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NOW IS THE TIME
By Mrs. Paul E. King

"So that's all the New Year means to you, Reg!" Lexie exclaimed sadly, facing her brother with open-eyed wonder and amazement. "And here I have always admired you and looked up to you!" Lexie's exclamation ended on a sadly-morbid note.

Reg studied his tall, blonde-haired sister for a moment. Then his eyes dropped to the floor. Lexie was different now, no doubt about it. He felt uncomfortable around her anymore. Yes, that was the word . . . uncomfortable. And they had always been so close to each other, too. At every party he had protected her from the bold, brash and daring would-be

suitors, keeping an eye on her like the proverbial hawk and whisking her away when any of the young men tried to get too amorous around her. And now, here she was, standing before him with a smitten look on her face and in her eyes. "I can't help it, Lexie," he finally said, "but, yes, that's what New Years means to me; partying and fun and. . . ."

She stepped near him. "Don't say it, Reginald. Please don't. I can't bear even so much as the thought of the old life. That is all in the past for me. How I wish it were for you, too," she exclaimed, adding brokenly, "There's so much more than drinking and partying. Believe me when I say there is. I tasted of the cup from which you are drinking and through which you think you are having such a great time, and it gave me nothing but remorse and bitterness and a guilty conscience. It left me empty and miserable and wretched."

"Maybe that's you, Sis; let me speak for myself," Reg said in a sarcastic manner. "You and I are totally different; we are two distinct individuals: I am me, you are you. I enjoy partying and. . . ."

"Don't, Reg!" Lexie exclaimed again, placing a finger over her brother's lips. "Drinking will damn your soul. Already its binding and habit-forming tentacles have a strong hold on you. Even Mother has noticed."

"And she should care! Why, Lex, I don't drink half as much as Dad and Mother do. They're the ones who got me started on it. I acquired the taste for it from Dad and Mother themselves. They've been giving me sips and tastes for so long as I can remember. So Mother has noticed, huh? Big deal! Maybe if she would stop I'd give it a bit of thought. But then, maybe I wouldn't, either. Who knows?" Reg laughed mockingly.

"Will you listen to me? Please, Reg."

"I suppose I haven't been listening?" came his tart question-reply.

"The Lord Jesus satisfies, Reg. Completely and entirely. He takes away the desire for alcohol and drugs and cigarettes."

"You never drank or smoked, so how would you know?"

"True; I didn't smoke nor drink and do drugs. So, how do I know that Christ can deliver from these habits and take even the desire for them away?"

I'll tell you. Better yet, come with me tonight to the watch night service at the church and I'll introduce you to two former drug addicts and an alcoholic-turned-Christian. All three of them were chain smokers, too. But Jesus saved them and forgave their sins and He delivered them from these sinful and wicked habits. He can do the same for you, Reg. In fact, He is waiting for you. He wants to liberate you and set you free."

In exasperation, Reg flung his hands up in the air. "Okay. Okay! So it worked for those three fellows. Suppose I don't want deliverance, as you phrased it."

Lexie gasped in disbelief. Placing her trembling hands upon her brother's broad shoulders, she cried out in alarm, "Oh, but you do want delivered, Reginald. Drink cannot satisfy the longing deep within your heart; Jesus alone can do this. Believe me, Reg, I have peace in my soul and my long search for joy and real contentment is over. Give God a chance in your life, please. You'll find what you've been searching for for all these years, and you will be happy. Truly and honestly, happy."

"Such a dull and colorless life, Lex. I must admit and confess that it becomes you, but not me. When I get older perhaps I'll consider what you've told me. And I may even do something about it. Something like you did. But not now. No, not now. Why, Lexie, I'm having the time of my life: I have a beautiful girlfriend, a brand new sports car, a good job, and plenty of money. Who needs anything more? Not I. And tonight I'm going out on the town; Candle and I are going to celebrate in style. I may even ask her to marry me. Since I don't have you to look after any more nor to protect from some of the wolves that come to parties I've been having more fun than I've ever had. Well, I must go; I don't want to be late to the Packards' house. They're having the biggest party ever. Mother and Dad are already there. Too bad you aren't going."

"I have no desire whatever to be there, Reg. I'm changed. I have a new heart, a blood-washed heart. My desires have been changed."

"You can say that again! Well, I must be going. By the time I pick Candle up and we get to the Packards, the party should be getting in gear."

Lexie gripped her brother's shoulders tightly. With tears streaming down her cheeks, she said, "Don't go, Reginald. Please don't go! Come with

me to church. Give Jesus your heart. Please! I feel . . . scared . . . for you. I'm frightened. Terribly fearful . . . for you."

"Now wait a minute. What are you trying to do; scare me or something?" Reg asked, shaking loose of his sister's grip. "I said I'm going to that party and nothing's going to stop me, not even you!" He started for the door.

"Reg, no! No!" Lexie cried. "Don't do it! Don't go!" She blocked the doorway with her slender frame.

"I'm going!" With a powerful hand, he pulled Lexie away and walked outside, slamming the door behind him.

She stood in the doorway, trembling and sobbing. What had she done? she wondered, weeping brokenly. She had thought he would heed her heartfelt plea not to go, but he hadn't. "Oh, God, have mercy! Have mercy on my brother!" she cried. "I'm scared! Scared! For him. I did what I felt I had to do . . ." Again she sobbed.

She heard the car door slam; then she saw Reg race it down the long driveway like a wild man. Fear gripped her heart. Cold shivers traced her spine. Her brother . . . her very own dear brother . . . had turned his dearest Friend away. He wanted nothing to do with God or His Son, Jesus. And she had felt so sure that tonight was the night for him to get saved.

She closed the door and locked it. How she wished she knew more about the things of God. She had felt so surge that her brother would seek the Lord like she had done when he heard how wonderful and kind and precious Jesus was, and how He had made the sacrifice for sin with His own life and His precious blood. But instead of repenting and confessing and forsaking his sins, Reg had become livid with rage and with anger. Instead of running with all urgency and haste to Jesus, like she had done when conviction seized her soul, he had turned and run away from God.

Lexie checked the tall hallway clock for time just as it chimed seven times. Seven o'clock. And the sin and revelry was only just beginning, as Reg had stated. If only he had come to church with her just this once, she thought, with a sick, hollow feeling deep in the pit of her stomach. He would have gotten saved, she felt. Or maybe he would not have. But at least he

would have heard a stirring gospel message and beautiful, soul-stirring songs. And he would not have been with the drinking, partying, careless crowd of revelers, her parents included.

At thought of her father and mother, hot tears gushed from Lexie's eyes. They seemed so unconcerned about their soul and its eternal destiny. They hadn't hindered her on her new spiritual journey to Heaven, but neither had they encouraged her. And they hadn't gotten angry with her, either, when she talked to them about their soul and about getting right with God. Instead they sat and looked at her with an expression of It's-fine-for-you-but-it's-not-for-us. They were positively neutral and noncommittal. And one could not be neutral about spiritual things, she knew. One's soul, especially.

She walked into the living room and sat down to read her Bible until she would have to leave for the watch night service at the church. The house was quiet and peaceful; her spirit was strangely troubled. She felt restless and fearful, like something dreadful and horrible was going to happen.

She got up from the chair and walked to the window. Pulling the curtains apart, she stood framed inside and looked down the long driveway, hoping with all of her heart to see that her brother had changed his mind and was returning home to go to church with her. But there was neither sight nor sound of him and his car.

She stood for a long while, watching the road, but all she saw was the snow that was now falling in great wind-blown sheets of white, making visibility almost zero at times. She shivered with fear. Reg had been drinking before he left the house; she had smelled it on his breath when he talked to her. Suppose he got careless in his driving? Alcohol affected people this way, she had read and heard. And he was angry, too. A double threat, she thought, sadly and silently.

Her mind went back to the years before Reg had begun his drinking. True, their parents had introduced him to the habit And less than a year ago it got hold of him and would not let him go. When she saw what it was doing to him, she felt like she would die from the burden it placed upon her, especially so since she was converted.

She turned the lights off then went back to the window, a horrible fear gripping her heart. She prayed for her parents and for her brother and

Candie, prayed that God would save their soul at any cost. Then she began to pace the floor and weep brokenly. What was the meaning of this fear which she felt? she wondered. And for whom was it? For Reg?

She felt suddenly that it was indeed for her brother. She dropped to her knees and prayed earnestly. Intercedingly. Agonizingly. How long she prayed she had no idea. None whatever. It was the shrill ringing of the telephone which brought her suddenly out of the realm of prayer back to the earthly.

She hurried to answer. Before she picked up the mouthpiece even, she knew.

"Is this the Van Nies residence?" a voice in an impersonal tone asked

"It is. I am Lexie Van Nies. How is my brother? Is he still alive?"

"How did you know?"

Tears were streaming down Lexie's face. "Where is he?" she asked brokenly.

"He and his lady friend are here in the emergency room."

"Is . . . he alive?"

"I'm sorry. . ." The voice carried pity and compassion across the line.

"Thank you. I'll contact our parents. . ."

Long after she had seen her brother's and Candie's mangled bodies, Lexie lay in bed, shivering and shaking. She felt like it was all a horrible nightmare. But she knew only too well that it was not. It was stark reality. Horrifying reality. But where was her brother's soul? she wondered And where was Candie's? The State highway patrol had chalked it up as driving while intoxicated, or some such wording. Was it just another common, oft-repeated daily happening in their round of duty? Or did it, perhaps, hurt and grieve them as much as it was grieving her?

She got up, slipped into soft, warm house slippers and a long robe then stood by the window and looked down the driveway. Snow was swirling from

the sky in great sheets of white and was piling the bushes and the lamp post in tall, milky-white marshmallow drifts of fluffy mounds. Four hours ago, she thought sadly. Only four hours ago he . . . Reginald . . . could have made his peace with God. And he would still be living, no doubt Four hours ago. Only four hours ago! Yet she felt like she had lived years in those four fear-filled and dark hours. Her brother, gone! Forever! Forever! At twenty years of age!

She shuddered. Shivered. The end of the wicked was horrible. Only, that was not the end; it was the beginning in another world. Truly, the Bible stated it like it was when it said, "For the wages of sin is death. . . ."

Lexie thought then of the rest of the verse, so filled with light and glory and hope: ". . . but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" Romans 6:23. She and Reg had each come to the crossroads in their life. God had been faithful to each of them. The choice was theirs -- Heaven or Hell; the broad road or the strait and narrow road toward Heaven. Reg had chosen the wide and broad road toward Hell.

She shuddered again. God had left the choice up to man. He sealed his doom and decided his own destiny by choosing the broad road to Hell; or he, by choosing the strait and the narrow road, could enjoy Heaven's glories and grandeur and splendors for the endless ages to come

Looking out the window and down the driveway, she said tearfully, "Oh, Reg! Reg! You made the wrong choice And now it's too late. Too late!"

The snow swirled dizzily at the windows and the wind moaned around the corner of the house, "Too late! Too late!" it seemed to mourn.