TOP SECRET
By Mrs. Paul E. King

Peggy rushed up the stairs and tossed her schoolbooks on the desk that stood near one corner of her bedroom. Pirouetting 'round and 'round she hummed softly, feeling for all the world like this was one of her greatest most wonderful days ever to have been alive.
"Calvin!" She said the single word dreamily in what was little more than a musical whisper, liking the sound and relishing her little secret. No, their little secret. For almost a month now it was no longer I, or me, but us -- Calvin and she; two; plural!

Drawing his picture from her billfold, where she had kept it hidden and well-concealed behind another picture -- the one of her best girlfriend, Cinda -- she sat on the edge of the bed and looked at the auburn haired Calvin's handsome face.

"Hey, you sound happy, Peggy," Charlene said, sticking her head inside the door and smiling at her younger sister. "It's because of the youth group going to Sugar Creek tonight, I suppose. . .?"

Youth group? Sugar Creek? Why, she'd forgotten all about the meeting that was going on at Sugar Creek, and that the young people from the church were all going.

"I'm excited!" Charlene exclaimed, coming into the room and sitting down beside her sister. "O, what's that? Another picture of Cinda?" she asked quickly, seeing Peggy fumble with the picture in her hand.

Getting quickly to her feet, Peggy snapped the billfold shut. Making sure Calvin's picture was perfectly concealed in the palm of her hand, she dropped everything into the dresser drawer, saying, "I'd forgotten about going to Sugar Creek, Sis."

Charlene gasped. "You can't be serious, Peg!" she said quickly. "Why I can scarcely wait till we're there. God's been moving mightily over there. They're having a wonderful revival and some of us have been praying that it will spread to our church -- to us! We sure need revival, among our age group especially. It's awful, the things some of the young people are doing! And they're all from good homes. That is what makes it so sad and... and..., so terribly distressing: they've been taught the right way; they know what they're doing is exceeding sinful and evil. I'm sure glad the Lord got to your heart and mine when He did! No telling what we'd be doing. . ."

For a long while after Charlene left, Peggy sat, mulling the things her sister had said over and over in her mind. Suddenly she stood to her feet. It
was nobody's business what she did, she decided quickly, hurrying down the stairs and rushing out of the house.

Like one on an important and hasty errand, she headed for Gray's Drugstore; Calvin had told her to meet him there.

Her heart hammered and pounded inside her chest when she spied the top of his head (above the tall booths) in a secluded spot at the far end of the eating section. "I'm here!" she said rather breathlessly, sitting across from him.

The boy smiled; it was a disarming smile. Always, it had the same effect upon her. She became almost like putty or soft clay in his hands.

"Here," Calvin said, getting up and motioning for her to sit in the seat beside him. "I want the prettiest girl in school to sit next to me, not across from me," he commented lightly.

Blushing rosy-pink, Peggy obeyed, feeling daring and bold in his presence.

"Still afraid to tell your folks about . . . us?" Calvin teased, tilting Peggy's chin with his hand and making her look at him.

"O, Calvin, not again! You just don't understand, We'd never get to . . . to see each other alone like this if Mother and Father found out. They'd put a quick stop to it."

"I'm not good enough for the Kelleys' lovely daughter?"

"It . . . it's not exactly that, Calvin; it's something you wouldn't understand. But, please, let's forget about it and enjoy our time together . . . alone."

"My practical Peggy! Sure. Sure, we'll make the most of these precious moments -- these forbidden, stolen moments together. But here, take a draw on this, it'll give you courage and backbone to stand on your own two feet," and Calvin drew out a cigarette and quickly lit it. "Here," he said, holding the smoking thing out to her.
Peggy trembled as she looked in Calvin's face, feeling weak and spineless in his presence. "Go on," he urged, holding it to her lips.

Like one awakening out of sleep, she pushed his hand away. "Calvin, please! No! I . . . I . . . you know I don't smoke."

"Hi, Peg. Hi, Calvin," a girl's soft voice called from the adjoining booth. "I didn't know you were seeing each other." Then, quickly and with no hesitating whatever on her part, Pat Cooren asked, "Do your folks know, Peg?"

Pat was a girl from the church and Peggy felt like slapping her -- a feeling she had never had before.

"Does your father know?" Pat continued. "After all, Calvin's not a Christian, and you know what the Bible says. . . ."

"I can't see that it's anybody's business!" Peggy rejoined flatly and hotly.

"I didn't mean any harm, Peg; honest I didn't. I . . . I . . . guess it's just that I was . . . shocked. I thought you were in good victory. . . ."

Peggy felt her face burn hot in embarrassment. She looked up to find Calvin wearing an amused, mocking and cynical smile. "Don't pay any attention to what she's saying!" she exclaimed apologetically.

"You're going to Sugar Creek tonight, aren't you, Peggy?" Pat asked, standing beside the couple's booth now.

Without warning and not asking to be excused, Peggy pushed past Calvin and Pat and rushed out of the store.

Once at home, she hurried upstairs and locked herself in the bedroom, her heart a muddle of frightening emotions. Whatever had caused her to speak to Pat the way she did? she wondered, feeling embarrassed and wretched. And why hadn't she had the courage to walk out on Calvin when he asked her to smoke? Worse still, why had she allowed herself to have
these secret rendezvous with him in the first place? It had done nothing but drag her down spiritually.

Drag her down? She was backslidden! Through and through, backslidden, she realized finally.

The sudden illumination sent shivers of fear through Peggy's heart. O, why hadn't she remained on the straight and narrow pathway to Heaven? she wondered, feeling waves of remorse and guilt wash over her being. One always got into trouble when they went beyond God's "Thou shalt nots." She knew this, but she had thought she was strong enough that she would not be affected by these little "sneak" meetings. But it hadn't worked that way. Ah, no!

Peggy walked to the window and looked out, her mind recalling the unhappy marriage and, finally, the broken heart of her very favorite cousin, Sue. Like herself, Sue began dating an unsaved boy against her parents' rules on the "sly" during her junior year. In less than a year they were married, and in less than another year Henry left her and was never again heard from. Sue bore his son five months after her philandering husband's departure and was left to make a living for the child and manage the best she could. Her life was one continual "grind," it seemed. And now she, Peggy, had begun heading down that hard path, too! Involuntarily, Peggy shuddered.

Charlene's voice cut sharply into her thoughts. "Telephone call for you, Peg," she called up the stairs. "Calvin Brookfield's on the line. . . ."

Opening the door, Peggy said, "Tell him it's all off. It's dangerous to play with fire -- that's what I've been doing."

Rushing down the stairs, she flung herself in her mother's arms. "Oh Morn," she wailed as tears streamed down her face, "I've been a deceiver. I've . . ."

"Why, Peggy, what on earth is wrong with you?"

"I'm backslidden, that's what's wrong with me. You and Dad always forbade any of us children to go out with unsaved boys . . . well . . . I've been sneaking around with Calvin and I . . . I've lost God out of my heart. And, Mother, just a short while ago -- at Gray's drugstore -- he offered me a
cigarette! I almost put it between my lips! O I'm sorry; forgive me, please . . . I had no idea how far I had fallen!"

"Calvin insists upon speaking with you!" Charlene announced, coming into the kitchen.

"Tell him for me, Sis, tell him I have no hidden secrets any more -- he'll know what I mean. And . . . and . . . tell him that 'Bread of deceit is sweet to a man; but afterwards his mouth shall be filled with gravel.' (Prov. 20:17)"

Peggy buried her face in her hands and sobbed. The Lord knew why He had inspired the Apostle Paul to pen II Cor. 6:14-18. "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?"

"And what part hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel?"

"And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

"Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you.

"And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty."

She would separate herself, she determined fixedly inside her heart. He had promised to "receive" her. No boy was worth the risk of losing one's soul over!

The revival was on at Sugar Creek, and it had begun in Hillvale -- in Peggy's heart!