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To Adopt Or Not

By Mrs. Paul E. King

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Derek Haldeman hurried from Fairhill High's familiar surroundings in a grand state of muddled thoughts -- troubled thoughts! Shifting his armload of books, he tried to analyze his feelings. Ever since Sunday, when Mrs. Bane told about the many men and women at the Old Folks' home who had no living relatives to care about them or love them, his mind had been in a tizzy. Why it should bother him was more than he could understand. But it did bother him -- terribly so.



A sudden gust of icy-cold wind made him shiver. Giving the zipper of his jacket a quick pull, he was soon warmly encased in its double-lined warmth from neck to waist.

Walking briskly now, his face buried partially in the upturned collar, he breathed a prayer upward, asking the Lord the reason for his troubled thoughts.

Another strong gust of icy air shook the bushes and rattled the branches of the trees until their naked limbs trembled under the blast. Involuntarily, Derek trembled, too. How like the desolate-looking trees those old folks must be, he thought . . . desolate, cold and unloved.

"So you think I'm too lowly a creature to walk home with, huh?" A pleasant voice taunted in a jesting way behind him.

Turning, Derek laughed. "Sorry, Christine," he apologized bowing in mock obeisance. "But I'm about as confused as a fellow can get. Am I ever glad you're here! Am I ever! Sorry I didn't wait for you, but this thing about those old people has me torn up."

"Why should it, Derek?"

"Because... well, put it this way: suppose one of them out there was my father or my mother and . . . and I didn't care enough about them to ever go to see them. Worse still, suppose their relatives were all dead and they had no one left to look after them. I tell you, Christine, it . . . it's a troublesome thought, this that Mrs. Bane said."

"You mean that part about adopting an old person, I gather."

Taking the books from Christine's arm and stacking them on top of his own, Derek replied, "I guess that's the part that bothers me most, now that I think about it. You see, I'd like to 'adopt' someone from out there, but is it the proper thing for us to do? After all, a lot of us are still in high school."

Giving her head a toss, Christine said, "I can't see where that has any bearing at all upon what we do for those old people. The need is there, Derek -- a dire need, I'd say. Personally, I believe it's our responsibility as children of God to alleviate suffering and spread sunshine and cheer whenever we can and wherever we can, regardless of age or any other thing."

"Right," Derek admitted. "But will they accept our kindness and our deeds of goodness and generosity as being done out of love for them, or will they be offended and think us brash and brazen and bold? Some older people, no matter how poor and lonely, nor how destitute, are very independent. They strongly resent help of any kind, no matter how pure and good the motive that prompts the help."

Christine sighed. Burying her face deeper into the warmth of her upturned coat collar she said, "I guess that's a chance we'll just have to take, Derek. Frankly, I hadn't thought of that. I do believe, though, that God would have us do something more for them. Sure, we have a service for them every Tuesday night, and that has been rewarding in that some have gotten saved and others have been sanctified holy; but I feel that if we go this 'second mile' and 'adopt' them, we'll see some of the hard cases won to Christ. This love in action could well be the tool we need to break through Mr. Stoner's hard old shell."

"I'm not convinced that he's as hard-hearted as he pretends to be, Chris. I think his seeming stoic indifference is a mere facade. The same holds true for Mrs. Walper, I believe."

Christine burst out in hearty laughter. It seemed to throw an ember of warmth into the bitter cold air.

"Forgive me for laughing," she apologized; "but I couldn't help remembering Mrs. Walper's pretense at sleep last Tuesday night, nor her parted fingers and the enormous blue eyes staring through those finger cracks. It was humorous, but one thing is certain: she was not asleep. Coming to think of it, Derek, I believe I'll 'adopt' her."

Derek let out a long whistle. "You must be kidding, Chris! She's almost totally untouchable -- unreachable. "

"I thought you just said you didn't think she's nearly so hard-hearted as she pretends! Oh, Derek, where's your consistency and your faith? Know what I wish you'd do?"

"What?"

" 'Adopt' the hard-shelled Mr. Stoner. Let's take the two who have shown the least interest in the preaching and the singing and see what God can do for them through us and our love-in-action outreach."

"You really mean that, Chris?" "With all my heart. Yes."

"But suppose someone else has already 'adopted' them?"

Christine's laughter was warm and pleasant. "No need to worry, Derek. Frowners and complainers are never overly popular nor sought after. Furthermore, most of the young people have already decided upon whom they will 'adopt', and those two have not been included."

"Then we're going to put Mrs. Bane's suggestion into practice?"

"Absolutely. At least we're to give it a try for a year, Margaret Ann said."

"She's a great young people's leader; so I say 'Amen' to whatever she proposes. And Chris, beginning this week, Mr. Stoner is mine. I 'adopt' him as an elderly uncle . . . long face, dour expression, short, snappy, brittle words and all. God helping me, I'll do everything possible to reach him for Christ."

"Oh, Derek, you sound so... so militant."

"There can be nothing less in this holy war, Chris. It's all out for Christ, or nothing."

"How true. How very true! And I 'adopt' Mrs. Walper, here and now this very minute, to be mine to try to win to Christ."

"We'll have to pray a lot, Chris, and fast, too." "True; prayer can move people and soften hearts when nothing else can. Honestly, Derek, I'm excited over this new challenge. So very excited!"

"Your excitement's contagious, Chris; I feel the same way. And now, here's your home. So, until tomorrow, God bless you."

"Thanks for carrying my load of heavy books, Derek..."

The weeks that passed were busy ones for the young people of the church . . . busy, but rewarding.

"Who wants to report on his or her 'adopted' uncle or aunt?" Margaret Ann Fulbright asked at one of the young people's services.

"I do," Christine said. Standing quickly to her feet, with tears streaming down her cheeks and her lips trembling, she reported happily, "Yesterday God answered my prayers: Mrs. Walper got saved. Oh, it was so wonderful. So very wonderful! She actually shouted for joy. She told me the one thing that convinced her that what we were testifying to possessing was real was the fact that we cared for others -- her especially.

"The first sign of her 'warming up' came after I presented her with a gift-wrapped box of warm booties which I had knit for her. Following these were gifts of stationery, a warm shawl, a lap cover, some pretty handkerchiefs and some homemade candies, which she is allowed. The 'cap stone' was the half-dozen yellow roses I took to her yesterday. Grabbing my hands in her own, then pulling my face down to meet her eyes, she said, 'Oh, Christine, Christine, you really do love me, don't you? You're the first person who has ever cared about me since my mother passed away. And now, my dear girl, I am ready to do as you have told me to do and give my heart to Jesus. Will you pray for me? Now?'

"It was the most beautiful sight I've ever seen!" Christine exclaimed. "I am a different person because of it. I can never again be the same; I must continue to win others. Oh, I have been so richly rewarded and repaid for my feeble efforts."

Derek was next to testify.

"I haven't seen Mr. Stoner repent and yield his heart to Christ as yet. But God is dealing mightily with his heart, and slowly . . . ever so slowly . . . the shell is cracking and the wall is crumbling. Thanks be unto God, the victory is coming; He is going to be saved."

And he was -- a few weeks before his decease. Derek, looking into his cold face, was glad and thankful that he decided to 'adopt'.

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THE END