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**COME**

**By Mrs. Paul E. King**

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It was upsetting, Monty thought, walking away from the hospital toward the beach for a bit of fresh sea air. Why should this Andrea Cook upset him so? He wished, suddenly, that he'd never need go back into her room again. But that was quite impossible, he knew. Old Mrs. McCumber, in bed 2 beside Andrea's, had to have her physical therapy daily, and it was up to him and another young physical therapist to see that she got it regularly.

He slipped into a small cafe before reaching the beach and sat down. Music, raucous and ear-shattering, blared from a nearby juke box, making his already taut nerves even more tense and edgy.

Sipping the tea he had ordered, his eyes fell to a poster on the wall: "Come unto me... and I will give you rest."

Incredulous! he thought. That was what Andrea Cook had quoted to him not many days ago. And now here on the wall it hung in bold design for all to see and read. But something didn't seem right; it seemed all wrong and out of place, he thought.

Monty studied the poster for a long time, wondering why he should bother to care what was wrong or wasn't wrong, when it dawned on him that the reason the poster seemed out of place on the wall was because of the blaring juke box and the type of music it was playing. The two things didn't synchronize, he decided. It was like offering Christ and the world at the same time. Ignorant though he may be regarding spiritual things, he knew enough to know that the two things didn't go hand in hand. They just didn't belong together. Not at all.

He finished the tea, paid the bill, and slipped outside, hoping the brief respite from his daily hospital duties would clear some things up in his mind.

A spicy wind came up to meet him and a flurry of leaves scurried ahead of him, as if trying to race him to the beach. Logically, he knew he should be feeling fine and happy, being just barely past 23 and having a body as healthy as God could make it. But the strain of the weekend and the emotional upheaval of the morning had left him feeling weak and drained.

He thrust a fist into the open palm of his hand, exclaiming, "What's wrong with me? Am I losing my mind?"

He walked faster now. The air became downright nippy. Must be the result of last night's hard storm, he decided, wishing he'd brought a sweater along or a wind-breaker, at the least. But he hadn't; so that was that! He'd just have to walk faster, he told himself, to get his blood circulating better and thwart off the cold wind.

He reached the beach and paused to look out across the water where fishing boats bobbed like corks on the vast expanse of blue-green sea. Off in the distance, he saw an enormous sea-going vessel as it cut smoothly across the emerald green while to his right, the raucous blast of a fog horn reached his ears.

"Come unto me . . ." Andrea had said it was Christ's invitation to the sinner, His special, personal invitation, to be real explicit. But was he a sinner? Listening to Andrea, he almost felt like he was. No fault of Andrea's, mind you. He shouldn't have been so inquisitive and asked all the questions he did. One thing about Andrea, she was honest.

He walked along the beach, head bowed, shoulders bent. He felt suddenly old, haggard. He almost ran into a young woman, but he looked up in time to prevent the collision. "Sorry," he said out of habit.

"You searching, too?" the girl asked quickly.

"Not for sea shells if that's what you mean," Monty answered.

"So many of us are dissatisfied," she replied in a far-away sounding tone and a pensive mood. "But I guess one won't find it walking beaches. At least Mandy says not. She said I need to have a heartchange; says it'll fix me up for sure."

"Heart change!" Monty exploded. "Guess I've seen about as many people who've had heart operations as anybody," he remarked dryly, "and all it ever did was give the patient a few more weeks or months or years to live and be miserable. Heart change indeed!"

"You're talking about the physical," the girl said nonchalantly, falling in step beside the male therapist. "Mandy's kind of heart change is spiritual. And know what, mister? It really did change Mandy. She's as different as daylight is from darkness. Honestly and truly, she is."

"Why don't you try it then?" Monty asked, greatly irritated and agitated. Turning quickly, he walked back towards the towering hospital muttering, "First Andrea, then that wretched poster, now her! Ugh! Where can a man go to have peace of mind?"

He lingered outside as long as he dare; then, consulting his watch, he hurried through a side door into the hospital.

"Where've you been?" Kermit Widner asked anxiously. "It's back to work in a couple minutes. Or had you forgotten?"

"I didn't forget," Monty retorted, a bit more sharply than he was used to doing.

"Hey, what's eating you?" Kermit asked. "I ask you a civil question, one pertaining to our work, and you all but snap my head off."

"Forget it, Kermit. I'm sure you've had some annoying days yourself. This is one of mine."

"Sorry, Monty. I had no idea. Accept my apology. But look, it's time we get busy. I've got the McCumber woman lined up as our first patient this afternoon. We'll work our way from her room down the hall then go up to 7 and..."

"Do as you please," Monty cut in. "We've got to get her sometime; may as well be patient number 1 as number 9 or 10."

"Look, if you'd rather we began with..."

"You heard me, Kermit. Lot's get busy."

Kermit squared his shoulders and faced his colleague. "Look, Monty, sure you're having an annoying, miserable day, but either you stay here until your attitude changes or I'm not working with you. One of the things we were taught was to be courteous, polite and congenial at all times to our patients. I'm not going into a single room with you until you toss that chip off your shoulder and act like a gentleman. We're getting paid to help people, not to encourage them in their misery, nor add to their burdens. Annoying day or not, you have an obligation to the patient and a commitment to the hospital."

"I said, let's go. I'm anxious to get finished." "A lot of dedication you have!" Kermit exclaimed, falling in step beside Monty who seemed suddenly to have dropped his hateful attitude like one would shed a dirty coat.

Kermit merely shook his head in disgust.

Mrs. McCumber greeted them with a smile, saying, "Look, I can move my foot! The doctor is so pleased. And of course, I am, too."

Andrea, who had been sleeping, suddenly opened her eyes. "Wait till you hear what happened to me!" she exclaimed, fixing her large, honest, expressive blue eyes on Monty's face.

"And what miracle do you think you can convince me of now?" he asked mockingly.

Ignoring the bitter sarcasm of his voice, she went on brightly, "I get to go home tomorrow, the Lord willing."

"And why the Lord willirlg?" Monty asked sarcastically.

"Because the Bible says we don't know what tomorrow will bring forth. We're supposed to say, 'If the Lord wills,' we'll do this thing or do that thing. And now for the miracle. The x-ray shows that my leg is totally healed and well. There's not a single sign of it having been broken and splintered, like it showed when I came into the hospital. I told you God set it for me yesterday. You didn't believe me, but it's true. I heard it, and I felt it when it happened, and now the x-rays prove it. I hope this will make a believer out of you, Mr. Montague. Or are you afraid of facing a miracle squarely?"

Her question, so poignant and direct, shot through his heart like a sharp arrow. It almost floored him. "What do you mean?" he asked quickly, stalling for something better to say.

Andrea looked at the man. "You are afraid," she said softly. She asked quickly, "What are you afraid of Mr. Montague? Of believing that there is a God, after all, and that His power is still the same today as it was when He walked and talked with men so many, many years ago? If this is the case, you're fighting a losing battle. Why don't you cease struggling and do what I told you to do... to come?"

With an impatient tug at the curtain separating the two patients, Monty drew the curtain roughly around Mrs. McCumber's bed and trying to steady his trembling, quivering voice, he said lightly, "You should feel highly

honored, little woman, you're number one on our afternoon agenda. How do you like that?"

Mrs. McCumber's feeble voice said a grateful, "Thank you." Then she prepared herself for the painful therapy, never murmuring nor offering one complaint.

"At the rate you're progressing," Kermit remarked, "We'll soon be able to take you downstairs for more extensive therapy. And you'll be one happy woman when you're home with your family again and almost as good as new, won't you?"

"I'll have God to thank, boys."

"You mean we don't get any credit at all?" Monty cut in quickly.

"God has used you to help, to be sure. But it is He who does the healing."

Monty mumbled some indistinct something under his breath but Kermit ignored the irritated attitude and remained pleasant until they left the room.

"I think I know what's bugging you," he said, turning to Monty before they reached patient number two. "Andrea Cook, among other things. But it's true; God did perform the miracle. Who else, if it wasn't He? You may be surprised to hear me say this but I'm going to say it anyhow. That little blue-eyed lady got me to thinking. She's genuine. She has something to you and I both need. I've gazed earnestly and honestly into the past to see where I've been and desperately into the future to see where I'm going. The time and place from which I've cast my backward and forward glances doesn't seem to matter much.

"But the present, ah, that's another thing. As Andrea said a few days ago, 'Now is the acceptable time.' I've been doing a great deal of thinking, and I'm planning on doing something about it. I've had a praying mother, Monty..."

"Cut it out! Do your talking to yourself. If you want to change, go ahead and change. That's your business. ' ' "

The afternoon passed slowly for Monty, and when he let himself into his small efficiency apartment when his work was finished, he sat down wearily in the first chair he came to. He felt weak and spent and drained of all strength and energy. Try as he may, Andrea's words haunted him. Everywhere he went and whatever he tried to do, they clung to him like barnacles on the bottom of a ship. Above everything she said, the one thing, "Come unto me . . . and I will give you rest," seemed to have a deathgrip on him. Nothing he did got rid of it. He walked with it, sat with it, ate with it, and slept with it... what little sleep he was able to get anymore.

Getting to his feet, Monty moved like a mechanized toy. Realizing the only way to peace was through obedience, he dropped to his knees on the floor and cried, "Lord, I come."