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The Darkness Lifts

By Mrs. Paul E. King

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I sat on the edge of the bed listening to the old man's labored breathing and watching the muscles in his face twitch and contort as though with pain. Across from me, his fingers resting gently on the unconscious man's wrist, counting the pulse-beat, Doctor Park's face was a study of concern. At last he shook his head.

"There seems to be only the heart weakness," he stated, looking at me, "and that shouldn't account for the prolonged coma. Has he had any shock or deep trouble? The problem, as I see it, is either mental or spiritual. You are his son, I presume?"



Getting to my feet and clearing my dry throat, I replied, "No, Sir, I'm not his son, I'm a good friend."

The doctor looked at me. I had the uncanny feeling of being probed within. His steel-gray eyes never wavered as he asked pointedly, "What do you know about Martin Gray, young man? How long have you been acquainted with him?"

"I have known Mr. Gray all my Life," I answered truthfully.

"His wife; is she living?"

"No, Sir. Mrs. Gray's been dead for eight or nine years."

"Any children?"

Shifting my weight from one foot to the other, I said, "A daughter. An only child."

"Where does she live? Near here?"

"She's away in college."

The doctor looked at his patient, then once more placed his skilled fingers on the man's wrist and counted in silence.

Giving me an enigmatic stare, he said, "This daughter, she is, no doubt, the man's pride and joy. Has she been notified of her father's condition?"

I knew it would come, this time of reckoning, and suddenly I wished the floor would somehow allow me passage through it.

"Well, young man?"

The doctor's words brought me quickly back to reality.

Clearing my throat again I said, "Amber has not been notified. Mr. Gray will have nothing to do with her."

The statement shocked Doctor Park. "He wants no part of her!" he exclaimed unbelievably. "An only child, and he will have nothing to do with her! What a selfish, selfish man! What brought on the estrangement, and when did it happen?"

"Two years ago Amber turned deeply religious -- against her father's wishes; he turned her out of his home and out of his life. Since then he's been a bitter and lonely man. He has few friends. I happen to be one of the rare few."

"Go on," Doctor Park urged, folding his hands across his ample chest.

Taking a deep breath, I said, "As I stated previously, Amber was an only child..."

"Was?"

I felt color come into my cheeks. "Is, I should have said," I corrected, feeling somehow ill at ease in the doctor's presence. "She has all the features of her mother, as well as her mother's extraordinary beauty. And talent, too. It was this latter that caused a part of the trouble."

"Oh?" Doctor Park questioned, twiddling his thumbs, his piercing eyes never once leaving my face. Against my will, I found myself relating everything.

"Amber has an unusually beautiful voice. Clear as a bell on a crisp morning. She was a concert pianist also. As more and more audiences requested her to sing when she gave her concerts, Martin decided she should have the best voice training. In a short time, she became an operatic singer -- a coloratura soprano they called her. Her father and I were delighted and ecstatic with joy when she performed in her first opera. She looked like a goddess. Her performance was flawless. The audience was mesmerized. We -- her father and I -- beamed proudly upon her, watching and listening from our box-office seats."

"You . . . seem rather attached to this daughter. Am I assuming right . . . ?"

Again I felt the mounting color in my cheeks. With open candor I remarked quickly, "Amber and I would have been married by now had it not been for this -- this forth something that got into her -- this foolish religious notion."

"Foolish notion?" Doctor Park questioned, arching his eyebrows. "By the way, what is your name? I didn't think to ask when I entered the room."

"I'm David Miller -- a life-long friend and acquaintance of the Gray family. As I previously stated, Amber would have been my wife by now had she not gone off the deep end and gotten religious."

Drawing his eyebrows together in a frown, his enigmatic stare quite a bothersome thing to me, the doctor said without preamble, "Why that should have been cause for you not to marry is quite beyond my thinking. It seems to me that, had your love for this woman been a thing of genuine quality and pure devotion, you would have married her in spite of her turn toward things religious. In all actuality and from my observations, the most solid, stable and enduring marriages are those built upon, and around, religion. True and pure religion, that is."

The doctor was disconcerting, to say the least, and for a brief moment I felt like sealing my lips. But the shallow breathing of the comatose man gave impetus to the statements that followed. I spoke almost fiercer.

"But you don't understand!" I exclaimed defensively. "Amber broke our engagement when I refused to get converted, as she called it. This 'conversion' ended her musical and singing career as well. Naturally, her father was furious. All the money he'd invested in her went down the drain. And all because of a gospel tract she had handed to her while shopping one day, which she read! I tell you, Doctor, she's thrown both of us into near hysteria. First, breaking her engagement to me, because the Bible says something or other about not being 'unequally yoked together with unbelievers' -- her words -- then bringing her highly successful career and performances to an abrupt halt, stating that she could not be 'linked up with the world and maintain a bright and clear relationship with her Christ at the same time!'"

For the first time since entering the room, a faint smile played around the corners of Doctor Park's mouth. "Sounds like this Amber's quite a wonderful young woman. But tell me, if all of this took place two years ago, why this reaction now on Martin Gray? In studying the man's medical record I note that he's been quite healthy. Organically, he's fine. What has happened to produce this condition? What further new development or happening with this daughter?"

"He got word through a friend that Amber's traveling, doing evangelistic singing during the summer season when Bible School's not in session. She's in her second year of Bible training. It was this latest bit of news that overwhelmed him. He felt she should be singing for the entire world to hear her instead of "wasting her talent in an obscure, insignificant Bible School.' These are Martin's words, Doctor Park."

The doctor stood to his feet. Straightening his back he said, "Send for Amber immediately."

Taken off guard, I exclaimed hotly, "Nothing doing! Martin's wishes shall not be transgressed. Never!"

"Then I shall contact the girl myself Mrs. Hemmingway will be able to assist me. It was because of her insistence that I agreed to take this case. She has compassion for the man; also, she is greatly concerned about his soul, a thing you had better give serious thought to yourself, young man. Death, nor the grave, is man's ultimate end. Better ponder over the."

With these words the doctor hurried from the room.

Seating myself in the chair just vacated, I watched Martin's chest rise and fall with his breathing. What a brittle thing was the thread of life, I thought seriously, realizing for the first time ever the value and importance of a single heartbeat.

Doctor Park's words sent a dagger into my heart. About giving serious thought to my soul, particularly. Heretofore I never bothered my mind with such things, living and functioning on the premise that each day was mine to be enjoyed to its fullest in whatever things I desired to do. But now . . . !

Could it be possible that Amber was right after all? that her tearful entreaty to her father and me -- that we get right with God -- was a call from God to our heart?

Suddenly I felt afraid; terror seized my heart. Where would I go when I died? It was a frightening thought, and to shake it from my mind I stepped out of the room and walked down the hospital corridor to the windows at the far end.

Two days later, as I sat watching the man who was to have been my father-in-law, I became aware of a presence. Turning and facing the door, I gasped.

"Amber!" I exclaimed.

"Hello, David. How's Father?"

Getting to my feet I said quietly, "You'd better not come inside; you know the score."

"Oh, but you're wrong, David. Daddy will rejoice to know I'm him." I've been praying ever since Doctor Park called. Now step aside, please, and let me go to him."

With that, Amber stepped through the doorway and rushed to the bed.

"Daddy dear, it's me -- Amber. I've come to see you. Can you hear me, Father? I love you."

With bated breath I washed from my stance at the foot of the bed, knowing Martin's fury and bitterness over what had happened.

Tears streamed down Amber's face; her lips moved in silent words. She looked like some heavenly being, I realized suddenly, seeing the radiance and the glow of another world reflected in and through her. I turned and hurled out of the room. She must not see the tears that rolled and tumbled down my cheeks.

When I was sure that all tell-tale marks of my crying spell were gone from my eyes, I walked back to the room. Bending low over her father, her mouth close to his ear, Amber was singing:

"Jesus Lover of my soul
Let me to Thy bosom fly . . ."

It was beautiful. In fact, her voice was more beautiful than I had ever heard it. She sang with feeling; it came from somewhere deep within and suddenly my heart and soul and mind wanted the Christ about whom she was singing.

"Other refuge have I none --
Hangs my helpless soul on Thee. . ."

Between my fastly-falling tears I saw Martin's eyelids flutter then slowly open.

"Am-ber . . . is . . . it really . . . you?" he asked in a weak and trembling voice.
"Am-ber!"

"I'm here, Father dear. Yes, it's I," she replied, caressing his cheek and clinging to his hand.

"Oh, Amber, I was . . . wrong. All . . . wrong. Please forgive me. I . . . want your . . . Savior . . . to be mine. Please, Amber . . ."

"Yes, Daddy dear. Yes. You can know the joy of sins forgiven"

"Now, Amber? . . . right... now?"

"Now, dear Father! Yes, now."

Again I slipped away, and when I returned Martin was asleep. There was a look of peace on his face. "He'll be fine." It was Doctor Park's voice.

Startled, I turned and faced the doctor. I had nether heard nor seen him as I entered the room

"He's passed the crisis," he said, looking me squarely in the eye. "And now, what about you, David? Don't you think it's time you relinquished your stubbornness and stopped fighting against God and got down to doing serious business with Him? You'll never know real peace until you do. My prescription for you, young man, is that of repentance. Martin proved its genuineness . . . its effectiveness. He got things fixed up in his soul and he'll soon be well enough to return to his home. You, however . . . well . . . you're as lost as a man can ever be without Jesus Christ."

That stung; cut, too. Yes, the doctor's last sentence cut and slashed away inside my proud heart like a sharp sword. He spoke with open candor and frankness, bringing me abruptly face to face with Truth. With sudden awareness and frightening illumination, I saw that I was indeed "as lost as a man could ever be, without Jesus Christ."

My body trembled and shook under mighty conviction.

"You've always been a sensible man, David," Amber said tearfully. "Why don't you do what you should have done two years ago? My Savior's waiting to enter your heart and to give you soul-rest."

Soul-rest! More fitting words could not have been uttered to describe my heart's deep and secret longing. That, I admitted finally, was the very thing for which I had been searching and seeking.

With bowed head and an intense contrition and godly sorrow for my many sins, all the mental rationalizing I'd ever done against God suddenly vanished. I had no argument to pit against the irresistible Power that was drawing me and wooing me to Himself.

In utter self-debasement I humbled myself confessing and acknowledging my sins, and in a moment of time I, too, was convened . . . made new in Christ. The old life

passed away and all things became new. I came out of the darkness into God's glorious fight. Now -- yes, now I -- understood the radical change in Amber's life and why she so completely separated herself from all things worldly.

She went back to Bible School a week after Martin returned home . . . he insisted that she do so! But we plan a trip out there some day, Martin and I, the Lord willing . . . as soon as he's strong enough. And who knows, I may enroll there myself in another year if it is God's will. Amber said it would do me much good; spiritually, especially so.

And, yes, another thing: I'm sure I detected that Amber's love for me is still intact. But this is something too sacred and too wonderful to mention to her until I've had time to prove that I'm following Christ, not for the 'loaves and the fishes' of her own self, but out of total willingness and love and obedience to Him. Till such a time when He may lead us back together (if ever) my humble prayer is, "Thy Will, not mine be done."

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THE END