SPENDING SPREE

By Mrs. Paul E. King

 Bitsy raced out of her aunt's house to Ann Smith's home three doors away. "Ann! Ann!" she called excitedly, "I won! I won!"

 Ann dropped the potato she'd been peeling and turned to look at Bitsy who was waving an important looking letter above her head. "Won what?" she asked without the least bit of animation or excitement in her soft voice.
"A thousand dollars, that's what!"

Ann's mouth flew open wide in astonishment and disbelief. "A . . . thousand dollars, Bitsy! But . . . how?"

Bitsy laughed a bit shakily and unsteadily, then she said, "It's really quite simple: I entered a contest I saw advertised in one of the magazines and I won. I'm one of the ten who won a thousand dollar prize. Of course, there were larger prizes -- $25,000 first prize, $15,000 second and . . . ."

Ann's mouth was still open in disbelief. "You . . . you can't mean that . . . that you did such a thing, Bitsy!" she finally managed to stutter out, interrupting Bitsy's unfinished statistical rundown.

"Of course I did. How do you think I got this?"

"You . . . shock me!" Ann exclaimed quickly. "That's gambling."

"It is not! Somebody was going to get this give-away money, and I decided I may as well try for it as someone else. I'll need so many things before I leave for college in the fall - what better way to get them? It's quite simple, really."

"I can't believe it! I just cannot believe it, Bitsy!" Ann exclaimed, shaking her head as though she was trying to clear her brain of something ugly and horrible. "I never would have thought it of you -- not after all our home training and excellent Christian upbringing. What do you suppose your mother and father will think and say when you tell them?"

"They'll never know; I don't plan to tell them."

Ann stood like one in a state of shock "You mean you'll even practice deceit? Oh, no, Bitsy! No!"

"I wouldn't call it deceit Not exactly I'll just spend the money on things I need, and they'll never be the wiser. They'll think I spent that money I'm earning in Aunt Carol's dress shop. It'll be that much less they'll have to buy for me, and I'll pay $100.00 tithe to the Lord. . . ."
"I rather believe the Lord isn't interested in having a gambler's tithe, Bitsy. It . . . it's not right and . . . and the next thing you'll be doing is buying lottery tickets. But then, in my way of thinking, there's really little if any difference between the lottery tickets and your present winnings. Each is a game of chance and . . . ."

"Oh, hush, Ann! You make it sound like I'm almost a criminal," Bitsy said quickly. "There's really quite a lot of difference between the two things of which you speak: I didn't pay one cent for what I won; in lottery you buy something, and I have no intentions of ever doing that."

"Many a gambler has gotten his start in a way such as you have done. This is definitely a game of chance," Ann continued, speaking softly. "And this is not right. In fact, it's very evil and wrong."

"And since you seem to know so much," Bitsy retorted sharply, "I'll not get you a single thing. I wanted you to go with me and we'd have had a great shopping spree, but I can see that's out. Well, enjoy yourself. I'm off to the Mall to outfit myself for college." With that, Bitsy made as hasty an exit as her entrance had been.

Still dazed, and dumb from shock, Ann stood and stared through the open door, trying to convince herself that she actually was not having a nightmare. It all seemed so unreal.

"Wasn't that Bitsy's voice I heard?" Mrs. Smith asked, coming into the kitchen from upstairs. "Where is she?"

"She . . . left in a . . . a big hurry, Mother."

"That's quite unusual for her. Is something wrong, Ann?"

Ann retrieved the potato she had dropped and as she resumed peeling it, she said, "There's nothing wrong with Bitsy that a case of genuine old-fashioned salvation wouldn't cure."

Mrs. Smith spun around quickly and faced her daughter. "But I thought Bitsy was saved!" she exclaimed.
"It's not for me to judge, I know, but . . . but, Mother, do you think the Lord is pleased with anyone who enters these give-away advertisements? You know, you fill your name and address in and send the paper to whatever company's sponsoring the give-away. . . ."

"I couldn't do it, Ann, and I'm sure that no holy man or woman would ever think of doing such a thing. We're admonished to abstain from the very appearance of evil, and this very definitely is a form of gambling and of evil. I'm thankful that my heart is established in Christ; I have no desire for anything other than that which pleases Him. But why do you ask, dear?"

"Bitsy just won a thousand dollars. She's on her way to the Mall to spend it on clothes for college. Oh, Mother, I can't believe it! I can't! That Bitsy would have entered her name, t mean."

"Do her folks know about it, Ann, or didn't she say? They're strongly opposed to such things, I know!"

"She's not going to tell them. Imagine! Not telling her parents! I told her that was being deceitful. And when her aunt learns about the check, I just know it's going to ruin Bitsy's testimony with her. She's been observing Bitsy with an 'eagle's eye,' as the saying goes. Oh, Mother, let's pray. God can even yet intervene and speak to Bitsy's heart. . . ."

While Ann and her mother prayed, the motor hummed, Bitsy's old car began sputtering and coughing and, limping jerkily, it came to a sudden halt in front of a small grocery store. In spite of Bitsy's many attempts to start it, the car refused to cooperate.

Bitsy sat for awhile, wondering what to do; then, as though her brain was clearing, she went inside the store and dialed a number.

"Hi! Ann," she said into the mouthpiece. "I'm sure you've been praying. . . ."

"Yes, Bitsy, we have been -- Mother and I. Please don't spend that money!" Ann pleaded. "What is your aunt going to think of you? Will you be able to testify?" she asked brokenly.

"My car broke down. . . ."
"Praise the Lord! God's trying to stop you, Bitsy. Don't you think so?"

"Yes, I do. That's why I called. Do you suppose your dad would mind looking at the car when he gets home? I'll lock it and leave it here -- naturally! and I'll be seeing you soon. I got a funny, scary kind of feeling when it began to act up. I thought of Balaam and his mule. I honestly did -- and, Ann, I can hardly wait till I put this check in an envelope and send it back to where it came from with a letter of explanation. I felt strangely funny and peculiar when I mailed my entry."

"That was the Lord, Bitsy. My mother always says to give God the benefit of the doubt. I've tried to practice it. . . ."

"And that's why you've never done such stupid things as I, either. Well, I'll be seeing you. I want your mother and you to pray for me. . . ."

Teardrops hung in Ann's eyelashes and shimmered like diamonds as she put the receiver back in place Her heart felt like a heavy weight had been lifted off it. Soon Bitsy's testimony would have a ring to it again and her dear face would shine, like it always did when she was in good victory. Aunt Carol would see and feel and know the difference, too.

Ann hurried back to her mother They would wait for Bitsy -- on their knees.