We would meet at the mill tonight again, this I knew. For so long as I can remember (and I guess that's somewhere close to four or five years now) we met down at Fiddlers Mill just as soon as our chores were completed and finished for the day. When I say "we," I mean Russ Prudens, Anthony Clive, Dave Horne, and Walt Balty, sons of farmers, all, were we.
How Fiddlers Mill got its name none of us is quite sure. Some say our valley once had half a dozen families or more by the name of Fiddler. Another version has it that it's because of the fiddler crabs in our area. Still another story is that, every Saturday night, long years ago, the valley people met at the mill for a time of fellowship and friendship. Grain bags were stacked carefully to one side of the big, rough mill floor and the neighbors took over the empty space, setting up makeshift tables for the carry-in supper and playing their fiddles and banjos afterward. At any rate, Fiddlers Mill it was, and is.

The Mill itself must have been quite a handsome thing, though all that now remained of its stateliness and beauty was the four tall stone walls, joined one to the other with an "everlasting" mortar. The roof had long since fallen to decay and, by the harsh elements of snow, rain, wind, and extreme heat, had rotted and fallen, bit by bit, to the earth floor and gone back to dust. Only the big overshot wheel, that once generated and made the power to grind, remained intact, thanks to the caring farmers who enjoyed watching the water spill over the wheel and make it go round and round.

Many a farmer still stopped at the mill's "water fountain" and slaked his thirst in the heat of the day with the icy-cold water that flowed continuously from the mountain's side. Talk about delicious and refreshing! People from nearby villages filled jugs and containers and took them home to drink.

Our fascination with the mill was its pond. True, the water was icy-cold and, now that we were getting bigger and growing older, some of the exquisite charm and extremely-strong pull to our favorite of all childhood haunts and spots was lessening. Still, it was a habit with us; a pattern. And none of us wanted to break the pattern. So, out of an established habit, we met. To swim, like always? Yes, some; but, more, it was a time for those of us who had no television to sit on the cold rocks that were near, and around, the pond, and listen to Anthony tell us some of the things he was seeing and watching and hearing over their family's newly-acquired TV.

At first I shrank from some of the things he told us, chiding him for daring to behold anything so vile and sinful and wicked. He only laughed, said it took hold of you once you began watching it and, that, now, he wouldn't stop for anything; not even our nightly summer fun times at the pond. So he missed swimming more than he was there. But the three of us
continued on as usual. And tonight, for a specific reason, Anthony said he was coming.

My heart hammered loudly inside my chest when I realized what I must do. You see, Anthony told Dave he was coming to see for himself if the story he heard about me was true.

"I don't know what you're talking about," Dave had replied. "What did you hear? You know for a fact Steve's always lived a good life."

"Oh, it's not anything he's done wrong, Dave; it's just that I heard he went overboard. I mean really far out."

"Like what, or where? Or how?"

"The religious bit. I guess we all know his folks are far out on that. But Steve? I always thought he was more sane and level headed than to be swayed by what his elders thought and did. Maybe I was wrong; I'm not sure. Tonight I'm coming to find out."

"I still don't know anything. I mean, I hadn't heard a thing until what you just now said. How'd you find out? Who's your informer? And if it is true, what's so all wrong about it? My personal feeling is that it wouldn't hurt each of us to change for the better. After all, Anthony, the immoral garbage you're feeding on and have been dishing out to us when you come here isn't exactly to my liking. And I'd be ashamed to have my folks find out that I had ever listened to what you described in such vivid and explicit detail."

"That's because we've always been so sheltered, Dave," Anthony answered quickly. "And as for my defiling your puritanical brain with my so-called garbage, you didn't have to stay and listen; you weren't being forced to remain, nor held down so that you couldn't get up and leave if you wanted to. You could have left."

"That's true enough, Anthony; and how I wish I had! Good common sense tells one that garbage isn't food to be desired or partaken of. This is especially true of the garbage you have been telling us about. I know you have meant well. But I haven't felt one bit good about listening to what you have said."
"You getting religious, too, Dave?"

"I'm not sure what's going on inside of me, Anthony; I only know that Steve told me his folks were really praying for each of us and that he, Steve, could not sit through one more evening of listening to what you are seeing on television."

"Hey, this is really getting interesting!" Anthony ejaculated quickly. "Sounds like Stevie boy's gone soft. I'm positive, now that I've heard you, that Steve's sure enough gone off the deep end and gotten religion. Curly Fisher said Sandy White called it getting saved or converted, or something like that. Sandy told Curly it happened in church last night. Be sure to tell Steve I'm coming tonight!"

And tell me Dave did. And now my heart was hammering inside my chest. There were so many things I wanted to tell Anthony. Important things. He may never change, I realized, but at least I intended to be faithful to his soul: I didn't want his blood on my hands by failing to witness to him.

It was an unusually beautiful early evening and I was ready for a dip or two in that cold water. After a day of hard work in the hot sun, the swim relaxed my muscles and seemed to renew and revive my strength.

I always felt new and rejuvenated as I headed homeward.

Dave and I were the first ones to arrive at the pond. "I'll beat you in the water," he challenged, charging through the dense bushes from whence we always emerged. Then he raced for the diving-in place.

I was right on his heels and, almost as one, we dived into the pond. Talk about relaxing and refreshing! I felt every muscle in my body relax. My entire being succumbed to the seeming weightlessness of my body.

Dave and I swam back and forth, first to the far side of the pond then back again. Our third trip around, Russ shouted to us just as he was ready to dive in, yelling, "Here I come; move over!"

"Some guy, Russ!" Dave exclaimed, flipping over and floating on his back. "Look at that sunset!" he added emphatically. "Talk about beautiful!"
I looked toward the sky and saw one of the most magnificent sunsets that I had ever seen. God certainly knew how to put the right combination of colors together, I thought. Just like He knew how to put beauty and joy into my life, I soliloquized, now that my sins were forgiven and I was a new creature in Christ.

"Hey, guess what?" Russ asked, swimming out to where Dave and I were. "Know whom I saw? None other than Anthony," he added, answering his own question. "I believe he's on his way over here. Sure looked like he was heading this way. He was taking the shortcut through his dad's cow pasture; the way he always does when he heads for Fiddlers Mill and the pond. Wonder where Walt is."

"I think today is the day he and his dad went after those young steers they ordered from wherever they get them to put out in the pasture. It's always late when they get back home," I remarked.

A voice from the edge of the pond let us know that Anthony had arrived indeed. "Hey Steve," he shouted, "how about bringing us up to date on what's happened in your life. I hear you're really far out. Is it true?"

"If you mean did I get converted, yes, it's true. I'd be happy to tell you what happened; wait till I come out." And with smooth, quick, easy strokes, I swam back to our usual diving-in "junction" where Anthony sat on a rock, waiting for me with a sort of mocking sneer on his face.

I disappeared through the thick bushes, shed my dripping-wet swim clothes and dressed myself, then hurried out to where Anthony was, just as Dave and Russ scurried away to change into their dry clothes.

"So you do admit to getting religion, huh?" Anthony asked with a silly grin on his face. "I thought you were of a more sound mind than to do such a thing, Steve. Don't you know that's not the 'in' thing these days?"

For a long while, I studied Anthony. He shifted his gaze, not wanting to look me full in the face.

"What the Lord did for me goes far deeper than getting religion, as you call it, Anthony," I said, allowing the simple statement to hang in the air for a while, hoping to get him to look at me.
Russ and Dave emerged just then and, draping their dripping-wet clothes over a bush, they sat down on the ground, crossing their legs Indian fashion, and waited eagerly to hear the dialogue.

"So?" Anthony queried, lifting his eyes and meeting mine. "You still went off the deep end." I smiled. "You know something, Anthony?" I answered, keeping my eyes riveted upon his face, "I've never been so happy in all my life. I traded my sins for salvation; my guilt and shame for peace and joy and a full assurance that Christ is mine and I am His. If this is going off the deep end, as you say, I never want to change. I know I'm ready for heaven. Can you say you are? What if you were to die this instant, would you be ready for what's after death? Could you meet God and look Him full in the face without being ashamed and afraid, with all the garbage you've been cramming into your mind and storing in your heart and your thoughts?"

"Hey, Steve, I didn't come over here for a sermon!"

"Just answer me, Anthony, please: all that sinful, wicked and trashy filth you've been feeding on and 'soaking up,' as it were, will that be allowed into Heaven? I know how just listening to you tell what you saw had a demoralizing effect upon me and upon my mind. All I wanted to do was think about it; and in my mind's eye I conjured up my own faces and personalities and I began to fantasize. I suddenly realized how very sinful and wicked my heart was. It frightened me dreadfully. I knew I was traveling the broad road that leads to destruction and eternal fire and damnation. The thought shook me. Yes, I became converted last night. And by God's grace, I mean to stay true to the Lord and make Heaven my everlasting and eternal Home some day.

"For me, there will be no more listening to what you are seeing and watching on television: I am a new creature, Anthony; old things have truly passed away and all things are become new. I wish you'd give your heart to the Lord and..."

"Stop it, Steve!" Anthony exclaimed, jumping to his feet and making fast tracks for home. "You're crazy, man! Crazy!" he shouted.
Tears fell from my eyes as I saw him leave. I was fearful that for Anthony the die was cast; he had made his choice and it was the wrong one.

"You are changed," Russ declared stoutly." I mean, really, really changed."

"Jesus has done it, Russ," I remarked joyously.

"Why don't you and Dave get converted, too? You'll need to if you get into Heaven," I added quickly. "Jesus Himself said that unless a person was born-again -- converted -- he could never enter into Heaven."

Dave hugged his knees in silence. I knew him well enough to know that he was thinking about what I had just said. Russ, on the other hand, jumped to his feet and grabbed his still-wet clothes off the bush. Saying softly, "I'll think it over, Steve," he took off for home.

That left Dave and me alone.

After what seemed like a long time, Dave said, "Steve, maybe you could help me to know how to become converted. I want to go to Heaven."

"I'd be glad to, Dave. You must be sorry enough for your sins that you're willing to confess them to God and then forsake them and. . . . "

"Oh but I am, Steve!" Dave exclaimed, breaking into my sentence. "I'm ready to pray. . . ."

If Fiddlers Mill ever had a prayer meeting like Dave and I had I certainly never heard about it in all of my life. I never before felt like I was on hallowed ground when I was there; but this night was different -- gloriously so! -- I knew Dave and I were on hallowed ground: God seemed to be all over the place! Talk about praying through! Dave did. So did I; I touched clear through to the throne for Dave and, in so doing, I was blest beyond any describing. We had a glorious time.

We parted and went to our respective homes, loath to leave the sacred spot but knowing that we must.
Fiddlers Mill is different these days. Oh, I don't mean that the old swimming hole has changed; no indeed. Nor the water wheel: the water still shoots over the wheel and turns it 'round same as ever. And it's just as beautiful and as fascinating as ever. Dave and I still go there to swim and cool off after our busy work days with our fathers in the fields. But more than all this, Dave and I go there each evening to pray and meet with God.

We're growing these days, Dave and I, since we got wholly and completely sanctified. And no matter where our paths may go in the future, Fiddlers Mill will forever hold a special place in our hearts.