FOR ALL THINGS THERE IS A TIME
By Mrs. Paul E. King

He stood gazing into the sky for a moment, thinking again. Since he’d lost his father, it seemed to be the thing he’d done best. Or most. Or both. But he couldn't help it; it was all he had left, it seemed . . . his thoughts. And the memories. Good memories, they were. Pleasant memories, too.
They'd been more than father and son; they were friends. Bosom friends. Always, anytime or about anything, he'd been able to talk things over with his father. And always, he had received the right answer to everything. Like the time when he had been troubled about his soul's well-being and had gone to his father and asked him what to do about it. The answer was straightforward and to the point. There would be no lesser easier way for him to become converted than for the vilest of sinners, even though he was a mere lad of nine almost ten years old at the time. The way of repentance, confession, and restitution was the only way to forgiveness, his father had told him. And he had followed the injunction-advice and was gloriously and marvelously converted, becoming wholly sanctified shortly thereafter.

His father was his ideal; the embodiment of saintliness and Christ-likeness. He would rather have been with him than any of his closest friends. He trusted his father. He never doubted his word. He had utmost confidence and faith in him and in his testimony of full salvation. And then, like a flower in full bloom, his father was cut down with a heart attack. Totally and completely, without so much as a warning sign, it had happened. It was over. And now, he was alone. Well, not entirely alone; he had his mother. But what did she know about hunting, fishing, and roaming the woods and the fields together like his father and he had done for as long as he could remember!

He gazed to the sky again then gave a heavy sigh. He should stay home more and try to comfort his mother. But the hurt in his heart drew him outdoors. Out to the sights and sounds and places which his father loved best. Like he, himself, did. His mother, bless her, cried her grief out to a loving, caring, hearing Savior. She found her solace in Christ. Like he used to do. Only, since the funeral, something had happened to him. He had tried to pray, but he felt dead. All over, dead. Still, he hadn't sinned. Blissful thought! No, he hadn't sinned. Nor did he have any desire or pull toward sin, and sinning.

He straightened his shoulders and walked toward the water. The work must be done. He alone was left to do it.

Snow and ice crystals glistened in the mid-morning sun like glittering diamonds. The decoys bobbed gently in the remaining patch of open water. They looked so real, floating on top of the water in their sitting position. He should have brought them home a week ago. Duck season ended then. But
he couldn't bring himself around to doing it. He and his father had put them there, and now the hunting was over for another season.

He looked back to the horizon for the ducks which he knew would not materialize. He felt numb with shock. Before his father's sudden Homegoing, he had hoped for a Canadian front to hurry up and push down the few remaining migrants. But nothing happened. Only white puffs of cumulus clouds, no massive gray beastly looking things, punctuated the sky. Winter, the purifier, had taken over already; clearly, coldly, and brightly.

The sun felt good to him. Out of the wind, it penetrated the icy confines of his waders and the three layers of wool socks, and added just the hint of a tiny spark of warmth to his frozen-feeling toes. He stood, studying the decoys for a moment, knowing they must be taken up, and that this year he must be the one to do it. Alone. Their black painted eyes looked back at him and seemed to ask why and where. The why, he could answer; the "where is father" look would be harder to answer.

He sighed and pondered their fate as tears formed in his eyes. Stuffed away in burlap sacks they would collect dust in the basement for the next ten months. Or would it be longer than that? he wondered. Would he be able . . . ever again . . . to carry them on his back and bring them here?

His mind drifted back to October, when his father and he had brought them here. They looked so good and so right in that dawn's peculiar red-orange glow. They looked like the real thing. So peaceful and beautiful, all freshly and newly painted or touched-up and the sun illuminating the feathering on the hen mallard nearest him. He even remembered bits and pieces of conversation his father and he had shared. Spiritual things, largely.

Taking his gloved hand, he brushed the tears off his cheeks. In the winter's cold light, he saw chips of paint gone from the decoys. Dents and rubs, too. Would he ever again feel the thrill and sheer delight of repairing them in the winter months, the way he did when his father and he worked on them together in the basement? Would he?

His heart hurt. It was too deep and painful for words to describe.

He waded into the water. He must get those decoys, hurt or not. His father would want him to go on living, the way they two had done together.
He looked upward. The thought was almost as real as if his father's voice had spoken it to him audibly. Yes, it was!

Tears rolled down his wind-red cheeks now and dropped into the water. An ice skin covered just about everything and the latest snow had dressed the brown earth in ermine. White dominated the land. Gone were the golden hues of autumn. No golden sunrises now, no yellow-orange leaves floating on the water. The trees stood stark and bare, stripped all the way to their bark, revealing their innermost secrets and leaving nothing to speculation or imagination. In October he spent idle moments marveling at their colored fall cloaks, so fully and completely covering their limbs and branches, and wondering how many bird and squirrel's nests were hidden away behind the density of foliage. Not any more; every nest, what was left of it, was revealed.

A pang of sorrow shot through his young heart. It hurt him greatly to know there wouldn't be anymore golden mornings for the year. Nothing except white, whiter, and whitest. No coatless days afield either; only cold, colder, and coldest. In September he felt alive. There was a spring to his step. The world was a thing of beauty, and he was thankful to be a part of it. He and his father had their yearly, carefully made plans for hunting, and scouting the mountain near them for the butternuts and chestnuts which his mother was so fond of. Death was the farthest of all things from his mind. And his mother and he had no warning that husband and father would fall victim to the grim reaper's cold, heartless and pitiless sword.

He waded into deeper water now. Thin shards of ice tinkled like chimes around the decoys. It was a pretty sound; musical, really. One he and his father had enjoyed standing still and listening to for a while before collecting the wooden ducks.

He reached for the first decoy and thrust it into the burlap tomb on his back. One after another he repeated the process, until all were removed. Then he trudged to the pickup truck and put his heavy load inside. Walking around the truck, he gazed across the water. It was lonely looking without the decoys. Lonely, like he was; like his heart felt.

Fresh tears slid from his eyes. He had never thought that his once beautiful, full, and wonderful life could see so numb, so bleak, so sad, and so lonely. And it had happened in an instant of time. His father and he had been
working together in the shop beyond the house. They were talking; something about the good sermon they had heard the previous Sunday. He had heard a thud; the conversation had ceased. When he turned from the piece of woodwork upon which he was working, he saw his father in a heap on the floor.

It was over in an instant, Doctor Gallagher had said, when he made the examination. And in that moment, something within the young man had seemed to die too. Or make him numb. It was an effort for him to do anything now, it seemed. Oh, he tried, to be sure, but the joy of doing seemed to have died within him.

He bowed his head and moaned sadly. "Dad! Dad!" he cried into the raw-cold winter wind. "O Dad! I miss you so! Please, God, I feel all numb and cold. It's been hard praying. And . . . and . . . I seem to have lost all feeling. You do care about Mother and Me, don't You?"

As if in answer to the heart-rending cry, the deep fountain of his heart was opened. Sob after sob tore his young manly form. Then he prayed. How he prayed! And God drew near. Then still nearer. And suddenly he knew that, all the time, his Savior-Friend had been living within him. His grief had numbed his senses. But then, one could not rely upon feelings: He must walk by faith. Yes, even in the darkness, and in the pall and gloom of death.

His thoughts now drifted ahead to springtime. Green leaves, warm weather, beautiful flowers. After spring came summer, then fall. And then winter again. All one big cycle, complete in itself, never ending so long as the earth remained.

Life, too, was much the same, he realized now. The Bible stated there was a time to be born and a time to die; one generation passed away, another took its place. His "time to die" was included in that statement. His cycle of life would someday be finished like his father's had been. And, by God's grace, he would die like his father had died; serving and loving the Lord.

He got into the pickup and started homeward. He must make up for all the sadness which he was sure he had helped to heap upon his dear mother by allowing his own grief to nearly drown him in its gloom.
For the first time since the untimely death, the young man felt the numbness lifting. Jesus had said, "He that believeth on me shall never die." His father was very much alive. Eternally so. He had only changed worlds, The Home of the redeemed.

He felt joyously happy now. His mother would rejoice with him, he knew, when she saw him.