preacher! Anything but . . ."



"Wait a minute!" Ken protested.  
"Since when do you choose my girl  
friends?"

Alice gasped loudly and shuddered involuntarily. Slowly, a meaningful smile parted her lips. "And who else said that same thing some five or six years ago and today is walking down the same path mother and father are walking.., with the same calling from God as father has? Who, Ken?"

Ken blushed scarlet and slumped down into the nearest kitchen chair as he answered, "Believe me, Sis, I'll never make a fool of myself like . . . like Brian and enter the ministry."

"You will, Ken; if you yield your heart and life unreservedly to God and get converted and wholly sanctified. If He should call you, that is. By and large, the parsonage is a wonderful place in which to be born and raised. It has blessings and compensations that..."

Ken cut her short with, "And your 'by and larges' reach beyond the perimeter of your long range view even." He marveled inwardly, secretly, again, as he so often found himself doing lately, over Alice's sunny and cheerful disposition during the most trying situations and under the most adverse circumstances.

Alice laughed lightly at his curt remark. "I'm so thankful I was born into the wonderful home of father and mother. I'm happy, Kenneth. Extremely happy."

"Happy? Ugh! All we ever get done anymore it seems is try to live down the horrid past of the former pastor and his family. I'm sick of it. Look at this house, for instance . . ."

"Yes, look at the house!" Alice laughed. "It's beautiful . . . now that it's cleaned and freshly painted inside and out. It even smells fresh as springtime, too. And look at these beautiful windows with their cheerful, crisp, freshly washed and ironed white curtains! Beautiful, Ken! Beautiful!"

"And who had to clean the mess left by the other preacher and his wife and family again? We did! It smelled worse than a pig pen and you know it did!" Ken exclaimed with utter disgust. "Why Alice Grayson, if my wife ever keeps house as poorly as Mrs. Kennison did I'll send her to the far ends of the earth and..."

"Why do that?" Alice interrupted. "The marriage vow says something or other like this, 'Till death do thee part.' Not merely so long as each pleases the other or fulfills the other's desires and tastes and likes. Ah no. Marriage is a life-time contract."

"Well, I wouldn't stand for it..."

Alice interrupted softly with, "The important thing, Ken, is to seek earnestly God's will and His guidance for one's life companion before getting too involved with the opposite sex. Don't get overly serious with anyone while still too young to know your own mind. Which reminds me, Ken, I'd take a second long look at the girl you think is so great and wonderful. Your house may look even worse than Mrs. Kennison's. Smell worse, too!"

Ken sat suddenly upright. "What girl?" he asked, playing the role of the hypocrite.

"The Brownlee girl," Alice answered without pretense. "You'll be sorry, Kenneth!"

"And look who's talking! Would you! To an older brother, too!" He mocked. "A little sixteen-year-old sister who's never known the meaning of love nor had any experience whatever in the field of love!"

"True enough," Alice agreed, popping the pecan rolls she was making into the oven. "Not that I could not have had experience, as you call it. It's merely that I prefer waiting to date until my mind is more settled and I'm more mature. Besides, youth is such a wonderful something that I want to enjoy the company of my good Christian girl friends a while longer. Mother says I'll not be sorry. And when I talk to the Lord about it He constantly brings those beautiful verses found in the third chapter of Proverbs before me: 'Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths.' I want God's will for my life, Ken. And, seriously, I doubt very much that you are in love with Helen. Infatuated perhaps; but love? I doubt it."

Ken winced. Alice was sharp! Even though she was only sixteen. He knew he had long ago left the 'main line' and was walking a detour. And detours could be pretty hard going some times. What's more, he wasn't happy inside. But no one need know. He could pretend, couldn't he?

"Back to Helen Brownlee," Alice continued, her back to Ken now as she washed cake pans and other baking dishes she had dirtied. "She's not a good influence upon you."

"Wait a minute! Wait a minute!" Ken protested, feeling his sister was carrying this thing a bit too far. "Since when do you decide which girl.., or girls... I should like? And who put you in authority to pick and choose my company?" Anger flared now in Ken's heart and showed plainly in his face.

Alice, shocked at the tone of his voice, turned quickly about and faced him. "I'm not trying to pick your friends, Ken. Honestly I'm not. Believe me. But it hurts to see my brother being led down the wrong path by a foolish, silly girl with a head of bleached hair who calls herself a woman. You think parsonage life is hard! Wait till Helen leads you to the altar -- which, incidentally, is what she plans on doing as soon as both of you graduate. She has boasted this to several of my closest friends. Said she'll get you one way or another. Take it for what it's worth, Ken. Different people have asked me if you and Helen were engaged."

Ken turned pale. He crossed his legs and swallowed hard. So those were Helen's plans! And he had thought she was keeping their secret meetings a secret! Well, he was a fool. Yes, a fool. But he would not be led into her wicked trap. Alice brought him out of his thoughts and back to the present again.

"Your life in the parsonage is a veritable heaven in comparison with the life you'll have living with Helen, Ken." She said it softly. Tears were streaming down her face. "She hates house-work and she detests cooking and baking. What's more, she boasted further to me that she had never, in her entire life, been made to assume any of the household tasks and responsibilities and that she never would stoop to such a

low state after she was married. So you can prepare yourself for a filthy house, Kenneth. Unless, of course, you keep it clean. This will be your life if you insist upon seeing her and pretending that you are in love with her."

"Sis! Please!"

"Allow me to finish, please," Alice insisted softly, kindly. "Helen hates children, too. She told me she would never consent to becoming a mother. Under no conditions, pleas nor entreaties from her husband. She does love the dance though; and cigarettes on the sly. And plenty of parties and night life. It's up to you, Ken, to decide whether or not you'll be happy in her kind of environment and atmosphere; but I can tell you for sure that you'll not have an easy life. No even road. Sorry I hadn't meant to sound preachy. But from someone who cares deeply about the future happiness of her brother, I thought you should know."

Ken swallowed hard. That was something, a sister preaching until a fellow felt downright miserable -- uncomfortable. Alice knew far more about Helen than he had ever dreamed she knew. She was a smart little sister -- wise, too. Besides, she was pretty. Even if she did wear her dresses well below her knees and do her hair up in a neat but simple way at the back of her neck. She was plain, he reasoned. Terribly plain by Helen's standards. But then, wasn't this simplicity, this plainness about her, the very thing that made her stand out and be set apart from her classmates! Alice was natural; no artificial mess smeared on her lovely face and eyes; and no bleach, tint or rinse, making that long black hair of hers to glisten and shine in a superficial way. His sister was different and he admired her highly for it. She was different first of all from within. This, he knew, made the difference on the outward. For that from within reflects brightly (or dully, as the case may be) that without, and vice-versa.

Without fully realizing it, he said quickly, "You'd make a good preacher, Alice. Almost as good as Brian."

"Thanks," she laughed. "That's saying something! God is really using Brian. I thank Him every day that the oldest member of our family died out to the awful nature within him and is now a burning and shining light for the Lord Jesus." Pausing briefly and looking through the kitchen window to the garden beyond, she added as a sweet after-thought, "and someday soon my other brother will take the 'High Road' again. The way of the cross."

Hurrying to the oven, she removed the browned, bubbly, fragrant pecan rolls.

"Um-m! Smell delicious!" Ken exclaimed, standing behind her, watching as she turned the rolls out on to waiting plates. "Are they for us?" he asked hungrily. "One plate is. That's all."

"And the other four...?" Ken queried.

"They go to the neighbors."

"Trying to help live down the past again I suppose?"

Alice laughed softly. "And what better way to prove that we are different! And that we love the Lord with all our heart, soul, mind and strength and..."

"And that the Graysons don't borrow eggs, sugar, flour, tea, coffee and spices which they never return," Ken said in a sing-song fashion, "but that they give: Oh, not in eggs, flour, coffee, spices and sugar and such like things, but in rolls, cakes, pies, and everything appealing and mouth-watering to a starved high-school senior boy."

"Oh, Ken, take a roll and run along!" Alice teased. "You're far from being starved. But if rolls and cakes and pies could help to convert your soul I'd bake from morning till night for you... "

"Meaning what?"

"The Blands and Snows seem nearer to repenting and becoming Christians than my own brother does. That's what I mean," Alice said tearfully. "Every time I take something over they break down and cry. They tell me how much they appreciate us and how different we are from the Kennisons. I always pray with them and leave several gospel tracts. They were out to hear daddy preach the past two Sundays, too. Or hadn't you noticed?" Then, in an agony of soul, she turned and looked into her brother's eyes. "Oh, Ken," she said softly, "why don't you get saved? Why? You could be such a blessing to God's cause and to father and mother. Life in the parsonage is wonderful. The way of the sinner, or transgressor, is the way that's hard. The Bible says this. You need your eyes opened."

"I hate this constant living down other peoples' pasts. It's that simple, Alice."

"But it's a challenge, Ken. I mean it. Living for Christ is a wonderful life. It's as natural for a born-again, sanctified person to live for Christ as it is for him to breathe. Oh, Ken, don't continue on in your stubborn, sinful way and bring more reproach upon the cause of Christ. Join our ranks again and do the right thing. The noble thing. You know the way back . . ."

Ken grabbed a roll and made a hasty exit from the kitchen. He hurried up the stairs to his room. He couldn't stand those dark eyes looking at him in that appealing, hurt and pained manner. Alice was right, he knew.

Passing his mother's room, he heard a groan and sobs. A quick glance showed him that she was on her knees beside the bed praying. It was for him, he was certain! A stab of conviction went through his heart; then another and another.

Without recrimination, he hurried to the bedside. Alice was right. Father and mother and Brian were right: the way of transgressors was hard. But, as Alice reminded him, he knew the way back. He would back-track.., to the foot of the cross!

Hearing someone or something, Mrs. Grayson paused briefly in her praying, her interceding. Then she saw him. "Kenneth! O Kenneth! My boy! My boy!" she exclaimed, her soul in an agony of travail over the backslidden boy. "You will get saved, won't you? Won't you, Kenneth? Don't lose your soul. Don't do it! My son, O, my son!"

Sobbing, the nearly-six-foot tall young man threw his arms about his mother's slender shoulders. "I'm returning, Mother dear. Back to God and the cross. I'm coming home. Right now!"

He needed no prodding to pray. The words of repentance and confession flowed freely, willingly from his lips and his heart. Soon faith took hold of God and the prodigal found peace and rest and joy to his soul again.

He wanted to tell Alice the good news but he knew she was out somewhere delivering her baked goods among the neighborhood and praying with them. Brave little missionary, that sister of his. Bless her. He would tell her the good news as soon as she arrived home.

Before he got up from his knees even, he knew that the old ties with Helen were broken. All that remained for him to do was to tell her this in so many words. He would get sanctified. Like Alice, he would seek God's will and guidance for a life companion for himself -- after he was farther along in Bible School. He had plenty of time. No use hurrying things along prematurely.

Suddenly and for the first time in many months, his heart felt light and happy and wonderful. Life in the parsonage wasn't bad at all. Not bad at all. He had been looking at it through dark, bleak, sin-darkened glasses. Why... why.., it was a challenge! A tremendous challenge.., to prove to a disappointed people that living for Jesus was a delightful way. He felt the challenge surging through him and joyfully rose to meet it!

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**THE END**