CHANGE OF HEART
By Mrs. Paul E. King

It's hard enough trying to write a story -- any story -- in Mr. Carling's English class, but imagine trying it with your brain in a merry tizzy over a certain bright yellow Omega which you feel you've just got to have! It's impossible! Absolutely and positively impossible to concentrate. Much less to write!
"Omega, you're mine!" I exclaimed aloud, totally oblivious of the fact that I was still seated behind my desk in class.

Mr. Carling's neck came up, crane-like, and his piercing gray eyes searched the classroom for the noisemaker. Quite naturally, they rested enigmatically on me.

"No talking, Bruce!" he ordered in his I-mean-it voice." Get busy and stop idling: you have an assignment to write!"

As though I needed reminded! I thought, trying hard to concentrate on my theme, "A Dog Named Tumbleweed."

"Once upon a time," I began, feeling quite original and, at the same time, hearing my baby sister's soft voice as she innocently asked Grandma once during her story-hour time, "Why do you always say 'Once upon a time' when you begin telling me a story, Grandma?"


I shuffled my feet and looked toward the front. Mr. Carling was staring at me. Should I tell him my problem? No, that would not do. It would be impossible to explain my excitement and enthusiasm over the yellow Omega to Mr. Carling. He didn't want explanations. He wanted silence, and he usually got it. Furthermore, he would not understand: he was much too old to give anything more than a casual nod or a bored look at a bright yellow car -- any bright yellow car -- much less an Omega.

Our minister and wife, recently retired, had used the Omega as a second car for making local calls. They had decided to sell it only yesterday and my father was the first to learn about it. I knew the moment he mentioned that it was up for sale that it was meant for me. It was "love at first sight" or, rather I should say, "love at first sound" sort of thing.

"Only 13,000 miles and just three years old! What a car! And what a buy!" I exclaimed dreamily, forgetting myself again and dropping my pen on the floor at the same time.
Mr. Carling came to life immediately. I mean, his temper came to life. Showing itself in an ugly way in his eyes and on his face, he jumped to his feet. "Out!" he ordered as he tore off an office referral slip and waved it at me.

I felt stunned; embarrassed, too.

"I . . . I'm sorry, Mr. Carling. I should have explained that. . . ."

My English teacher cut me off in short order. "No need for an explanation. Out!" he commanded angrily, grabbing my arm and escorting me to the door roughly.

I heard the girls giggle and the fellows titter as I made my infamous exit and headed down the hallway toward the principal's office, the first such appearance since my heart change. Under the power of the "natural man," I'd have been matching Mr. Carling's temper. Today, however, was different: my heart was calm and at rest.

One of the worst things about going to the office is the always-open door. Anyone passing can see who's having a "consultation" with the principal and, without straining too much, they can hear what the "consultation's" all about. This kind of news spreads like wildfire and, usually within a short time, the entire school knows exactly what happened and took place-with some "juicy" tidbit of gossip having been added.

If Hal Brown kept this information to himself, or within the circumference of the school, even, it wouldn't be so bad. But Hal likes to share news. Especially with the parents of the offender. Hal's one of those "more-perfect-than-thou" fellows and while, in all fairness to him, he's never been sent to the principal's office, nor the vice-principal's, he's quite a tattle tale -- something no one finds particularly lovely or interesting or desirable in his fellow beings.

Hal lives next door to me. This makes matters all the more complicated (for me), since he has a way of making himself available to Dad whenever I've been sent to the office, or I've been punished for something I did. I must confess, however, that I've done my share (or more than my share) of meanness in the past, and while I deserved the punishment I received from Dad (when he learned of my misbehavior), I always resented Hal and his constant tattling.
I stood inside the principal's doorway now.

"Come in, Bruce," he invited, motioning me to a chair across from him.

Handing Mr. Harney the referral slip, I thanked him and sat down.

"I'm sorry about this, Bruce," the principal said, looking over the top of his eyeglasses to where I sat.

"I am, too, Mr. Harney. It's been a hard day for me to concentrate."

"Something bothering you?"

"Pleasantly so! That's what makes it so ridiculous.

My mind kept wandering and. . . ."

"Why not tell me about it?"

I sat on the edge of the chair and, with shining eyes and animated voice, I told Mr. Harney all about the bright yellow Omega, closing with, "I'm terribly excited, Mr. Harney. You see, I've been saving my money for a long time for this day. Why . . . why . . . it'll be my first car ever, to own and to care for."

Mr. Harney sat on the edge of his desk now, his eyes shining and showing the excitement he felt for me. "I've always liked yellow cars, Bruce," he stated. "Always. And I remember when I bought my first car: it is an exciting time in a young man's life. But try to remember that you're in school. You come here to learn . . . ."

"Right!" I agreed emphatically. "And I meant to do just that. But the yellow Omega keeps popping up before me and my lessons are pushed out of my mind completely."

"Maybe you'd better not get the car, if it's going to hinder your progress in school," Mr. Harney said thoughtfully.
"Oh, I won't allow it to do that. I promise! It's just that I'm afraid the DeWitts will sell it before I get home this afternoon. I like school, and my grades have come up since. . . ."

"You've certainly changed, Bruce," Mr. Harney commented. "And that's why I'm not going to do anything to punish you. I'm sure you meant no mischief by what happened in class, for I've noticed that you are no longer belligerent and troublesome like you once were."

"I was a real menace, I'm sorry to say; and I'd still be that way but for the saving grace and the sanctifying power of the Blood of Jesus."

Mr. Harney turned quickly and, blowing his nose loudly, he said, "Go back to your English class, Bruce, and try to remember to forget about the bright yellow Omega until you're out of school this afternoon."

"Thanks, Mr. Harney, I will," I said, starting for the door.

"And, Bruce," the principal called, "bring the Omega 'round to the house when you get it. Mrs. Harney and I both love yellow cars."

"I will, Mr. Harney," I promised. "Besides Mother and Dad, you'll be the first to ride in it."

Mr. Carling didn't bother to lift his eyes from his desk when I entered the room. I was glad for this: I no longer enjoyed seeing the anger in his steel gray eyes. The "old" Bruce was dead; every part of him: the "new" Bruce had something within him which rejoiced in mercy and peace and goodness, not anger and strife. But it hadn't always been this way. No, it hadn't!

My story on "A Dog Named Tumbleweed" suddenly took form. The little talk with Mr. Harney was like an antidote to my wandering thoughts and, remembering my promise to that good man in the office, the words fairly tumbled off the tip of my pen. By the time the bell rang for class change, I was finished.

Turning the story in to Mr. Carling, I paused and said sincerely, "I'm sorry. I really am. I didn't mean to make you angry. Forgive me, please!"
I wanted to tell him about the yellow Omega but didn't -- in all deference to his hatred for explanations -- and before I passed through the open door I saw him looking at me in a strange kind of way. He had almost a pleased look, I thought.

After school, I stopped at Green Burrs drugstore and made a phone call, then hurried home. Besides the homework I had to do each evening, there were regular daffy chores, assigned to me by Dad. These were always finished before I could play or study or do anything for myself.

I had just finished my last job and Dad and I were in the midst of our first round of playing horseshoes when Hal sauntered casually across our lawn. He watched us (me, especially), with that "I-know-a-secret" look on his face; then he slowly sidled up to Dad.

"Too bad about Bruce, isn't it?" he said, in what was supposed to be a sympathetic tone and which was anything but that.

Dad ignored the question and continued throwing the horseshoes.

"You made a ringer, Dad!" I exclaimed joyously as one of the shoes circled the stake beautifully and perfectly.

"Bruce did it again," Hal volunteered, coming closer to my father and speaking loud enough so he was sure I heard him.

Dad merely smiled.

"He was sent to Mr. Harney's office again. . . ."

Dad continued playing. "I know all about it," he said softly.

"Oh, then someone else told you! I knew you'd want to know. . . ."

"Yes, someone else told me: Bruce did!"

Hal's mouth flew open wide. I was grateful that he didn't have false teeth -- he would have dropped them if he had. "Bruce . . . told . . . you?" There was a look of incredulity on his face.
"He's quite a changed boy since the Lord took full control of his heart and life!" my dad exclaimed, making another ringer. "He called me as soon as school was dismissed. . . ."

"Well!" Hal said, nonplused. "Well!" he repeated before hurrying away.

I watched him leave, and I felt a surge of joy and holy love wash over my soul. It used to be that his presence filled me with bitter hatred -- because of his continual tattling -- but this was all taken away. Taken out, really. I'd had a Divine change of heart!

"About the Omega," Dad began, "I told Brother DeWitt we'd be over to make the transaction after school's out tomorrow, Lord willing. They had some out of town business today," he added by way of explanation.

I was too overjoyed to speak. Tears were my answer to Dad.

He looked my way, then smiled. I knew he understood.