The Prognosticators
By Mrs. Paul E. King
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Jonelle Darvies stood inside the window of the dorm room, her arms folded and her face grave and serious, thankful beyond words that Lenore was out and would be gone for the rest of the afternoon and the evening, as well. Lenore was a good roommate, to be sure; a bit too persistent and insistent in her demands, perhaps, but good to have as a roommate in that she was meticulously clean and fastidious with her person as well as the room, a thing perfectly suited and aligned with Jonelle’s makeup and up-bringing.

Jonelle moved restlessly, wondering if her decision to come to the liberal arts college was the right thing after all and missing the Christian fellowship of those of her own age. There was John Patchett, Emilie Stone, Carole Springer and Anthony Crutcher, all from her home church and all leaving for the same Bible School about the very time she left for the renowned college.

"You sure you're doing the right thing, Jonelle?" Anthony prodded her gently their last night at church together. "I'd feel a whole lot better if you were going where the rest of us are going. We'll be in a wholesome and spiritual environment; you'll be among wolves."

"O, Anthony," she had chided, "I'm no longer an infant, incapable of taking care of myself! God will go with me and see me through. I can't get the courses I need in Bible School; that is my only reason for going where I'm going. I'll come out OK, God willing."
"And I trust you'll come out without scars," Anthony had said softly. Recalling the words now, Jonelle's slender body trembled slightly. But why should she let the words bother her, she reasoned, watching the blue wings of several Bluejays as they zeroed in on some crumbs which one of the students had put out for them. Garrulous birds, she thought, and noisy, too, but against the white of the snow and the dark green of the juniper and fir trees, they looked strikingly handsome. Cheerily and with cocky assurance, they gobbled up the supply of food. "Come wind, come weather," they seemed to say, "here we are, sky-birds of the blue for gray days like these."

The jays, ever on the look-out for sunflower seeds or any other tasty tidbit, flew to a window ledge nearby. Watching, Jonelle saw them greedily snatch the food in their sharp, strong bills then carry the pieces-six or seven, was it?--away, giving a Cassandra-like cry in the bargain. According to her father's seldom-missed-predictions, when jays did this, it was a sure indication of a heavy storm approaching.

The thought of another winter storm, plus her feelings of uncertainty as to whether or not she had made a wise choice in her selection of the college, sent shivers up and down Jonelle's spine. She must do something to assuage the fear she was experiencing, she decided, quickly going to the clothes closet after her heavy coat and woolen scarf.

Once outside, she felt relieved and considerably better. Her mind, troubled and perplexed in the room, now seemed to clear with amazing rapidity with each step she took away from the buildings toward the far-flung wooded hills and the ski slope. The snow, which had fallen during the previous night and had drifted, now stopped blowing and a burnt-orange late afternoon sun toasted the marshmallow hills to a golden crust. Her troublesome thoughts became a momentary discordant interlude of the dim past. She would fling herself head over heels into her chosen classes, she decided with a great surge of uplifted feelings and spirit, and when she returned home with her degree in her special field the home folks would see that one could be victorious in any college or school!

She walked on and on, unmindful of how far she was going, her body and mind feeling totally exhilarated and relaxed. There was something about a brisk walk in brittle-crisp air that worked wonders in one's body, she temporized, as she paused mid-way up the steep hill. The crisp air smelled thin and fresh, and her lungs, savoring the delightful and delicious cleanness, inhaled and exhaled over and over again and again. Pine branches bent under snowy white blankets; aspen trees, stretching slender arms high above, let the powdery stuff talcum to the ground. Not far away, a bevy of nuthatches took flight, their gray wings bearing them swiftly away from this forest intruder-stranger.

Jonelle, refreshed and having gotten her "second wind," climbed higher and higher until she reached the summit. From her vantage point, she viewed the skiers on the opposite hill. They looked like humans in miniature, flying down the steep,
snow-covered slope. She wondered if Lenore could possibly be one of the many over there. More likely than not, she was; skiing was her roommate's first love. She had even cut a class or two to hit the slopes when the weather conditions were just right and the slopes were "perfect" -- Lenore's word.

That was the trouble with most of the colleges anymore, she soliloquized, surveying the spectacular scenery beneath her and around her; they were too lenient and easy on truant students. And on a lot of other things, too.

With the thought in her mind, Jonelle realized that even the highest heights could not banish and obliterate one's troublesome worries totally. They had a way of lingering with you and following you, she saw quickly, and the best and only way to get rid of them was through the Word and prayer. Thus thinking, she fell on her knees in the snow and had a refreshing season of prayer.

When she got to her feet, conscious of God's Holy Presence filling and flooding her soul, and realizing how very few times she had been able to really pour her heart out in fervent prayer in her room due to Lenore's many interruptions, the sun was gone and twilight orchid tinted the snowy slopes. The skiers on the hill looked like tiny specks on a white horizon now.

With a brittle, biting wind stinging her face and nipping her nose, she started down the hill, chiding herself silently for having come so far and staying so long. Her father and mother would be horrified if they knew of her whereabouts with night settling in so fast and so heavily. A suddenly longing for home and friends of like mind as she swept her like a rush of wind. A tear darted from her eye. It rolled coldly and icily down her cheek. Oh, why didn't she go to Bible School with her friends? There she would at least have been among those who believed like she did; and, too, there her praying and daily Bible reading would have been a natural thing, a unified thing. But here... well, she was an "odd-ball," a "goody-goody" (a few of the girls' names for her) and a "kill-joy." And why? Simply because she refused to go to any of the parties, dances and other worldly functions so much an integral part of student life, dorm life particularly.

Jonelle walked briskly and rapidly down the forested hillside, the slightest noise making her shiver with fear and alarm. By the time she reached the bottom, her legs felt rubbery and weak and a half-moon had hung his lemon-yellow lantern in the sky above her. Looking up from where she had just come, the snowy, wooded slopes were a charcoal drawing.

Etching the nocturnal scene on her mind and tucking it away securely for reminiscent purposes for another day, Jonelle headed toward the dormitory, feeling vibrant and alive.

The room felt toasty-warm when she turned the key in her door and let herself inside. Without turning on lights, she slipped out of her coat then undressed and took a
quick shower before getting into her gown and a robe. Lights from street lamps gave the room a twilight glow and for a long while, Jonelle stood looking down on the campus below her. Students were milling about; some were laughing, others were tossing snowballs--boys at girls and girls at boys. A loud scream pierced the brittle night air and Jonelle, looking in the direction of the screaming girl, saw a young man rubbing snow over her face and down the back of her coat collar.

Smiling, she flipped the desk light on and settled down to her books. Lenore would no doubt come in late again and keep the lights on till the wee morning hours, trying to get her lessons for the day. Let them call her a "goody-goody," Jonelle thought, with no unkindness or bitterness whatever inside her heart; she, at least, was keeping up with her assignments very well. And wasn't that how best to use the acquired knowledge? For her, this was true. And with this thought in mind, she pushed all lesser thoughts aside and got down to diligent and concentrated study.

Long after her desk lamp was turned off and she was sleeping soundly, she heard Lenore in the bathroom, showering. Although she hadn't heard when her roommate turned the key in the lock of their door, she knew it was late. Lenore had come to college mainly for fun and "a good time," a thing she had confessed to Jonelle and which was all too obvious. Her parents had money "to throw away," she had said during one of her serious moods, and so long as she made passing grades and things kept going "easy street" for her, why should she kill herself studying!

Jonelle turned over and pulled the sheet over her eyes and was soon asleep again, and not until her faithful little alarm clock rang musically close to her ear did she awaken.

Reaching over to the nightstand, she turned the alarm off and jumped out of bed. Lenore, in the other bed, was an igloo of white wool blankets. Her steady breathing let Jonelle know that she was dead to the world in sleep. Making her bed quickly, she slipped into the bathroom for an hour of Bible reading and prayer before combing her hair and dressing for class.

When she returned to her room in mid-afternoon, Lenore met her at the door with, "Jonelle, honey, put your books aside for once and be a doll and do me a favor, will you?"

Laughing softly, Jonelle replied with, "It depends..."

"Sure, I know: 'It depends upon whether it's good or evil, moral or immoral.' I've heard it often enough; and you can thank yourself for my word for word memorization!" Lenore exclaimed, her spirits in a festive sort of mood and vein.

"Well . . . ?" Jonelle's question dangled in midair and her eyes searched her roommate's face for a hint of what the favor might be.
Lenore toyed with the corner of a throw pillow on her bed then she said, "Some of the students are having an ice cream social."

"How do I enter the picture, Lenore?"

"What do you mean?"

"I'm considered dull and prudish, extremely Puritanical and 'out of it.' So-o . . . What's going on, Lenore? Who put you up to ask me? And for what reason or purpose?" Jonelle asked kindly, adding, "I don't mean to sound catty or nasty, but I'd like to know what's behind this."

Color mounted into Lenore's cheeks. "You're sharp!" she commented. "It's simply that we feel..."

"Who is 'we'?"

"A group of us from the dorm. Anyway, we feel you need a bit of social life and activity. You're stagnating, Jonelle. We want you to have some fun. Then, too, in all seriousness, Justin Edmore is hoping he'll be able to convince you to go out with him. He's mad about you. Honestly, Jonelle, you're not being fair with him. Justin's a great guy; ask any girl who's ever dated him. And as for this Anthony of yours, well, I'm sure he's not staying in night after night poring over books and lessons and not dating any of the girls at the school where he's going. Fellows aren't built that way. And not too many of us girls are either. And, like I say, why let one man monopolize your time when many are waiting in line? Be a sport and give us a try, Jonelle."

Turning, Jonelle walked to the desk and put her armload of books down. Pointing to them she said, "See these, Lenore; I've come here to learn, not to party or date. Thanks, no. I have hours of studying to do. My lessons and assignments will keep me fully occupied till late into the night. So thanks, but no."

Lenore looked at her roommate for a long time, her eyes blazing and her face flushing a scarlet-red. "You're a stick in the mud!" she hurled angrily. "A real Puritan! A mama's goody girl who's afraid to have fun." With her hands on her hips, she shouted, "I hate you, Jonelle. Hate you! I'm fed up with your self-righteousness and your morality. So are a lot of others! This is not the dark ages: it's an enlightened age, an age of 'do your own thing'--of enjoying life and not feeling guilty nor condemned for doing what you want to do."

A smile creased Jonelle's lips. "I wish you could see inside my heart, Lenore," she said seriously. "I am doing exactly what I want to do. In fact, my heart delights itself greatly in keeping the commandments of the Lord and in following His precepts. I have
no desire for the 'fun' of which you so often allude to and talk about. Sin is never a fun thing. It's . . ."

"Quiet! Quiet!" Lenore shouted loudly, breaking into Jonelle's unfinished sentence and running out of the room.

The blue wings of a pair of Bluejays, zeroing in on food put on a window ledge by one of the students, caught Jonelle's attention. Snatching the food in their strong, sharp bills--six and seven pieces at a time--and giving a Cassandra-like cry, they flew away quickly. Another storm! she thought. Then a new thought formed in her mind. Was God trying to tell her something, trying to alert her of an approaching spiritual "storm" in her life perhaps? Warning her to seek shelter quickly by leaving the liberal college? Was He?

Cold sweat broke out on Jonelle's forehead as her mind wandered carefully back across each and every single class she had with Professor Munford. He had a shrewdly-sharp and subtle way of caricaturing prominent men of church history before the class. And everything he said sounded logical and so very factual, too, causing her (at times) to wonder if perhaps his cleverly-phrased remarks with their insidious innuendoes could actually have been true.

She shook herself and stood suddenly very tall and erect, seeing through the Professor's plot with clear eyes and new enlightenment. This was his way of injecting doubts into the minds of his hearers. Suddenly, she knew what she must do.

Going quickly to the closet, she pulled her luggage pieces off the top shelf and began filling them with the clothes she had brought with her to school. Professor Munford had wrecked numerous of her classmates' faith in the eternally existent God, but he would never erode and destroy hers. She would give him neither the opportunity nor the time!

Jonelle's hands worked rapidly. She felt happy and light-hearted with the wonderful knowledge that what she was doing was right. All right!

She blew a hurried kiss in the direction of the now-disappeared Bluejays..., her prognosticators.

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THE END