"Hurry, we'll have to work fast," Justin said.

Justin whistled as he raked the fragrant smelling leaves into a pile. He loved the fall season of the year best of all. "There's just something about fall!" he said half-aloud to himself and to the oh-so-gentle breeze that
whispered the leaves to the earth, dropping them so gently and lightly that, unless he had seen them fall with his own eyes, he would not have known they had spiraled earthward.

He had raked them onto a large sheet of plastic and had just brought the four corners of the sheet together and was dragging it carefully across the lawn to the garden across the road to be used as mulch, when Rodney Cassell raced up with his bike, breathing hard and panting like his lungs would burst.

"Justin," he shouted, "Harold's racing Matt down the old pike. Matt doesn't know that old road and its hair-pin curves . . ." His sentence trailed meaningfully and alarmingly.

Justin stood as one in shock. "You . . . you mean they're racing with their cars, Rod? It's not jogging or . . . or foot racing?" he asked, giving the improvised but excellent leaf conveyor a final tug and pull and emptying it on the garden.

"Right. I mean, they're racing cars! I'm scared. Matt's jalopy's not going to make it! I'm not sure Hal's will, either. What's wrong with Harold? Sometimes I feel like shaking him till his teeth rattle loose in his head. His braggadocio sickens me. It does. It's always the same story . . . 'I can swim farther than you; my bat's better than yours; my car can go faster than yours; I'll beat you to the crossroads and back.' Ugh! Sickening. Sickening!" and Rodney leaned over in mock nausea.

Justin was silent for a minute; then he snapped to attention like a soldier with an important assignment to carry out. "Run inside and tell Mom I'll be back as fast as I can," he ordered. "Next, call Matt's house to see if he's there or if he left. If he's not there, we'll have to work fast, you and I. The bridge crumbled away . . . just as you leave the second hairpin curve. They'll plunge to their death; go straight down into the ravine. Dad got word about it only hours ago. He and his crew of men planned to go out first thing in the morning and block the road off. They put a blockage up at the entrance way from the main highway. But, knowing Harold, he'll take the loggers' road up to it then cut into the pike. Hurry, we'll have to work fast. We don't have a minute's time to lose."
Like one racing for his life, Justin ran into the garage. He loaded four saw-bucks into his dad's ever-faithful four-wheel-drive jeep, reached for several of the big, long flashlights and tucked half a dozen flares in.

Rodney raced out of the house just as Justin put the jeep in gear and started down the driveway. "No answer at Matt's house!" he exclaimed, jumping in beside Justin. "Your mom said for us to be careful. Said she'd go to prayer for us, and for Harold and Matt, too. She's going to try to reach your dad and see if he can't send someone out to help even though it's past working hours."

"Thanks, Rod," Justin replied, staring straight ahead. Making a quick turn, he said, "There's no way I can beat them by going the loggers' road, Rodney. Hang on tight; you're in for a rough drive. But it's the only way we can get there before they do. I'll cut across the grazing land, go down Herns Trail and come out just above where the first dangerous curve begins. Hang on now, and pray. Even if you would like to shake Harold's teeth loose."

Rodney laughed in spite of the serious circumstances that were making this act of mercy a necessity. "I'm not carnal, Justin; believe me, I'm not. The Holy Ghost took all the fight out of me the night He sanctified me wholly and purified my heart. It's just that I'd like to shake some sense into the 'braggart.' Here's Matt, a brand new Christian, who, like a new-born colt that doesn't know all the pitfalls and the dangers of running foot-loose and fancy-free, has accepted Harold's challenge of death. Why does he feel it's necessary to accept Harold's challenge of death. What is it going to prove, Justin? So what, if Matt's car does outrun Hal's, or vice versa! It's stupid. Down right stupid. Not to mention dangerous."

Justin stared straight ahead, his knuckles showing white against the deep blue of the steering wheel, as the jeep loped across the grassland like a colt let loose in the beginning of spring -- like antelope frolicking across a hill.

Finally Justin spoke. "Matt knows nothing about the carnal nature, Rodney," he said steadily, keeping the jeep at a fast pace, climbing one hill after another, emerging finally where he could cut into the almost forsaken, little-used road known as the old pike. It had no name unless of course one wanted to believe it was 'the old pike,' which was not to be found on a single map anywhere and which was never capitalized, as was the name of the
state and the river that snaked its way in a winding, crooked trail at the bottom of the granite canyon walls.

"Carnality's a dreadful thing," Rodney admitted, recalling his battle with the 'old man,' as Paul the Apostle so aptly named the carnal nature.

"It makes men do strange things," Justin answered as he brought the jeep bouncing out of a bit of underbrush onto the old pike. "No doubt Matt's prideful nature usurped its authority and, being challenged so frequently by Harold, poor Matt succumbed."

It was dark as the two entered the winding, twisting, old, almost-indiscernible road. On both sides of the road, and for many, many miles in every direction, the trees spread themselves out, covering hills and valleys, their evergreen branches and limbs pulling down a canopy of darkness which, in some places, was so heavy and dense as to totally and completely obliterate the brightly-shining stars above.

"No sign of a light," Rodney announced, peering backwards into the darkness. "Oh, Justin, what if they . . . they . . ." He didn't finish the sentence; he sat and shuddered at the thought.

Justin flicked the jeep's lights to the high beam as he carefully started into the first hair-pin curve. Then, applying the brakes hard, he exclaimed, "What's the matter with me? Why let them try to negotiate this first curve even? Hurry, Rodney, grab a flashlight. We're going to put dad's saw bucks across the road back a piece from this curve," And he began steering the jeep backwards.

No sooner were the saw bucks in place across the road than a bright shaft of light pierced through the trees on the hill above where Justin and Rodney were working.

"Quick! Hand me a flare!" Rodney shouted above the roar of Harold's noisy, souped-up car as it topped the hill and raced downward like a wild demon with Matt not far behind.

Scraping the dropped evergreen needles away and embedding flares in the roadbed, the boys ran toward the rapidly-approaching cars, waving
lighted flares in their hands, trying to halt the drivers before they reached the roadblock.

Justin felt like his heart was in his throat as he heard Harold screech to a wobbly, shaking halt, and saw Matt do the same. Matt's car trembled violently and fiercely, then sputtered, coughed, and died.

Harold jumped out of his car and, with fists drawn, demanded angrily, "What's the big idea! Can't you stand to see your goody-goody friend lose? For a nickel, I'd punch both of you in the nose. Now, out of my way; we're going to finish this race in style, with a couple of spectators to vouch for it."

"You're doing nothing of the kind!" Justin declared authoritatively, stationing himself in the middle of the road.

Harold gave him a shove. Justin stood his ground, saying, "You're not going. See that little clearing to your right? Move your car over to it and turn around and go back.

"Say, who do you think you are?" Harold demanded. "What are you trying to do?"

"What am I trying to do? you ask. Do you really want to know, Harold? Well, I'll tell you what Rodney and I are trying to do: We're trying to save you from certain death, and a gaping, burning hell, that's what. Both are down there," he added, pointing down the road. "The old bridge that was over the big ravine is goner Crumbled away. You'd have had a long, deep, thrilling drop into the rocky crags below. Do you still want to go?" he asked.

Harold's face turned ash-gray. He looked like his legs were going to crumble beneath him. Blindly, he staggered to the car and leaned against its metal side. "I . . . I . . . thanks, Justin; thanks, Rodney," he said.

Matt, standing in the shadows, came toward his two friends. "What a fool thing I did!" he exclaimed. "I felt a gentle check of the Spirit when I told Harold I'd accept his challenge. But I thought I was being overly conscientious so paid no more attention to it. Then all the way out here, I felt uneasy and . . . and disturbed. I know now it was God's voice. Oh, I want Him to forgive me for not paying attention to what He was trying to tell me! I don't
ever want to lose Him and His peace and His Presence. Excuse me, while I go and tell Him to forgive me for not minding His checks."

"Don't be too hard on yourself," Harold called after the fading figure. "I influenced you, and I'm sorry."


Humbled like they had never seen him nor known him to be, Justin and Rodney stood like they were mesmerized. Here was a Harold whom they had never known before.

Quietly, Justin ventured a question. "Why have you been the way you are?" he asked. "I mean, why do you feel it's so important and necessary to brag all the time? If Rodney hadn't known what you were planning on doing, and we hadn't headed you off, both of you would have been killed. Think of it, Harold, you'd have been killed. And, worse than that even, your soul would have gone to hell. You're not saved; you're not ready to meet God! Eternity's a long time, Hal. Yes, a very long time. No return nor come-back from the place one enters when he dies."

Harold's face was white and drawn. "You fellows bugged me; made me jealous, that's why I bragged all the time. You and Rodney seem so natural; so unpretentious. And you're always having such good, clean, wholesome fun together. When you swung Matt into your church circle of young people, well, it was more than I could take. It angered me. I figured the only way I could prove I had a bit of influence over him anymore was to challenge him to a race."

"But you knew that Matt didn't know this road the way we do," Rodney injected with awe in his voice. "He would have wrecked the car on this first curve, at the rate of speed you both were traveling. Why, Hal? Why'd you do it? Matt's fairly new around here."

Harold trembled. "I was boiling mad with envy, that's why," he confessed. "Matt and I were friends until he became a Christian; then he told me he couldn't do some of the things we used to do together. You fellows all have such good times and, truthfully, I wanted to be a part of things, but I just didn't want to do what the Bible says I must do to get to Heaven. But I'm
ready to change. The devil would have had my soul by this time, no doubt, if God hadn't sent you and Justin along in the miraculous way He did. I'm ready to go God's way, fellows. Please pray for me . . ."

The branches of over-lapping evergreens became a chapel; the earth became an altar. The prayers of petition and agony for a lost sheep reached clear through the branches, higher than the clouds; beyond the stars; past the moon; straight into Heaven where the Son of God stretched out nail-scarred hands to His Father with the words, "For My sake, forgive that sinner."

Quick came back the answer, "Forgiven; saved through Jesus' blood!"

Instantly rose the glad shout on earth, "He's come! He's come! Thank God, I'm saved!"

"And now to head home," Justin said, when the shouting died down and they knew that Matt's completely-dead and would-not-start car could serve as a perfect road-block for any would-be travelers who dared to venture down the lonely pike.

Placing the flares in the road on top of the hill, they drove homeward with praises in their heart and a song on their lips.