The cool, night air fanned Doug's hair back into place as he bounced over the rutted, rock-strewn road toward the lake, hidden snugly between two towering hills. He had often come here to fish with his father and an older brother. But that was before the earth-shattering divorce was finalized and he had to decide which parent he would live with. Oh, the horribleness of it all! It was like a terrifying nightmare. He was torn between love for both his father
and his mother and the very idea of deciding which one he would stay with was almost like giving a silent testimony that he loved one better than the other. And he didn't. He hadn't. Yet the whole frustrating, burdensome thing was thrust upon him for deciding. And he hadn't had a single thing to do, about them getting the divorce. He hadn't created the problem.

"Divorce!" he exclaimed aloud to the night breezes. "I hate the word, even. Hate it. Why can't two people stay married?"

He accelerated heavier and the sports car bounced angrily across the rocky road. Night birds trilled softly-sweet melodic songs of gratefulness to the purple night, but Doug never heard. Stars danced and twinkled above him like scintillating diamonds, but he didn't see. Anger seethed inside him. Tears formed in his eyes then surfaced and bounced down his cheeks like the car bouncing over the rocks. He felt hurt. Cheated, really. Cheated of the love of two people whose lives were intertwined in every facet and part of him and his being. They had given life to him, and now it was almost as if they were snuffing out that life. Oh, not literally and physically, perhaps, but emotionally. "Why can't two people stay married?" he asked the night winds again, angrily and fiercely, clutching the steering wheel for all he was worth.

He had a sickening kind of sensation in the pit of his stomach. It was there every time he allowed his mind to dwell on the horror of the shattering news. What happened to the love which once his parents had shared? he wondered. When did it begin to wane and flicker and then die? What was the cause?

Question after question presented itself and he had no answer for them, he knew. He felt like he had reached an impasse. Sometimes, he wished he could die, then the very thought of death frightened him. Terrified him, really. What was beyond death? One of the girls in his class at school had told him several times that after one died, he would face God at the judgment unless his sins were forgiven and washed away in the blood of Christ. This always had an upsetting effect upon him and filled him with fear. But back then, he hadn't wanted to die, not when his home-family ties were secure and intact. He enjoyed living then. But things were changed and so very different now. He felt he had nothing to live for. His father had been his ideal and his mother had secured the home nest with her love and her excellent art of homemaking. He had felt so secure once upon a time. But not
any more. That was why he had made the rendezvous tonight. The fellows were ecstatic with delight when he told them he'd meet them at the lake.

A cold shiver traced his spine from top to bottom. Perhaps what he had planned wasn't so right after all. It was only a temporary escape route, he knew. All the frustration and hurt and pain would still be there when he returned to the world of reality. Yes, it would be there.

It didn't make good sense, this "new experience," as the fellows had phrased it to him. Every one of them was hooked, he knew. Hooked and bound. For the most part, they had lost their zest for living . . . except for their "trips." Did he want to live like that for maybe the rest of his life? Did he want to have the tell-tale signs in his eyes and on his face, like the fellows had in theirs? And what would his father say? What would he think of him?

Again, tears sprang to his eyes. Anger boiled inside his breast. Why should he care what his father said or thought; hadn't they hurt him? And hadn't they caused his world to crumble and fall and come to nothing but utter frustration?

The battle raged inside his breast. Fierce and long and hard, it raged. Revenge shouted, "Get even;" reason asked, "Is it worth it?"; conscience warned, "Don't do it"; his heart cried, "You'll regret it!"

He was getting nearer to the lake. He knew the bumpy road, knew it like a map. Every mile was memory laden. Pleasant memories, they were, of happy, bygone days with his dad. Did he want to change the once-beautiful, mental, memory pictures into another possible nightmare? Did he? Would that not be adding still more pain and hurt and frustration to his already broken heart?

In an instant, he made his decision: He would be a man and not take the road of least resistance. He would not take the so-called "easy way" out. In the long run, the easy way would prove to be the really hard way that it was; it would be his undoing and may even be the death of him.

He drove at a slower speed now. His mind seemed collected and he clutched the steering wheel less fiercely. He could see the shimmering silver of the lake and painfully-sweet memories washed over his being. It hurt him. Oh, how it hurt! He loved his parents. How he loved them! Yes, in spite of
everything, he loved them. He had chosen to stay with his father, not that he
loved his mother less, but because a boy-man needed the father image to
help him to full maturity. And his dad had been good to him. He had even
tried to keep the home life as near normal as possible for him, a thing
impossible to do without the entire family body there.

Doug slowed the car on the downward grade, deep in thoughtful
remembering. He would turn around at the landing and go home
immediately, even though his father hadn't been there when he left. The
house was a tomb of emptiness and silence and without his father's
presence. And how he had aged since the nightmare of divorce! Sometimes
it frightened Doug; was his dad on the verge of heart failure, or a nervous
breakdown, even?

He wound his way down the steep grade and was ready to make a
quick turn-around when his lights picked out a car near where he and his
father loaded and unloaded their small fishing boat whenever they came
fishing. The fellows! he thought with a shudder of fear, knowing what could
follow his refusal to do drugs. They could become fierce and violent, he
knew. Extremely so.

He was ready to accelerate and speed upward when the car became a
familiarly-fixed object in his troubled mind. It was his father's car. It was!

A new kind of fear washed over him. Shaking physically, he cried, "Oh,
God, do You hear me? If so, help me now."

He steered the car over the packed earth and parked beside his
father's car, calling through his opened windows, "Dad! Dad!"

He jumped out and raced to the boat landing, calling all the while, "Dad! Dad! Where are you?"

From a cluster of scrub willows, a haggard-looking figure emerged.
With stooped and drooping shoulders, he came toward his son. "Why are you
here?" he asked on a sob. "How did you know where I was?"

"I . . . I didn't, Dad. I . . . I . . ."
"Oh, Son, I feel I can't go on like this much longer. If only I knew where to turn, what to do . . ." The broad shoulders shook under his manly sobs.

"Dad," Doug said tearfully, "I love you. I love you!"

"Ca . . . can you, son? Can you love me . . .? We . . . we've hurt you badly, your mother and I have. And it's been so needless. So senseless. Pride and stubbornness are deadly things, Doug. They're death to a marriage."

"Dad, I believe I know someone who can help us."

"No one can help, Doug."

"I believe you're wrong. There's a girl in my class at school who keeps telling me about Jesus and His power to forgive sins and to solve problems. I used to think she was kind of odd, but I've changed my mind about that odd part tonight. Let's go home and I'll call her and see if we can't talk to her. She's different from the rest of the girls."

"I don't know, son. I feel there's nothing much to live for. If it wasn't for you . . ." His voice trailed.

"We have nothing to lose," Doug asserted pleadingly. "Please, Dad."

"A car's coming, Doug; guess we'll have to leave. No telling who it is nor what mischief they're up to. I'll lead the way, you follow."

Shaking with fear, Doug raced to his car and slid beneath the steering wheel just as the car came to a grinding halt on the rocky road between his father and him. He felt the blood drain from his face and his hands felt suddenly wet -- clammy wet.

"What d'ya' think you're doing, you two?" a burly policeman asked, swinging his athletic body out of the car and striding over to Doug. Seeing Doug's father, he said amiably, "O hi, Jack. I hadn't recognized you and your son. Pardon my rough and harshly-brusque manner. You see, we were tipped off that there's to be a pot party here tonight and we plan on catching the culprits red-handed. There's a gang of toughies in school who are out to
Doug's entire body felt limp. He was shaking like an aspen leaf in late fall. Dumb kid, the cop had said, and that categorized him perfectly.

"Clear out, both of you. My men and I plan a bit of a surprise for those fellows and you must not be here. Now follow my instructions carefully: at the top of this hill, you will see what looks like a wagon trail. It's hard to see, so watch carefully. Take it as soon as you find it. Mr. Hone's got the iron gate open; the road-trail will lead you to Hone's Ranch. Some of our men are on the trail, waiting to set up roadblocks as soon as these smarties get here. You must follow that rough trail all the way past the ranch to the bridge over Rushing Creek. Mr. Hone will let you use his bridge to cross the stream. About three miles beyond the bridge, you will see another trail-road. Turn left, and go as far as you can on that logging trail. It will bring you out on a road which you will recognize, Jack. Now hurry. We don't want anything to foil our plans."

"Thanks, Sarge," Doug's father said. "And do be careful. These kids don't play, you know."

"There's five of us here, besides the three up on that wagon trail who will be coming down here after they've arranged the roadblocks. And we've brought a super-good dog along, too. Now hurry."

Doug trembled as he followed his father up the rough, steep, hill road. He had almost made a fool out of himself. Almost, he had given in to something illicit, which could well have sent him to a premature grave.

What had kept him from doing what he planned? he wondered. And why had he decided to not yield? Some Power higher than himself? It had to be, he reasoned sensibly. Carolene's prayers, perhaps? She had told him repeatedly that she was praying for him. Yes, that must be the answer; Carolene was praying. For him!

Following behind his father on the bumpy wagon trail road (if one dared call it a road), Doug's spirits soared. He would go to see Carolene tonight yet. She would help him on to a new and different way, and life would be worth living again. Perhaps she had seemed odd to him . . . different, really . . . yet
there was something beautiful and attractive about it all. Something which he needed. Or, like Carolene had told him once, it was not something he needed, but Someone: the Lord Jesus Christ. And tonight, for the first time in his life, he wanted to know Him. Not in a mere head-knowledge way, but in his heart -- like Carolene knew Him.

Doug had a sudden, beautiful feeling that life was just beginning for him and his father. And who knew what the Lord would do for his mother! Carolene had said God was the great problem solver, too. Well, whatever the future held, he knew he was on the right road by going to see Carolene and seeking to know her God.