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Digital Edition 08/09/2001
By Holiness Data Ministry

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Paved With Good Intentions

By Mrs. Paul E. King

From the February 11, 1973 Sunday School Beacon

Ellen parked the car then slid out from beneath the steering wheel and hurried up the back steps to the kitchen door. Was father ill? Why all the cars? she wondered, stepping to the door.

Loud jesting and ribald laughter reached her ears before she turned the door-knob even, and when she stepped inside she felt as if her breath were suddenly knocked out of her. The room was blue-gray with smoke from pipes, cigars and cigarettes and hung like an ill cloud over the heads of the men seated around the kitchen table, while on the table by each man, were tall glasses of whiskey and beer. At the head of the table, dealing his cards expertly and shrewdly, sat her Father. Behind him stood David!



"Father!" Ellen's exclamation of shock and hurt drained the color from her father's face. "Father! Oh-h father! You promised me!" she said, sounding more like a wounded animal than his daughter.

"Ellie! I... I... you weren't supposed to be home yet!" Mr. Cardington stuttered, dropping his cards.

Ellen looked with pain and disgust at the men seated around the table. Her blue eyes, a confusing mixture of pity and loathsomeness, suddenly overflowed with tears. Under her pure gaze and stare, all cards dropped quickly to the table.

To her father's right sat Tom Bailey; to his left was Art Fluters. "O you poor, foolish, deceived men!" she moaned, thinking of Tom's wife just then and of the children, in dire circumstances. Art's too. And this . . . this was the reason! Her father, a slick, sharp gambler, had been taking the men's money all along. And she had believed him when he said he would never do it again if she'd come home and make a home for him since the death of her husband and her mother.., his wife!

Taking David gently by the arm she guided him across the smoke-filled room to their separate bedrooms. "Pack your clothes and all your belongings, Son," she said brokenly. "We're leaving."

"Where are we going, Mother?" the twelve year old asked.

"Back to the cottage at Laurel Falls and back to a wholesome Christian atmosphere, dear."

"What about grandfather?" "He's in God's hands, dear," Ellen answered brokenly, going into her bedroom and packing hastily.

Before leaving, Ellen wrote a note and placed it on the dining room table where her father was sure to see it. She couldn't go back into the kitchen. Somehow, the evil of it all brought back too many hurtful and painful memories.

Driving down the highway, her eyes misted with tears, Ellen spoke softly, "I'm sorry we ever left Laurel Falls, David."

"But grandfather needed you, Mom," the boy said, looking steadily into his mother's pale face.

"Not really, dear. And to think I believed him! That he had changed, I mean." Ellen's hands clutched the steering wheel tightly. Her knuckles showed white.

David sighed. Fastening the seat belt securely around him he settled back into the seat.

"Mom," he began slowly, after a long period of silence, "know something?"

"What is it, David?"

"I... I... you are right. About grandfather not changing, I mean."

Ellen cast a quick sideways look at her son as he continued.

"Right after you left grandfather's place to go take care of Mrs. Harmon... well..., well..." he faltered. Stuttered. Should he go on? the youth wondered. Was it fair to grandfather?

"What happened, David?" Ellen prodded gently. "Tell me."

David suddenly burst into tears. "Grandpa called a whole bunch of men and . . . and, Mom, he's had cards and drinking and smoking in the house ever since you left. Oh, I'm so glad you came back tonight! It was terrible, Mother! Until tonight, Grandpa always made me stay in my room. Said it wasn't fit for a stripling my age to learn the ways of grown men. But tonight one of the men demanded that grandpa make me stay out in the kitchen and learn how to play cards and gamble. Said he'd been at it since he was a boy. And, Mom, you walked in right after grandpa made me come out of my room and stay near him."

Ellen sighed wearily. "The ways of God are past finding out, David. Yesterday as I worked, the Lord impressed me strongly to hurry home. Since Mrs. Harmon is much improved, I asked her daughter to find someone else to stay with her till she is fully recovered, that I must return to you immediately. So I left early this morning. Oh, David, I'm sorry I ever brought you home to grandfather's house!"

"But God took care of me, Mother. As soon as the men began arriving at the house I hurried into my bedroom and locked the door. Then I'd read my Bible and pray and ask the Lord to keep me safe and to bless you and bring you back to me soon. Some of the men got terribly angry at grandfather, Mother. I could hear them shout at him and curse him. I.. was scared!"

"David," Ellen's voice trembled, "I have deliberately hesitated to talk about your father to you. But I feel you now are old enough to know the facts."

David's eyes never left his mother's face. "What happened to daddy?" he asked eagerly.

"To begin, we must go back many years -- back to the past, David. Your father was a wonderful man. A strong man and kind. We fell in love with each other and were married. Two years and five months later God sent you into our lives. Your father was as proud of you as I was. You not only bore his name, you looked like him.

"Shortly after God sent you to us, we both got gloriously converted and a short time thereafter we were sanctified wholly. We were so happy in the Lord and with each other and you. One evening your father and I stopped by grandfather and grandmother's house to take grandma with us to church. You had a wonderful grandmother, David. She was a real saint of God who prayed earnestly for grandfather's conversion. Well, as I was saying, your father went inside to help grandmother out to the car. As usual,

grandpa had a game going on in the kitchen and the men had been drinking. Just as you saw it tonight."

David shivered in spite of the hot outside temperature.

"One of the men, in a drunken rage and out of hatred for my father -- your grandfather -- started after him. Your father, hearing a loud commotion and a plea for help from grandfather, rushed into the smoky hate-filled room and threw himself between the man and your grandfather. The steel poker in the angry man's hand hit your father over the head. He dropped to the floor.., a corpse."

"Mother!

"Yes, my dear boy," Ellen sighed brokenly, hot tears starting in her eyes with remembering. "Your father has been in heaven for better than ten years."

"But . . . but why, Mother? I mean, why did my dear noble daddy stand between grandfather and ... and that wicked, wicked man?"

"Because he knew that if grandfather were killed he'd go straight to hell. That's why. But the man who killed your father was not any more wicked than your own grandfather, son. Sin is sin no matter what form it takes; and God said, 'The soul that sinneth it shall die.' "

David's eyes were fixed hard on the road now.

"It has been truthfully stated that 'the road to hell is paved with good intentions,' my son. Grandfather promised many, many times to change his way of living and to give up the old life . . ."

"Then why doesn't he do it?"

"Simply because no man can rightly change himself."

"But God could change him, Mother!" David interrupted.

"God is the only One who can change grandfather, dear. But until he comes to the place where he is willing to humble himself and seek God's forgiveness and His righteousness and peace, things will never change."

After a long while of silence David spoke. His voice conveyed an air of resoluteness; a positive note. "Mother," he said, squaring his shoulders, "the Lord helping me, I will be a man like my father! I shall try to carry on the life he laid down at that early age. My life shall be lived entirely for Jesus!"

And it was!

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THE END