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## Out Of The Night

By Mrs. Paul E. King

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### Chapter 1

Jon Huntley sat down on a fallen tree along the edge of the frozen pond outside the town and looked across the glassy water, his thoughts a mixture of lightness and heaviness, gaiety and troubled forebodings, cautious adventure and frightening fear. For months and months he had wanted to be a part of the so-called "in" crowd at school and now that he was accepted his heart was filled with sudden misgivings and fearful apprehensions.



Disgusted with both himself and his feelings, he laced the skates on his feet in a fierce manner, wondering why Buzz suggested they meet on the pond instead of at someone's house. Easing himself query out on the ice, he glided over the smooth, glassy surface with the skill and grace of a pro, the bitter cold biting his nose and stinging his cheeks with a pricking, burning sensation.

The night was beautiful and clear with winking, blinking stars and a slivery-yellow quarter moon with his lantern hanging upside down. From a nearby woods came the shrill, high-pitched and quivering call of a screech owl. A dog, hearing the spine-tingling cry, mingled his mournful melancholy wail with that of the nocturnal fowl.

It was spooky, Jon thought, weird too. Did it, perhaps, portend some ill fate for him, he wondered, thinking that it may be better that he not mingle too freely with Buzz

Spears, Hutch Tallon and some of their gang. What about tonight, he wondered, skating fiercer, trying to clear his mind to decide what to do. He could back out; that would be easy. All he'd need to do was skate down around the bend, then cut to the shore and make quick tracks at getting home.

Doing a quick turn-about, he headed for the bend just as the sound of skis cutting across the ice reached his ears.

"Good boy, Jon!" Buzz exclaimed, coming alongside him. "Right on time. That's the way I like it."

Jon started to say something but Buzz spoke again. "This is your big night," he exclaimed. "If you make it tonight . . . well . . ."

"Yeah!" Hutch said. "This is your night of initiation, Jon. You know, sort of like those high-faluting sororities do."

Jon shuddered. "Just what do you mean by that?" he asked.

"It's 'The Antique Shoppe' tonight," Buzz said informatively. "Only, you'll pull the job off. See?"

Jon's blood seemed to run cold. "Surely you wouldn't do what I think you mean! Mr. Tasker's a good man, and he's old, and . . ."

"Look, pal, you're not getting out of this, see? You wanted to be one of us . . ." and Buzz's voice trailed meaningfully and menacingly.

"But Buzz, I had no idea that you fellows would . . . would do anything like . . . like..."

"Steal?" Buzz said, finishing the sentence for Jon and laughing a hard, cold kind of laughter when the word was out. "Grow up; stop acting like a baby and a sissy. Just 'cause your dad's the mayor doesn't mean . . ."

Jon rose to meet the situation. With a raised fist, he exclaimed indignantly, "Stop it! Stop it! Can I help it that my father's one of the big shots around here? Did I ask to be born into a family of highbrows? Answer me, Buzz Spears!"

Backing away, Buzz said quickly, "Cut it out, Jon. I was merely testing you, wanting to see what you're made of. I can't have a softie in the gang. You have been rather sheltered, you know."

"Through no fault of my own!" came the derisive and flat rejoinder. "Let's get moving; it's cold out here and it's getting late, too."

"Curfew?" Hutch questioned quickly, a smirk on his face.

"No, nothing of the kind. My dad doesn't care how late I'm out so long as I behave and don't do anything to mar his image nor ruin his chances of making it again next year."

Buzz snorted. "I know what you mean," he said derisively and in utter disgust. "My dad's big executive job is his idol. Sis and I scarcely know we have a father. Oh, we wear his last name, but that's about all. He's gone more than he's home, and he's never around when we need him. But come, let's get moving. The reason I suggested meeting here was to throw off suspicion should anyone see Hutch and me leaving together. We don't have the best reputation, you know. And since it's quite natural for young people to go skating when the ice is frozen and thick and glassy, I figured no one would suspect us of anything other than of having good, clean, wholesome fun. Follow me? Then too, Ninth Street isn't too far from here -- easy access to and from The Antique Shoppe."

Hutch laughed wildly. Slapping Buzz soundly on his shoulder he said, "That's what I call using your brains, Boss. Yeah, brains!"

Jon, totally unimpressed by the remark, moved across the ice with the pair, his heart feeling as cold and as frigid as the night air itself. After removing their skates and hiding them in a place designated by Buzz, they were soon at the back of Andrew Tasker's small but thriving place of business.

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Jon moved uncomfortably on the hard cot, his eyes raised toward the narrow window in his cell through which a single, slanting ray of sunlight filtered into the dismal and bare room. Bitterness washed over him. He had been apprehend as he was sure he would be. But he hadn't laid so much as a finger on Mr. Tasker, nor had he stolen anything from the man's place of business. That was a consoling thought. Buzz, angered greatly by his refusal to enter the shop through a rear window, had made the entrance himself and was in the process of removing the certain valuables when the aging shopkeeper entered the store room. Like a caged tiger, Buzz flew at the man, knocking him to the floor and setting off a burglar alarm.

Jon tried to push the nightmarish happening out of his mind but found this quite impossible to do. In the eyes of the law, he was now as much a criminal as were Buzz and Hutch who, on numerous other occasions, had been in serious trouble. What would happen to him, he wondered suddenly, realizing that, although he had no previous record of offense, he would have to pay for being with the pair when they were caught.

Getting to his feet, Jon walked to the tiny, grimy, dirty wash bowl in the corner of the cell and turned the spigot on, longing with great intensity for the big, clean bathroom at home. Splashing cold water over his face and hands, he ran his fingers through his hair, trying to 'comb' the tangles not only from his rusty-brown hair but from his brain as well. He had been a fool; yes, he had! In a single moment of time he had thrown his good name and his equally good reputation to the wind. What would happen to him and to his father's position, too?

At the thought of his father, Jon clenched his fists. Position and prestige were the all-important things in his dad's life. Jon Huntley was of no importance whatever -- never had been and never would be. He had known it all along and was more convinced of it than ever, now that he was confined to this loathsome cell (how long had it been? -- two weeks? three?) and his proud, haughty father hadn't paid him a single visit. He would never stoop to visit his jail-bird' son, Jon knew, and try to find out his innocence or guilt.

The thought shook the boy to the core. Trembling, he settled down on the miserable cot again, his mind doing play-backs of lonely nights when he had begged his father to stay home with his mother and himself, his soulful eyes pleading all the while to be a part of things -- mainly, a part of his father's life. But his dream was never to be fulfilled nor realized; Mayor Jason Huntley chided his only child for whining when his simple requests were denied, dubbing him "a sissified brat" when the tears spilled down Jon's face.

The hurt and the pain had grown and intensified with the years and Grace Huntley, for all her mother heart, was shut out of the high wall enclosure which had been built by Jason Huntley, line upon line and precept upon precept, around the son whom she seemed never to fully quite understand.

Jon brushed a hand across his eyes and discovered that he was crying. Why hadn't his mother visited him, he wondered anxiously. Was she, like his father, callused and too vain and proud to spend time with him? Or could it be that she didn't care, that she thought this was the best place for him to be?

The thought was digressing and torturous. Jon felt utterly and desolately alone, forsaken and abandoned by all.

"Chow time," a guard called loudly, breaking in upon Jon's melancholy mood before unlocking the door and leading him to the mess hall.

Hatred boiled up within Jon's young heart. He ate little. The food seemed to choke him, and when he was taken back to the damp, cruddy cell he settled down once more to bitter thinking. Suppose Mr. Tasker died from the blow he'd received by Buzz, then what? How was he doing? Oh why, why didn't someone come and tell him what was happening? Surely the newspapers were keeping the citizens of his town informed as to the condition of the antique shop owner!

Jon paced restlessly back and forth behind the locked door. If anything happened to Andrew Tasker, he may well spend the rest of his life behind bars, he realized with sudden fright.

Cold chills raced madly up and down his spine. it was a staggering thought, a sobering thought. Jon buried his face in his hands and wept. What was it that Sandra Gilbert had told him in school one day . . . something about sin having its payday?

At thought of Sandra, Jon groaned aloud. Sandra, the best girl in Whitley High, and he had disappointed her! Not that they dated -- as badly as he had wanted to. Each time he had asked her for a date, Sandra declined, saying something or other about not being "unequally yoked together" -- whatever that meant.

It didn't make sense, Jon thought, but Sandra's life did! She was different from any girl he had ever met or known and she listened when he told her his problems. Yes, Sandra listened, and she cared. He could feel it. Maybe that was why he had been drawn to her like a magnet -- because of her empathy and her listening, compassionate and understanding heart where his and his fellow classmates' problems were concerned. She had reminded him over and over that she was praying that he would get saved and forsake his life of sin. Always he had countered with the age-old, "I'm-not-so-bad" excuse which now left him cold and bitter, empty and void.

Perhaps, if he had taken Sandra's advice and surrendered himself to the God whom she loved and worshipped and served, he would still be a free man finishing his first year of high school. But now . . . now . . . !

Burying his face in his hands, Jon sobbed uncontrollably. The one person in all the world who had understood him and cared enough about him to pray for him was now lost to him forever. Yes, forever!

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## Chapter 2

"Better start eating, Son, or you'll be little more than a skeletal shadow," the guard said kindly to Jon a few days later. "You're getting entirely too thin and sallow looking." The latter statement was added with a note of positive and definite concern.

"It makes little difference!" Jon retorted bitterly. "I've no one to care about me nor bother themselves with what happens to me."

"I wouldn't say that; at least you've been getting mail; that's more than some can say who're in here."

"Mail! Are you kidding? I haven't had so much as a postcard since I was thrust into this loathsome cell. That's what I mean when I say that nobody -- absolutely nobody -- cares about me. I can rot here for all my family cares."

Drawing his breath in quick-like the guard -- a Mr. Higgins and a kindly, middle-aged man -- said, "I'd be careful what I said and how I felt, if I were you, Jon. But of course your parents care -- your mother, particularly. Haven't I seen the letters she sent you on the desk out front?"

"You're lying!" Jon accused bitterly. "Now leave me alone and stop mocking me. I'm no idiot, and no moron either; I guess I know if I got mail or if I didn't; and when I tell you I didn't, I didn't! Isn't it torture enough to be locked up in a dirty, filthy cell -- for a crime you never committed -- without being made sport of for not getting mail nor having any visitors? Just leave me alone! Do you hear?"

Sighing, Mr. Higgins drew a piece of paper from his pocket and thrust it into Jon's hand. "Read this," he said, "while I go check on something."

Jon was breathing heavily by the time the guard left. Anger was a dreadful thing, he realized, pacing back and forth. Crumpling the paper, he threw it on the floor. It was maddening, he mused fiercer, being locked up like some wild ferocious animal with nothing whatever to do but sit and think.

"Hey, you in there!" a male voice shouted from a nearby cell. "I heard what you said about not being guilty -- about not committing the crime. But don't get any ideas, kid. Don't try getting the guard on your side by feeding him that line. I guess every one in here has said those exact words, and believe me, they're not magic; it won't work. You're here for the same reason I'm here; you commuted a crime same as I did and we're both paying for our roughness. Admit your guilt and put on your best behavior and maybe -- just maybe -- you'll come up for an early parole."

Admit his guilt! Jon felt anger boil up within him again. He made no reply; inwardly, however, his heart was aflame with bitterness and hatred. Admit his guilt? Never. Never! He wasn't guilty -- not of anything more than being with the wrong fellows. No matter who accused him of committing the crime, he wasn't guilty. But who would believe him? Oh, why . . . why . . . had he ever thought it would be great to hang around with Buzz and Hutch and their gang? Why?

"Jon." It was the guard.

"Not you again! Please, please let me alone. Alone!"

Waiting until Jon spent his wrath, Mr. Higgins finally held out his hand toward him. "Here," he said kindly, handing him a packet of mail. "Accept my apology about the

letters. For some reason not explained to me, these were never given to you. I'm sure it will make your day brighter."

For a long while Jon was speechless. Finally he stammered, "Th . . . thanks, Mr. Higgins, and forgive me for . . . for . . . accusing you of lying. I'm . . . sorry."

Slapping Jon on his shoulder, Mr. Higgins spoke softly. "I'd like to help you, Son, if you'll grant me the privilege." Then, in little more than a subdued whisper, he added, "You see, I believe you, when you say you didn't commit any crime. I really want to help you, Jon. Promise you'll read the tract I handed you."

Jon's eyes dropped to the wrinkled, crumpled paper on the floor. Stooping, he picked it up. "I . . . I'll read it," he promised in a trembling, hoarse voice, feeling some of the bitterness inside him giving way to respect and admiration toward the man standing before him. "Yes, I'll read it!" he repeated emphatically.

"That's all I ask for this time, Son."

Jon stood, dumfounded, for a long while after Mr. Higgins had departed. Son! Mr. Higgins had called him son! How sweet and comforting the word sounded to his ears. Did the man, perhaps, have children of his own? And did he speak kindly and lovingly to them like he had always longed for his father to do, he wondered, feeling a lump pop into his throat.

Involuntarily, hot tears stung his eyes and rolled down his cheeks. Oh, if only his father had loved him and spoken kindly to him! All his life he had tried hard to please his wordly-minded ambitious father but to no avail. And all his life, for so long as Jon could remember, his father had let him know that he was a most unwelcome addition to the home.

"But I didn't ask to be born!" Jon exclaimed fiercely to himself now, recalling the unpleasant scenes in the home and his father's cutting, stinging declaration.

Suddenly remembering the packet of letters in his hand, he seated himself on the miserable cot and untied the string which held them together. He felt warm color mount to his cheeks at sight of Sandra's return address in the upper left-hand corner. She hadn't forgotten him! She hadn't! And maybe . . . Oh that it may be so . . . yes, maybe she was still praying for him.

The thought that someone did care and was concerned overwhelmed Jon. Perhaps life may even yet hold something of good for him.

Sorting quickly through the mail, a sense of remorse settled in upon him for secretly and rebelliously feeling that no one cared, especially when he discovered ten

letters from his mother, eight from Sandra and half a dozen from names unfamiliar to him. As he expected, the welcome packet yielded nothing from his father.

Opening his mother's letters, Jon devoured the contents eagerly, rereading certain lines and phrases, tears all the while spilling from his eyes. She missed him (really missed him) she had written. She would have driven down to see him, great though the distance was, but a sudden, unexpected emergency surgery had kept her confined to her bed for a long time with doctor's strict orders that she must have total rest for several months yet. He was not to worry over her, she had added; she would be all right, she was sure. Her greatest desire was to see him and to have him home again, she told him.

Jon clasped the letters to his bosom. Not a word had his mother said about his father. The very obvious absence of any mention of him whatever was proof enough to Jon of his father's utter abhorrence of him. But his mother cared, and she missed him; this was solace enough for him.

Sandra's letters were full of compassion and concern for him and his soul's healing. Every sentence she wrote seemed to drive truth home to his heart. Like his mother, Sandra wondered why he hadn't written. Wasn't he allowed this privilege? And what about visitors; could he have visitors? she wanted to know "I am praying more than ever for you, Jon," she wrote, "and fasting for you, too. So are the young people from the church. And, know something, Jon? God's going to save your soul; I have full assurance of this . . ."

Jon couldn't go on. Closing his eyes, he leaned his head against the cold, damp wall and wept. Oh, it was wonderful -- wonderful -- to know that he wasn't forgotten after all. His mother missed him and cared about him; so did Sandra.

It was a heady thought and as Jon read the rest of his mail -- letters from the young people in the same church where Sandra attended -- he became fully convinced that here was a group who were "pulling" for him. With the illumination came a desire to turn about-face. If only he'd taken God's way when Sandra had asked him to he'd never have gotten into the mess he was now in.

Opening Sandra's letters again, Jon reread them all. Snatches of Scripture verses fastened themselves upon his heart and mind as he read her letters, and long after the fights were turned out in the building the verses spoke to his heart. With sudden eagerness he embraced them, asking God to take the darkness from his heart and to make Himself real to him if, indeed, He was real and did really exist.

For the first time since his incarceration, sleep came readily and easily to his eyes that night. When he awoke the following morning, the letters still held close to his heart, Jon felt strangely happy. It was then that he remembered his promise to Mr. Higgins. Searching through his mail, he found the piece of paper among the letters.

Salty tears stung his eyes while he read the simple and beautiful plan of redemption and salvation as outlined plainly on the gospel tract. With fierce intensity, Jon believed it was for him. Yes, regardless of how much his father had berated him and called him a sissy and told him he'd never amount to anything, he knew differently now. God loved him and He could use him!

Slipping off the cot to the cold floor, Jon prayed. "God," he said aloud, "I'm new at this, but please do for me what this piece of paper says You did for the publican man. Like him, I cry, 'God, be merciful to me a sinner. . .'"

Instantly a peace and rest such as he had never known filled Jon's heart. He knew he was forgiven of all his commuted sins; he had the Witness within him. Now he knew what Sandra meant when she had told him at school one day that serving the Lord was the greatest thing in all the world. Finally, the light had broken through upon his heart. With the knowledge that he was now a child of God, Jon wept unashamedly for joy.

"Hey! What's going on in there?" the nearby cell-mate asked, calling loudly.

Still crying for joy, Jon replied quickly, "I just got saved. I'm a new person. God made me new!"

"Who're you kidding, sonny boy? You're just trying to get an early parole, that's all. Now listen to me; cut the act. Do like the rest of us and serve out your time without trying to pull off any stunts. You hear? Some of us are pretty tough in here and if anything tee's us off it's the religious act. It'll go bad for you if we get our hands on you!"

The warning was given; Jon knew the man meant what he'd said. He had witnessed two big fights since his arrival here and he had heard numerous others in cells where more than one was confined to a cell. Heretofore he'd considered himself lucky to have no one in the same cell with him. Now he realized it wasn't luck at all, but rather, it was God's doing. Yes, God had been looking out for him all along.

"You get what I said, kid?" the man bellowed from his cell.

"Can one stop the mighty dyers from flowing by stuffing a handkerchief in their current?" Jon asked sweetly as wave after wave of heavenly joy and peace washed over his happy soul.

"You challenge me, huh? Well, wait till I get my hands on you! I'll make you sorry you ever got soft-headed. I'm not called Muscles for nothing!"

Lifting his head upward, Jon talked to his newfound Friend about the threat.

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### Chapter 3

The bully man's threat was fulfilled and carried out quicker than Jon had anticipated; Mr. Higgins, overjoyed at hearing the good news of Jon's conversion and heretofore not tolerated. The man called Muscles, infuriated into a burning rage by Jon's relative degree of freedom and liberty, pounced upon him with the swiftness, agility and accuracy of a mountain cat as they returned to their cells from lunch one day.

It happened so suddenly and so ostentatiously that by the time Mr. Higgins got the man off Jon and had him locked securely inside his cell, Jon was badly cut and bruised and bleeding profusely.

Painfully pulling himself to his feet, Jon made his way to the cot in his cell and laid down, a get-even feeling stirring somewhere inside his heart and disturbing his new-found peace and joy. Muscles all the while was belching out invectives against him and declaring loudly that the next time he "would tear him apart, limb by limb."

The feeling inside Jon's breast increased and with its persistence came another... hatred!

"Forgive me, Lord! O forgive!" he cried immediately aloud in desperation and anguish of soul. "Please, please, dear God, don't ever take Your peace and rest and joy away from me. I want You! I need You! I'm sorry for this awful -this frightening -- get-even feeling, and for this hatred . . ."

Instantly the peace and joy returned to Jon's heart. In spite of his pain, he was happy again.

His wounds healed with time, as did the severe discoloration of his bruises, but the dreadful feeling of retaliation which he'd had toward Muscles that day when he was knocked to the floor and receded the beating bothered Jon. Suppose it should again arise inside his heart and soul and this time be carried through! Oh, God forbid, he thought, shuddering with fright and fear.

The thought was so painful and troublesome as to drive Jon to his knees in supplicative prayer to God for deliverance, begging Him to forbid the peace-disturber to ever trouble him again. A holy calm enveloped him, possessing his entire being, and a sense of cleanness -- of inward purging -- surged through him. Simultaneously, wave after wave of divine glory and love flooded his entire person until he shouted aloud for pure joy. From that moment on the get-even spirit was gone, to never again bother and distress him.

In a letter to Sandra, Jon wrote in vivid detail of his earlier bitter, get-even, hatred spirit, ending with, "Something happened to me, Sandy, when I told God to deliver me

from that dreadfully frightening peace disturbing thing; I've been delivered! Thanks be unto God! My heart now has a perfect calm within, and with no reservation whatever I can pray honestly, 'Lord, bless Muscles and all my enemies . . .'"

Jon's pen dropped suddenly from his hand; tears of joy washed his cheeks: enemies! enemies! Dad! . . . Yes, yes! his happy heart responded. He could even pray -- openly, honestly and with unfeigned love -- for his father. This, he realized with joyous illumination, was one of the greatest miracles of all.

Taking his pen, Jon quickly related this new revelation to Sandra whose almost daily letters served as a stimulus to his new found faith and whose answer to the letter told him that that which he had received was holiness of heart -- sanctification.

The following weekend Jon was surprised by a visit from his mother. She was pale and wan looking with worry lines recorded on her usually pretty face. Gathering her into his arms, Jon wept -- partly because he knew he was responsible for some of those lines on her face and mostly because he was overjoyed at seeing her again.

"It's been so long, Mother, since I saw you!" he exclaimed hoarsely. "So very long. Oh, but it's good to see you. I'm sorry I caused you worry and sorrow, and I humbly beg you to forgive me. I'm different, Mother! All different and all new, and I want you and Dad to experience this inward change. Sandra calls it the 'new birth,' a biblical term, really."

For answer, Mrs. Huntley merely sighed and declared wearily, "Nothing can change your father, Jon. Nothing! He doesn't want to change. At least he didn't when he left."

"Left! What do you mean, Mother?"

The color, what little she had, seemed to drain from Grace Huntley's face. Gently, Jon led her to a settee and made her sit down. Then, seating himself beside her and taking her small hands in his own, he said, "Tell me about Father, Mother. My heart harbors no more bitterness toward him; so tell me all, please."

Heaving another troubled sigh and looking into her son's face for a long while, the woman finally exhaled, "You have changed, Jon! You really have. No longer do I need to pity you and feel sorry for you; I am the one to be pitied. O Jon!" she lamented, breaking down and sobbing bitterly. "Jon! Jon! I have nothing to live for. My life's been void of meaning and purpose since your incarceration. Then when your father left, well..."

"When did he leave?" Jon asked quickly. "How long have you been alone, Mother? And where did Daddy go?"

Raising her tear-stained eyes to meet those of her son's, Grace Huntley said simply, "He's been gone since the week when the news of your imprisonment came out in the papers. But where, I have no known edge."

"Mother!" Jon gasped in shocked surprise.

Straightening her tiny shoulders, Grace Huntley said bitterly but confidently, "Oh, he'll make it, Jon; no need to worry about that. His terrible and all-consuming pride drove him until he had to leave. The thought of having a son who was a jail-bird was too -- too humiliating and deflating to his egocentric spirit. For all his business expertise and know-how, Jason Huntley was a little man, little and shrunken in spirit. I'm glad he's gone, Jon!"

"Mother, no. No! He is my father! He's your husband for so long as both of you shall live, the Bible says."

With a look such as Jon had never seen in his mother's eyes, she said bitterly, harshly, "You can't begin to know what I went through with Jason; so don't chide when I say I'm glad he's gone. I'll not detail my life for you, Jon; it's too sordid and horrible. So, out of deference to the fact that I, the fool, married him and was his wife, the dead past shall be buried, its memories of horror and fear to be forever bused when I am buried. But to say that I am not bitter would be a lie; I am bitter. Had you endured all that I endured, you would be bitter, too."

Caressing the small hands, his eyes taking in the pattern of tile upon the floor in the room, Jon said slowly, "I was terribly bitter toward Father, dear Mother, until the Lord Jesus came into my heart in saving grace and sanctifying power and gave me love, soul-rest and peace in place of bitterness, malice and hatred. Oh, how I long for you to become 'new in Christ.' "

"I didn't come here to be preached to, Jon; I came to see you. I understand you are up for parole in a little while," she said, changing the subject abruptly. "It will be good to have you home again. I contacted Mr. Hallowell and he said your grades merited some sort of favor. He's sure you'll be able to graduate with your class in spring. Your books are at the front desk, going through careful inspection for any forbidden, concealed thing or things. I'll do everything I can to help you. Your innocence will soon be proved, I'm sure."

"How is Mr. Tasker, Mother? Not a day passes but what I don't think about him. And now that I'm a child of God I pray daily for him. I mean to go to him just as soon as I'm released."

"You . . . you . . . mean you'll go to see him, Jon? I wouldn't if I were you. You see, Ansel, the son, stays with the couple now --ever since the night of the break-in. I

understand he's quite a crack shot with a pistol. I think you'd better take this into consideration."

"I'll cross that bridge when I come to it, Mother dear. God has worked so many mighty miracles in my life and brought me through such deep waters until I'm confident that He'll go before me when the time comes for me to see Mr. Tasker."

His mother sighed. "I hope you know what you're doing," she said. "Personally, I think it's a grave mistake."

"We'll see," Jon said simply. "And now, tell me about yourself. The surgery was a success, I hope." "Very much so. Yes, my health's improved, and slowly I am regaining my strength. I've gone back to my old job with Haskell and Hobard Corporation. This has done wonders for me -- my physical man as wen as my morale -- since your father's sudden and hasty disappearing act."

"Did you never notify the police, Mother?"

With a hazy nod of her head, Grace Huntley replied, "That wasn't necessary; Jason had one of the office boys deliver a personal message to me the night of the morning he left. Simply stated and to the point, the note said, 'Grace, this is more than I can stand. I've been disgraced by the boy. I'm leaving town, never to return. Don't worry about me and don't try to locate me. Jason.' Those are the exact words, Jon. No 'Dear Grace' and no concern for anyone except Jason Huntley . . .' this is more than I can stand; I've been disgraced; I'm leaving . . .' Ugh!"

With his eyes tracing the tile patterns in the floor again, Jon spoke softly. "Dad's a miserable man, Mother. Miserable, and most unhappy. He'd have to be, living such a selfish life. But it seems rather ridiculous, dropping out of sight and forfeiting his position and prestige. Why, his position and power were his god. He lived, breathed, ate and slept this."

"You're right, Jon; so right. But it was a devastating and an all-consuming evil. Personally, I feel he's carving out a new life for himself abroad. His brother Joshua tried on numerous occasions to get Jason to move over near him. But your father was too ensconced in Brookfield to pay any attention to the invitation. Well, I'll have to be going. I'll be back soon to take you home. According to the lawyer who's working on your case, you may be acquitted, especially since you were not involved with the actual breaking in and stealing. Buzz, it seems, has finally confessed everything."

Getting to her feet, Grace kissed her son. It was the first display of final love Jon had had in years, and the simple gesture and beautiful act went straight to his heart.

"Mother! Mother!" he exclaimed, weeping with emotion. "Oh how long I have waited for a show of love on your part. Thank you, thank you!" he added brokenly.

Tears coursed down the wan cheeks of the petite woman. "I know, Jon, and I'm sorry. But you see, your father forbade me to shower you with love, and I . . . well, I was afraid of him. Terribly afraid. I'll try to prove my love for you when you return home. It's been there, Jon, all the time. But I was afraid to display it."

In that instant the wall which had seemed to more or less exist between them crumbled and fell. For the first time in each life there was an openness, a mutual understanding between mother and son -- a oneness.

"Before you leave, may I pray for you?" Jon asked.

"I . . . I guess it wouldn't hurt," Mrs. Huntley replied, stammering. "No . . . it . . . can't hurt. In fact, it may even . . . help . . . me. Yes, go ahead and pray, Jon."

The prayer, simply prayed but straight from his heart, plunged an arrow of conviction into the mother's soul. When he had finished, Jon saw tears shimmering in the blue eyes before him.

"Th . . . thank you, Jon. That was beautiful. Yes, beautiful! I . . . wish I could talk to God like that."

"You will, Mother dear! Some day -- soon -- you'll be talking to God in prayer."

When she had gone, Jon hurried out of the small visitor's room to find Mr. Higgins. He must tell the godly guard the good news that his mother was in the 'softening-up' process and would soon be a new creature in Christ.

\* \* \* \* \*

## Chapter 4

The news of his acquittal, a few days after his mother's visit, made Jon's spirit soar. God had been good to him, he realized. It was his duty now to work and labor for the One whose life was given and Whose blood was shed that he, Jon Huntley, might be saved from all sin and sanctified wholly. With that thought in mind, he found himself in front of Muscles' cell.

"I came to tell you good-by," he said kindly, "and to ask your permission that I pray for you, Muscles. I harbor no ill will toward you. From the bosom of my heart, I love you and want you to experience the peace and love which only Christ can give. What do you say? May I pray?"

For a long moment the athletic built, burly and stoic-looking Muscles stood immobile inside his dismal cell. Then, suddenly trembling and sobbing, he blurted, "Go

ahead and pray, Jon, and may God have mercy on my soul! I've never felt like this before. Never, in all my life! Suddenly -- and I don't understand it, I confess -- I feel weak as my mother when she used to cry over me for doing something wrong." Mother! Muscles had a mother who wept over! The thought brought tears to Jon's eyes.

"I was not always like you see me today," the man was saying. "Once, when I was your age, I was saved, Jon. Really and truly converted. That's the reason why I was so mean and hateful to you; I couldn't stand to see you so happy; it brought back a flood-tide of sacred memories."

"You . . . you mean it, Muscles!" Jon gasped in surprise. "It's true -- every single word of it. I have been living a life of remorse and regret. Mine is the oft-repeated story of getting in with the wrong crowd. I thought it meant quick money and that eventually it would land me on 'easy street.' Well, you see where it landed me. Oh, if only I could go back and undo my wicked past."

"You may not be able to undo what you've done, Muscles, but I know one thing you can do. You can have a clean slate from here on all the way to Heaven through Jesus' shed blood."

"Go ahead and pray for me, Jon. I promise I'll pray with you -- for myself, William Howard Brinkley."

Jon was amazed how easy it was to pray for William (as he addressed the man to God, rather than call him Muscles any longer), and he was equally amazed at William's fervency of spirit and deep contrition of heart as he prayed for himself. Once started, the giant of a man prayed on until his prayer reached higher than the cell in which he was locked and higher than the tallest tree beyond the prison wall. Up, up, up it rose, straight to the ears of a listening, waking Savior whose gentle words, "Son, thy sins are forgiven thee," instantly removed the heavy load of guilt and shame and discharged a car-load of glory on his soul. Though locked in a cell, William Howard Brinkley was free. At long last, he was!

"I'll be praying for you," Jon promised as he said a final good-bye, "and I'll write you, William. If you need to know anything, call Mr. Higgins. He helped me tremendously along the line of things spiritual. And William, I expect you'll be coming up for parole one of these days now that you'll be a model prisoner and not cause any more trouble. Come by and see Mother and me. You'll be welcome at our house. Anytime!"

\* \* \*

The transition back into the flow of society wasn't nearly so difficult as Jon had thought it would be, and when he was once more seated at his desk and listening to his teachers' instructions, he realized just how valuable and priceless a thing was one's freedom.

Through diligent study and much cramming, Jon was soon up with the rest of his class in his studies. A great feeling of intense gratitude welled up inside him. God had been so good to him. His mercies, like the morning dew, had fallen upon him day after day after day, even when he was alienated from his Creator-Maker, he realized. Yes, God was so very good to him. He had not only given him full salvation, but He had helped him to make up every bit of his back work at school, too. And He had preceded him to Mr. Tasker's quaintly-beautiful little shop, also. There, while he testified to Andrew Tasker and his son Ansel, he confessed his involvement with Buzz and Hutch and begged the shop-keeper to forgive him for his wrong-doing. God used his testimony to convict the father and son. After Jon had prayed with them, Mr. Tasker gapped his hand in a death-like grip and all but begged Jon to come back and pray with him again, adding that it was the first time anyone had ever cared enough about him to do such a beautiful thing. Promising to be back often, Jon had walked away, feeling like he was riding a cloud. Oh, what freedom, this clearing of himself brought.

Jon's chief concern now was for the salvation of his parents -- both of them.

Three times as he wrote his father, addressing the letters to his Uncle Joshua's address abroad. Not once did he get a reply. There was consolation in the fact that none of the letters were returned, however.

Hoping and praying, Jon prayed more and more intensely for Jason Huntley's salvation. His mother, while attending church regularly with him, was still not converted. But Sandra, who was his ideal of true Christianity and who was becoming dearer to him with every passing day, (although he had no intentions of revealing his feelings to her until each was older) had told him that she believed the day was not far away when his mother would be saved -- born again.

The prediction came true several weeks later. It happened on a Sunday morning. From the opening song, the service was blest and owned of God all the way through. During a display of holy joy and rapture among the saint, Grace Huntley, of her own will hurried down the aisle to the mourner's bench and was gloriously converted and made new in Christ.

Except for the experience of his own salvation and entire sanctification, never in all his life was Jon happier. At last he would have a Christian home.

When they returned home from church, the telephone rang noisily. A feeling of fear washed over Jon as he fired the mouthpiece and an even greater fear possessed him when an unfamiliar voice asked urgently to speak to Mrs. Jason Huntley.

With trembling hand, Jon gave his mother the phone. "For you," he stated.

He listened with bated breath to the snatches of conversation -- his mother's startled exclamations, her questions and finally her faint, "Thank you, Joshua. Thank you."

For a long while after the receiver clicked back into place not a word was uttered. Aside from the ticking of the clock in the hallway and the faintly-beautiful tinkling wind chimes on the porch beyond the hall, all was silence. Total and complete silence. That the call was about Jon's father, he had no doubt. But whatever his uncle's message, one thing was certain: it had a profound shock upon his mother.

Quietly, Jon slipped out of the room to the kitchen. Sending a silent prayer heavenward for his mother in this hour of trouble and trial -- whatever its nature -- he turned the burner on beneath the teakettle. A cup of hot tea may help her, he reasoned. Tea and a light snack.

Returning to the room a short time later with a tray for his mother, he tapped her lightly on the shoulder. "Drink the tea," he said kindly, noticing for the first time that tears were trickling down her cheeks.

Grace Huntley showed no sign that she heard. Setting the sandwich on the table beside the chair, Jon lifted the tea off the tray and held the cup out to his mother. He must get her talking, he reasoned. She was in a state of shock.

"That was about Father, wasn't it, Mother?" he asked frankly. "He . . . he's dead, isn't he?"

His words had the effect of rousing her. Quickly she raised her eyes to meet his. "What did . . . you say, Jon?" she asked.

"I said, Dad's dead, isn't he?"

"But . . . but how did you know?"

Kneeling beside her, Jon lifted the tea to her lips. "Drink this, Mother," he urged softly. "Then tell me about it when you feel up to it."

Almost mechanically, Grace Huntley sipped the hot tea. Then she began talking. "I can't believe it, Jon," she exclaimed sadly. "I can't believe it! Your father dead and never repenting! Why God should have saved my unworthy soul, I'll never know. But for His grace, I, too, may have been where your father is this night -- in a cold, Christless grave."

"He . . . he's . . . buried already?" Jon asked quickly. "I wonder why Uncle Joshua didn't let us know sooner. You at least could have flown over for the funeral, Mother."

"It was your father's request, Joshua said."

Cautiously Jon ventured, "Did . . . Dad ever make mention of my letters, I wonder? I pled with him to get right with God, telling him that what the Lord had done for me He was able to do for his soul also."

"He resented it, Jon. Joshua told me so. To the bitter end Jason remained proud and self-confident, your uncle said."

Jon shuddered.

"Your father was a skeptic and an agnostic, Son. I was almost one myself -- your father's influence upon my life," Grace explained. "Your life -- the radically beautiful change in it, Jon -- brought me face to face with the facts. Rather, I should say, with the Truth; I saw Christ who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life displayed in you and through you. Needless to say, I was convinced even though I didn't yield immediately. Instinctively, however, I knew that the One who had brought you out of the night could do as much for my poor soul, too. And He has! Bless His worthy name!"

Jon sighed. "I have only one regret," he stated sadly. "I wanted my father to experience the joys of full salvation."

"Each of us is a free moral agent, Jon. God gave us the will to deride and make our own choices. Your father willfully chose to take the 'broad way.' Before your birth, in an old-fashioned revival meeting, he strongly resisted and spurned the gentle strivings of the Holy Spirit. Mid-way through the meeting, he asked God to leave him alone. Immediately, conviction left him to never again return. He was a different man from that night on; another spirit took possession of him, and tonight . . . well . . ." Grace's voice trailed meaningfully.

"But for the grace of God!" Jon exclaimed.

"Yes, but for His grace, we would still be enslaved by sin's galling fetters."

"But thanks be unto God for His unspeakable Gift, Jesus Christ,' who has taken us out of the darkness and brought us into the glorious light of His Son!" Jon added, hurrying away to pray.

\* \* \* \* \*

THE END