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## The Gentle Voice

By Mrs. Paul E. King

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Dan Tucker wiggled out from beneath the car, pulling the oil pan with him. Tinkering With the spark plugs and valves for a while, he next slid behind the steering wheel and turned the key on in the ignition. Hearing the smooth purr of the motor, he smiled and thanked God. At last, the Lord had helped him to get the old car running smoothly. Now he must go to Ben's house as quickly as possible, he thought, hurrying inside to clean up.

He had just covered his hands and arms with a special kind of goop that loosened the grease and grime and made it wash off easily when he heard the beep of a familiar-sounding car horn outside. Hurrying to the door, he saw Monty and Shannon and Rex inside Monty's aging Ford sedan.



"Ready?" Monty called, as soon as he saw Dan's face inside the screen door.

Giving the screen door a gentle shove with his shoulder, Dan stepped outside, the grease-goop mess dripping from his elbows.

"You mean you aren't ready!" Rex exclaimed, eyeing the soiled, "rolled to the elbow" shirt sleeves and greasy pants. "Whatever have you been doing?" he asked, a hint of impatience registering in his voice. "You knew Monty said 9:30 sharp!"

Pulling an old but clean rag from his hip pocket and wiping the dripping stuff off his arms and hands, Dan said, "I'm sure sorry to disappoint you fellows, but I guess I'll not be going with you to the mall after all. I want to go, believe me, but I just can't get away from this persistent, gentle, unrelenting feeling and urge that I must run over and see Ben Galloway this morning. And now, with the Lord showing me what was wrong with the car and helping me to get it going again, well, I'm more sure than ever that I should go."

"Have you lost your marbles!" Monty exclaimed. "Everybody knows Ben's no more interested in anything religious than we're interested in eating a mouthful of sawdust. Come on, get ready; I'll wait till you're spic and span, clean and shiny as a new pin. Then we'll run on to the mall and take a look at all those new cars they're displaying!"

Shaking his head, Dan said softly, "Thanks, Monty old pal, but I can't. I'd be disobeying God's voice."

"You must be kidding!" Rex persisted. "You're certainly aware of the fact that we're not., positively and absolutely not . . . of Ben Galloway's 'class' -- his 'pedigree', if you please. He thinks he's so high and mighty and so far above and beyond us B-average fellows that he can't speak to us even. He's proud and vain and haughty and..."

"But he has a soul, Rex!" Dan cut in quickly. "Just like the rest of us, Ben has a soul that will live on for all eternity in either Heaven or Hell."

"And I say he'll make fun of you today if you go to see him," Rex declared stoutly. "Ben's sure expert at making one feel little."

"They made fun of Jesus, too," Dan answered. "Ever since we had that great spiritual awakening and revival in our church, I've been doing serious soul-searching. The Holy Spirit has revealed many things to me regarding my own spiritual growth. I have been subjected to deeper spiritual promptings, and specific burdens have increased until there is true compassion in my heart for others, Ben included. So you fellows run along. Maybe, after I've been by Ben's house, I can stop by the mall. I'd sure like to see those late model cars they're showing there."

Rex and Monty shook their heads in disbelief.

"I don't know why you two should be so upset," Shannon said, addressing Monty and Rex. "The most important thing of all is to obey God and to not delay when He bids us do a certain thing. The worst Ben can do is to tell Dan off, and I'm sure Dan's not scared of that. So let's do like he said and go on to the mall; he'll come by later on, I'm sure, unless Ben may really need him."

Monty scratched his head thoughtfully. "OK," he said agreeably. "We'll be at the main fountain in the mall by 12:00. See you there."

"The Lord willing," Dan replied. "If I'm not there by then, just go about with your looking; we'll perhaps find each other some time during the day."

After they were gone, Dan made his way into the house and got cleaned up. "See you later, Mother," he said, heading for the door. "Possibly about two-thirty or three this afternoon."

"Oh, yes, today is the day when you and your friends were driving in to Shadyland Mall to get a first-hand look at those bright new cars," Mrs. Tucker said. "One thing, Dan..."

"What's that, Mother?"

"Don't dream your heart away," she answered with a twinkle in her eyes.

Stopping long enough to give her a quick kiss on the end of her nose, Dan said, "No need to worry, Morn; there's no ready cash available. So I promise, my heart will still be intact when I return, God willing."

They laughed together then Dan hurried outside. Without a single worry, he turned the key in the ignition and the motor started instantly. All the way to Ben's house, the young man prayed, asking God for Divine wisdom for the right words and to open Ben's heart to receive the Word.

Turning off the main road onto a long lane that led up to an enormous, sprawling, beautiful house, Dan saw Ben's sleek yellow convertible standing out front. Good, he thought; that meant that Ben was home.

Bringing his old, rusty car to a halt beside Ben's beautiful new one, Dan swung his legs from behind the steering wheel and stepped out of the car just as Ben came out of the house.

"Dan!" he called in what sounded like a tone of glad surprise to the young man who just slammed his car door shut. "What ever brings you here?" Ben asked, slapping Dan on the shoulder in a congenial and friendly manner.

"God," Dan answered quickly and truthfully. Ben's reply was as startling and as revealing as anything Dan had ever heard. "I guess, to God, Dan," he began, kicking at a small stone near his feet, "you and I appear as diverse and as different as our cars look side by side. The one big difference is that in His sight yours is the shiny-new and all beautiful and clean heart; mine is the dull, rusty and decayed one."

It was a statement of fact, Dan thought, his heart leaping for joy and a cry for help, too!

Laying a gentle hand upon the straight "A plus" fellow classmate's broad, athletic-built shoulder, Dan said, "God sent me here to you this morning, Ben, with a message for you . . ."

Ben's head dropped; tears spun in his eyes. "Thanks Dan," he said in a hoarse whisper. "I was beginning to believe that no one cared for my soul. And I've been so hungry to know God."

Dan was weeping now. "Forgive me, Ben, for not approaching you sooner," he begged. "I guess we all just figured you weren't interested in God and in spiritual things. You always seemed so distant and unapproachable."

"Only to those individuals whose lives don't correspond with their testimony, Dan. You? You're different. I've seen the change for months now, so I'm ready to listen. I know I'm a sinner... I believe even the vilest person recognizes this whether they admit it or not. But what must I do to change?"

Looking quickly toward the house, Ben continued: "Good as my folks are to me, they've never done a single thing to help prepare my soul for the hereafter. Ever since Bill Jeffries died with leukemia, I've been doing a lot of thinking. Deep thinking. It could have been me!"

Speaking softly and earnestly, Dan said, "You are not far from being saved, Ben. Recognizing one's sinfulness is step number one." Then, quoting Scripture verse after verse, he said, "Would you like me to pray with you, Ben?"

"Will you, please?" came the plaintive question. "We can go into the garage; no one will bother us there."

Once inside the enormous four-car garage, where two Lincoln Continentals stood side by shiny side, praying was easy. Ben, his heart all soft and tender, surprised Dan by the way he talked to God, telling Him how sinful he'd been and asking His forgiveness and pardon.

Stopping quite suddenly and abruptly, Ben, with face aglow and shining, said, "It's wonderful! Wonderful/ Thanks, Dan. Thanks a million for coming. At last, I'm truly happy. Say, how about going with me to pick Lauren Peters up? We were going to the mall to see those cars."

"I promised Monty and Rex and Shannon I'd meet them at the center fountain inside the mall, Ben; so I'd better keep my word. But why don't you and Lauren meet us there at twelve when you get to the mall? We'd have a good time of fellowship together

and we could even slip in to Hutt's Pizza Palace for a twenty-four inch pizza with everything on it. They're super!"

"I agree," Ben replied, "And that sounds great! So, be looking for us."

"See you at twelve then, Lord willing, Ben. Until then, may God watch over and protect both of us. Chances are you'll pass me on that little stretch of freeway we'll both be taking to get up to the mall. My car gets me where I want to go, but at a far slower pace than yours. It's another hare and turtle story," Dan added, laughing as he slid behind the steering wheel and started down the lane.

Ben passed him on the main highway en route to Lauren's house a short distance away and when, again, he passed him shortly after he had gotten on to the freeway, Dan smiled, realizing just how slow his car did run.

Four miles down the freeway Dan noticed brake lights coming on in a chain reaction in front of him. Unconsciously he pressed his brakes, wondering what was happening. Next he saw cars pulling off on the shoulder of the road. Cautiously he continued moving forward. Then he saw it . . . a yellow convertible and another car -- a mass of jumbled, torn, pressed metal -- both cars totaled.

"No! No!" Dan cried aloud, pulling his car off into the median strip and rushing down to Ben's car. "Oh, God help Ben! Help Lauren!" he prayed. "Please! Please, dear God!"

A crowd had gathered by now and traffic was backed up bumper to bumper far down the freeway. Dan, standing by the yellow convertible, wept. "Ben! Ben!" was all he could say.

"You know the driver of that car?" a man asked, pointing to Ben's car.

"Yes. Yes, sir; he was my friend."

"He's a statistic, I fear," the man said sadly. "Didn't have a chance: that car careened across the median strip like some blue demon. Your friend didn't have a chance." Again he made the sad pronouncement. "No doubt some fool drinker who thought he was making a turn or negotiating a curve in the road. They see strange things, these drinkers do, and it's usually the innocent party that gets killed. Look at him!" the man continued, pointing to the blue car and the man who had managed to free himself from the wreck. "Doesn't look like he has anything greater wrong with him than a few minor lacerations."

Dan merely stood and wept; his body was in a state of shock. The wail of a siren brought him back to what was going on around him. Stepping away from Ben's car a short distance, he heard the state troopers in conversation. "The driver of the

convertible's gone," one said. "The fellow beside him is still breathing. There's hope for him..."

Dan waited to hear no more. Rushing back to his old car he crawled inside and sobbed. "O God, thank You, thank You!" he cried aloud. "Thank You for saving Ben's soul. And thanks, dear Lord, for giving me the courage to stand up against my friends and obey Thee swiftly. Thanks," he said again, watching as an ambulance drew up along side the wrecked cars and put Ben's lifeless body and Lauren's frame on stretchers and drove away.

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