

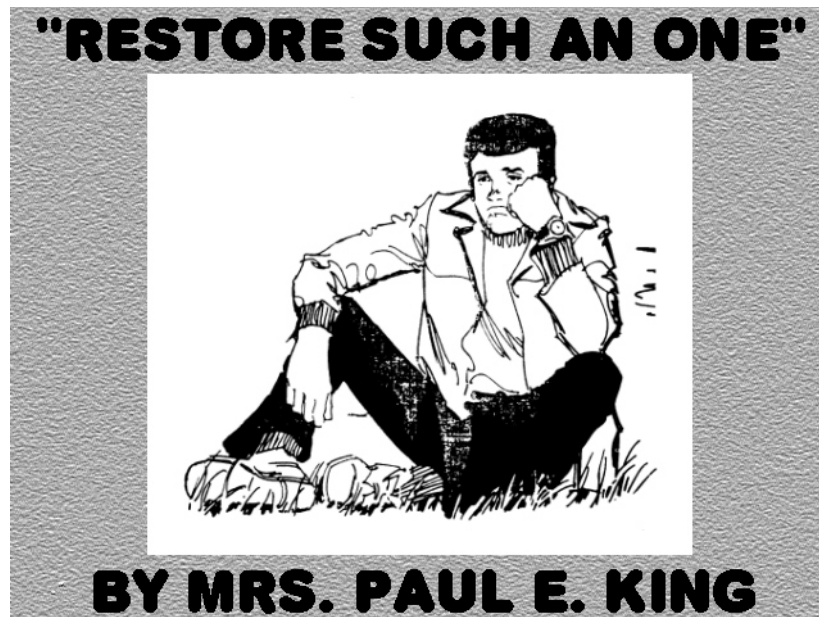
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"RESTORE SUCH AN ONE"
By Mrs. Paul E. King

Kim raced down the school steps, taking them two at a time. He wanted to get away from Laurel High as quickly as possible. Seeing Harold Croddy cutting across the lawn in his direction, he ducked behind the trunk of a maple tree and waited until Harold was well out of sight before resuming the walk home.

"Hey, Kim, wait for me!"

It was Tom Smith, yelling his lungs out, trying to get Kim's attention.

"Wait up!" Tom shouted again, making long, easy strides in his friend's direction. "Why the deaf-ear pretense, Kim?" he asked, falling quickly in step beside the silent boy.

Kim kept moving forward, his eyes downcast and his handsome face creased in a frown.

"What's eating you, Pal?" Tom asked, concern registering on his face and in his voice.

"It won't do a bit of good talking about it," was Kim's honest rejoinder.

"I'm not too sure about that," Tom asserted stoutly.

"Sometimes the best thing one can do is to unload what's on his chest. You haven't been yourself lately. . . ."

"Please, Tom, don't rub it in!"

"I'm not; believe me, I'm not. Humbly, I ask you to accept my sincere apology. I wanted to invite you to go with us to the Old Folks' Home tonight, Kim. Donnetta wants us over to her house for refreshments after the service. How about it?"

Kim cast a quick sideways glance at his friend. He felt all choked up on the inside; his throat got a sudden, totally unwanted knot in it and his stomach did the same. "I . . . I won't promise, Tom."

"Why not? You never used to miss out on anything we did. What happened, Kim? You... you haven't lost out with God? I mean . . . well . . . you didn't backslide, did you?" Kim's answer was a long drawn-out sigh.

"I'd sure like to help you," Tom said, with utmost sincerity in his voice. "Tell you what," he added brightly, "I'll call you later on. Meanwhile, think it over. But please come. We miss you terribly. Truth of the matter is, we need you; and frankly, you need us, too. It's kind of like the giant redwoods in California. Together, they support one another; alone, they're quite

vulnerable to the storms and the winds, succumbing easily and readily to the fierce gales that frequently sweep those heights."

"Thanks, Tom, I really and honestly appreciate your concern. But there are some things in life in which no one can help."

"Ah, but you're wrong there, Kim; Christ has the answer for all our problems."

"Yeah, I know that. I was speaking -- rather, looking at it -- from the human side of life."

"And isn't this where we always fall and get defeated?" Tom asked poignantly. "Mankind surveys his circumstances with a critical eye of doubt and disbelief; God, on the other hand, laughs at these seeming insurmountable obstacles. True faith knows no defeat. Well, I'll be seeing you. Nice walking with you, Kim." And Tom turned down his street.

Turning quickly into his own yard, Kim shuddered. The place looked like a proverbial Hooligan's catch-all: cans and pieces of paper and scraps of metal littered the yard; the grass (weeds, mainly) was tall and uncut and the fence (what remained of it) leaned tiredly earthward, like a decrepit old man whose back muscles would not (could not!) hold him up straight and tall, but kept drawing him down, down, lower and lower to the ground.

In disgust, Kim turned the knob on the door and walked inside. The ever-present odor of stale cigarette smoke and equally stale and rancid grease greeted him -- as it did every afternoon upon his return home from school.

He wanted to run, and he felt like crying. He couldn't possibly go with Tom to the meeting tonight -- and then on to Donnetta's house. Sooner or later, the group would suggest meeting at his house.

He slapped his books down on the least cluttered end of the dirty table and surveyed the kitchen.

"Utter catastrophe!" he muttered aloud, burying his face in his hands.

Bracing himself, Kim walked into the living room, expecting to see the usual sight of newspapers and cheap magazines scattered about and strewn carelessly over the floor, with half-empty beer cans and pop bottles adding to the utter chaos and litter. Instead (and for once!), the room was in perfect order.

"Wonder of wonders!" he said aloud, hurrying back to the kitchen and tackling the dirty breakfast dishes. Had Stacie been here, he thought, and not run away from home six months ago, she would have had the house in tip-top shape and perfect order. But it had been too much for her -- the filth and clutter; the bickering, fighting and arguing between their parents; and, finally, the smoking and drinking that began when their mother started to work in one of the factories in the city.

Stacie, filled with shame and utter disgust at seeing her mother stagger home from work time and time again with seemingly no concern for Kim's and her feelings, had packed her bags and left, contacting no one but Kim. He alone knew her whereabouts.

Doing the dishes now, and cleaning the dirty kitchen, Kim wondered if, perhaps, going to Stacie wouldn't be the best thing for him to do. At least he wouldn't be around to see how far his parents had fallen -- how utterly degenerate they had become.

He had just finished scrubbing the kitchen floor and was ready to begin tackling the grand mess in the yard when the doorbell rang. Who could it be? he wondered, half-afraid to answer it lest it be one of his parents' creditors.

Kim stood motionless, wondering what to do. Insistently it rang, again and again.

Wiping the perspiration from his face, he walked toward the door and threw it open wide. "Tom!" he exclaimed, seeing his friend on the porch. "What brings you here?"

"You!" came the immediate reply. "I've been burdened for you, Kim. Just wanted you to know. And I . . . I'd like to pray for you. You're having it rough; I can feel it -- sense it, would be a more fitting word, perhaps. We all have battles, Kim, every last one of us. Mine may be different than yours and yours may be considerably harder and more difficult than mine, but they're

both still a battle. We're in this together! I want to help you; to share your burden, whatever it may be. The Bible admonishes us to 'Bear [ye] one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.' Something has you down -- low. I've come to help lift the weight . . . if you'll permit me. Does your anchor still hold, Kim?"

For a long while Kim surveyed Tom, sorting out his own thoughts. The last number of months he'd grown "people-shy" and trusted scarcely no one, he realized with a deep hurt inside his chest. It was as though he was blaming the world for the mess his father and mother were in. And he had been so wrong, he realized suddenly. Tom was sincere (just like the rest of his friends were); he wanted to help him. There was no shame or hypocrisy exhibited; the help he offered was genuine and real.

"Come in," Kim said hoarsely, leading the way into the living room.

Once inside, Tom put his hands on his friend's shoulders. "Look, Kim," he said quickly, "you don't need to tell me a thing, unless you just want to. But I want to pray for you. I feel you're discouraged and . . . and almost ready to give up -- to throw in the sponge, as the saying goes, and call it quits. Don't do it, Kim! Don't. . . ."

"I . . . I . . . you're right, Tom. Only thing is, I've already given up. I need to get back to God, to have the joy of His salvation restored in my heart and life. . . ."

They prayed together then, and when Tom left, the joybells of God's forgiveness and pardon were ringing once again in Kim's soul.

Kim worked feverishly in the yard, sorry for his former I-don't-care attitude, and eager now to get things neat and in order on the outside. He was sure he could get most, if not all, of it done before the service began at the Home.

Gathering the papers together and picking up the pieces of metal was child's play compared to the arduous task of cutting and mowing the lawn. It seemed endless, and when the last corner of tough, tall, rebellious and stubbornly-resisting weeds lay docilely beneath his feet, something akin to manly pride glowed in his eyes and showed on his face again. It was a job well done, he concluded silently as he raked the yard and gave the tired

fence "crutches" until such a time when he could set proper posts in advantageous places and spaces and revive the total complexion and disposition of the still good fence. Then he hurried inside and snatched a biting such an one, in the spirit of meekness. . . ."

Kim snapped a light on in the living room and one in the kitchen, wanting the house to have a warm, cozy glow for his parents -- who still had not returned home. Propping a note up on the kitchen table, telling them where he had gone and with whom he'd be, he stepped out into the lovely fall night, feeling a warmth deep inside himself over the look of the house -- inside and out -- orderly and beautiful by-products of his diligent work.

Sitting around the fireplace in Donnetta's home after the service was over, Kim overheard several of the girls talking.

"It's another thing for us to pray about," he heard Bethany Ashbrook say to Janine Smith. "Poor, dear, sweet Karen! None of us dreamed what she was going through. Her parents, in the process of divorcing !"

"I can scarcely believe it," Janine exclaimed brokenly. "It's quite a traumatic experience for Karen. I know it would be for me. Frankly, Bethany, I'm frightened. The devil's mean. Mean! He's out to destroy everything good and noble and worthwhile -- everything that God ordered and made."

"How true, Jan! But thanks be unto God, Karen's victorious and steadfast through it all. She really 'got her feet down' two years ago."

"I'll never forget that service, Bethany! Like Pappy Hollenbecker says, 'she went to the bottom' that wonderful night. And it's that very thing that's keeping her shining-bright and at peace in her heart through it all."

"But God can still work and perform miracles today, Janine. Look what He did in our family! Brock was gone -- so far as most people were concerned . . . drugs, cigarettes, liquor, you name it, he tried it. But God! Remember how long we all prayed and fasted? But look at my brother today . . . saved and sanctified wholly and on fire for God and in Bible School preparing for the ministry! Blessed be God forever and ever! And the same God can turn the Knisley's about-face and bring them to their knees and stop this separation. We'll have to get desperate in our praying and fasting again."

"Right! 'The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force,' " Janine quoted emphatically with a look of fixed determination in her eyes.

Kim bowed his head; he was ashamed of himself for having felt that he and Stacie were the only two people in the world who were going through deep waters at home. Look at Karen. . . .

Karen came into the family room just then, carrying a tall pitcher of fruit punch and a tray of delicious-looking sandwiches. Her radiant face wore its ever-present smile and her entire being bespoke of a deep inner calm and peace. Any person who could look like that in the midst of crushing burdens, Kim decided quickly, must indeed be listed as another hero of faith on God's heavenly roster.

Tom brought Kim back to his immediate surroundings with, "I'm sure glad you're here, Kim; it seems like old times. Our young people's group just wasn't complete while you were absent."

Involuntarily, Kim got all choked up. "If it hadn't been for you, Tom," he said hoarsely, "for your restoring such an one, in the spirit of meekness. . . ."

"Now, now!" Tom interrupted quickly. "It's just that. . . ."

"Just that you obeyed the Biblical injunction, Tom, that's what it is," Kim cut in. "Thanks, Tom; thanks . . . a million times. By the grace of God, this time I'm going through . . . on into holiness and then into being a full-fledged Christian soldier in this holy war."

It was Tom who got all choked up now. "That's . . . great, Kim. Great!" he exclaimed brokenly. "I . . . I . . . couldn't be happier. Now, how about you and me getting ready to tackle those mountains of sandwiches and cookies?"

Smiling broadly into his friend's face, Kim said, "That's a tremendous suggestion, Pal. And would you believe it, I'm starved!"