Mark Dalson put the broom up into the holder on the wall of the garage, then he closed the heavy pull-down doors and stood inside the exit door to give his finished work a last visual once-over. He wanted the garage to be as clean and tidy when his father came home from the hospital as the patio was.
Pulling the door shut, he stepped outside and surveyed the neatly mowed lawn. Then he walked over to the glider on the patio and sat down, recalling that this would have been the day of all days for him had things not taken a sudden and frightening turn.

His friends should be in South America this very moment, he realized, as the date of the month came to his mind. Yes, this was the day. And he would have been there too had his father not had the heart attack. But since it had to happen, he was thankful that it did so before he had started on the trip and would have been gone for the summer.

He had been saving his money for a long time, praying and planning on going with the group from their church as a work and witness team, and when he learned that he had been accepted he felt completely overcome with joy. Ever since he had been converted and was sanctified wholly, he had dreamed of going as a summer missionary to a needy field. The fulfillment of that vision consumed him. He prayed and fasted and waited on God, asking Him to use him mightily and to make him a great blessing.

His luggage was all packed; he was ready to go. And then, like a dark cloud in a once-clear sky, the storm had struck.

He was working in the garage with his dear father when he saw him grab at his chest in a sudden paroxysm of pain. He moaned, then fell to the concrete floor, looking more dead than alive, while beads of perspiration broke out on his forehead. Realizing that each moment was vital to his father's life, he rushed into the house and dialed the number of the Emergency Squad, telling them he was sure his father had had a heart attack. Then he searched upstairs for his mother and rushed back into the garage with her by his side.

Within minutes the ambulance arrived and, with siren screaming and lights flashing, they rushed his father away to the hospital, working frantically over him as they drove. His mother and he followed close behind.

For days his beloved parent lingered between life and death, teetering so close to the dark stream at times that the doctors alerted his mother and him that it was only a matter of minutes. But God stepped in! Mark recalled the night and the hour when God took over. How could he ever forget! It was when the hospital staff had given up all hope. As he and his mother looked
on, praying, trusting, and committing their loved one to God, his father opened his eyes, smiled, and said he felt a bit tired and he believed he'd take a little nap if they didn't mind. And immediately his heartbeat became normal and he fell into a long, peaceful, natural sleep.

The hospital staff declared it was a real miracle and told the two faithful loved ones that the crisis was over and husband and father was already on the mend, that they could go home and get some much-needed rest and sleep of their own. But they didn't; they remained beside the bed until the sleeper awakened and then they left.

Mark watched a hummingbird now as it flitted quickly from flower to flower, enjoying the delicious nectar God provided for it. Tomorrow, God willing, his father would be coming home.

His heart rejoiced. His disappointment over having his summer plans altered had changed now from sharp pangs to the dull ache of acceptance and to a total and complete resignation to the sweet and perfect will of God, whatever His will might be.

Voices floated to him from somewhere back of their lawn. At first he paid no attention, thinking that children must be playing beneath the trees that grew in abundance all over the acre and a half lot. Then certain words and sentences fastened like glue on his brain -"Tonight . . . Mr. Twain . . . back window's always open . . . we'll have fun . . . smash windows . . . time; soon as it's dark . . . under that big oak tree. . . ."

Mark sat up straight. Then he got to his feet and started toward the back of their lawn. No, he mustn't let them know he had heard, he decided, turning and hurrying back to the house. Mr. Twain was the church custodian/janitor of the church he and his folks belonged to and attended. And it was true that he always kept one window slightly ajar in the basement so fresh air could come in and the basement wouldn't get so musty smelling.

Mark's brain worked overtime, wondering what he should do and how. One of the voices was too familiar for him to forget. He had heard it before; but where? And why couldn't he attach a face to that voice?
He hurried inside and knelt down to pray, asking God to give him Divine wisdom and guidance and understanding. Then he got to his feet, knowing what he must do.

He was down near the big oak tree, standing off to the side near tall bushes before darkness draped the evening sun in its robe of deep purple, waiting and listening. When the night curtain had fallen and the crickets and cicadas and katydids had begun their nocturnal medley and chorus, he heard the sound of softly falling footsteps; two sets of them. They passed so closely by him that he could have reached out and touched the pair, had he wanted to. But he refrained from doing so.

He waited, peering out from his hiding place, and watching until the two boys were swallowed up in the night shadows of the giant oak.

He heard whispering but could not distinguish what was being said. Then, from the opposite side of the street, he saw two more boys cut over toward the spreading oak.

"Hey, you're here!" one of the fellows exclaimed from beneath the oak tree. "Now as soon as Randy gets here we'll go over there. Mr. Twain leaves about six and the cops don't usually expect too much trouble until later in the night. We can have our fun and be home and in bed before anyone knows anything about what has happened. Randy knows the place well."

Randy. Randy. Mark wracked his brain for some clue as to whom this Randy was and how come he should "know the place well." But nothing came to mind. Maybe, if he'd have taken that class of boys that Mr. Filbright had asked him to take he'd have known more about the neighborhood boys. But he didn't see how he could teach a class of fellows who were only three to four years younger than himself. He had told the Sunday school superintendent he felt they'd respect an older man far more than they'd respect him, since he was only eighteen.

Mr. Filbright had thought, and felt, the opposite was true; that because of Mark's youth, the boys would be able to develop a closer relationship and would be more willing and able to confide in and talk to him. This would have opened the door, Mr. Filbright felt, for Mark to lead the boys to Jesus.
Maybe he should have taken the class, Mark thought now. Mr. Filbright may have been right after all.

There was a shuffling of feet from beneath the oak tree and then Mark saw a tall gangly-looking blonde haired boy cross the street and fade into the shadows of the tree with the other fellows. He had seen that boy in Sunday school!

"We're ready!" came an excited exclamation in a muffled half-whispered tone of voice.

"Let's go" another said, loud enough for Mark to hear.

"Whatever we do, we'll have to be quick about it then leave. I'll go through the window and the rest of you can follow me. Once inside, we'll 'paint the church' literally" another voice said.

"Where is the paint, Randy?" someone asked.

"Right near that opened window. I have everything ready. Let's go."

Mark waited till they were a short distance ahead of him, then he stepped out on the sidewalk and cut through an alley. He intercepted them at the corner of another street, three blocks away from the church. "Hey fellows" he called, "I need some help."

The group turned in shocked silence and looked at Mark.

"I need help." Mark repeated his statement. "Will you help me?"

"That depends," a broad-chested fifteen-year-old answered.

"I learned that some fellows are planning to break into the church down on Maple and Chestnut Streets and smash windows and damage the pews and pulpit furniture. Let's go down and patrol the area. . . ."

The five youths looked at each other in stony-faced silence.

"Can I count on you to help?" Mark asked, watching their faces carefully. "We know how wrong and evil it is to do a thing like this, and it
gives our community a bad name for such things to happen. So tonight, after this was made known, I decided that I for one was going to do what I could to prevent it. But I'll need your help. Come, let's hurry," he urged, just as a siren wailed and a police car whizzed by.

"Let's go" the blond-haired Randy said, looking scared and frightened.

Like the proverbial Pied Piper, Mark hurried the group down the street until they came to the church.

"Here's what we'll do," he said, standing and facing all five of the boys. "We'll divide up by two's -- there are six of us here, as you can easily see. I'll take you with me," he said, pointing at Randy. "We'll go around the church and all the way to the end of the parking lot and that field beyond. That's all church property, in case you didn't know it. And I'll expect you to report anything you see or hear to me. Ready? Now no foolishness from anyone. This is serious business; God's business. And it's dangerous to trifle with God and anything pertaining to Him and His cause. Come with me" he said, motioning to Randy.

They went around the church, two by two. Mark's eyes and ears were open and alert. He watched, to make sure that no one "escaped." He prayed as he walked. A police car, patrolling the area, pulled into the parking lot.

"What's going on here?" the officer asked, shining his light from one to the other of the group.

"I learned about a planned break-in for the church tonight." Mark said, "so I decided to do something about it. A bunch of young teens who would break their parents' hearts, no doubt. And wind up in jail, if they were ever caught."

"Say, you're Mark Dalson, aren't you?" the officer asked. "You have a great father and mother. By the way, how is your father?"

"He'll be coming home tomorrow, the Lord willing. He's a miracle of God's quickening and healing power. He'll have to take things easy for a while; but Mother and I are so thankful that he's alive. The doctors gave him up for dead more than once."
"So I heard. But that's the miracle of prayer and faith, Mark. Say, how about me patrolling a while with the fellows and you. Did you look for any clues?" the officer asked. "Generally, some things are found that help us lead to an arrest."

Mark saw Randy's face go white as death.

"I'll check the windows and search in those bushes over there, Mark. The beam of this light is something else."

"Thanks, Sir."

The officer's radio crackled and, listening to the message he said, "Sorry, I'll have to leave for now. I may be back though. . . ."

Mark thanked him again, then he set his youthful charges to patrolling once again. One hour later he took them to the bushes and urged them to search among the bushes, with himself, for any evidence of vandalism that may have been hidden or concealed there.

"Well. Well," he remarked, finding the old buckets of paint and lifting them high for everyone to see. "Now wasn't that a dumb thing to do! Cowardly, in a way. Hiding paint . . . well, this is one time this won't be used on nice pews and pulpit furniture. I'll see that Officer Spence gets these cans."

"Please," Randy cried. "I don't think you should do that."

"Well, it's evidence," Mark declared stoutly. "And anyone who would deface and destroy church property needs something done to him, now don't you fellows agree? We all know this is wrong. More than that, it's sinful and wicked. And someday God, the righteous Judge who has a record of every evil thing we have ever done, will judge us, and sentence us to everlasting punishment and damnation unless we confess and repent of our sins and wickednesses." The group was silent.

"I think we'll soon go home." Mark said. "But first, we'll go inside the church and check everything to make sure it's all right. Come, he said, leading the way up the steps."
Turning a key which he had, in the lock, he walked inside and turned on the lights. He felt God's "thumb" in his back; he knew what he must do now.

"It's a pretty church, don't you agree?" he asked, watching facial expressions. "And wouldn't it have been a shame for anyone to have used that paint out there on these lovely oak pews? Well, I'm glad they couldn't go through with their plans. Now we'll go into the Sunday school rooms and the basement and then we'd better be getting home. I'm sure there are some anxious parents, wondering where you've been for so long.

"See this classroom?" Mark asked as he opened a door down a long hallway. "How would you like to have your own classroom right here? I'd enjoy teaching you. And say, you're the very age group I believe I'd enjoy having in a Sunday school class. We could do things together on Saturdays, God willing and . . . ."

"Like what?" It was Randy. "I mean, well, what would we do? It gets boring at home doing nothing. And with no father there to do things with, well. . . ."

Mark looked at Randy for a long while. Then the pieces began coming together. "Oh, it was your father who was electrocuted while repairing those wires down at the plant, wasn't it?" he asked. "I'm sure sorry about that."

Randy nodded. Tears glimmered in his eyes. "It's tough not having a father; especially one like my dad was. Why, we were always doing something together; fishing, hiking, bicycling, making things in his shop. Oh, you can't imagine how much I miss my dad and . . . how lonely I am without him."

Mark walked over and put an arm around Randy's shoulder. "I'll never be able to take the place of your father," he said with tears in his eyes, "but I'd love to not only be a Sunday school teacher to all of you fellows but I'd love to go fishing, canoeing -- Dad and I have a canoe -- hiking, and bicycling with you too. My dad would love going with us, if you fellows wouldn't mind him tagging along, once he's strong enough, God willing. And talk about doing things in your father's shop! Why, my dad and I did the same thing until the heart attack came that nearly took his life But he'd be delighted to have you come over and work in his shop. Fact is, I believe it would be real therapy for him, just sitting and watching us all as we made whatever we
wanted to. So how about it, fellows? We're a real team, of six. Can we be a team, if God spares us till Sunday, and be out for our first Sunday school lesson by 9:30? We'll have this classroom, if you'll come."

Randy's eyes were shining. "Hey, if you'll be our teacher I'll be there! I like you. How about it, fellows," he said, turning to the other four, "will you come with me?"

"Sure. If you come, Randy, we come."

"I'll be here early, the Lord willing. And my name's Mark Dalson. It's been great having you with me tonight. I'm counting on every single one of you. You're going to be great men some day, see if I'm not telling you the truth. I like you. We made quite a team tonight, don't you think so?"

Smiling, they looked at each other. Then one of the boys exclaimed, "Hey! We really did! And Mark, you're great. I'll be proud to come to your Sunday school class."

"Thanks, fellows." Mark replied. "I'm downright proud that you'll all be in my class, God willing. And now, as soon as I learn your names and get your home address we'd better be hurrying home. It's not fair to parents to keep them worrying over us. Someday, God willing, we'll be parents and, since the Bible tells us that we'll reap whatever we sow, I want for you fellows to begin sowing the good seed right now, while you're still young, so when your reaping day comes around, which it will, you'll reap the good harvest of the good 'seed' you have sown. . . ."

Walking homeward a short while later, Mark felt he understood now why his summer plans were interrupted and canceled. His mission field was right close to his door. He would be working and witnessing all right, but it would be at home. And with God's help, he meant to reap a harvest of souls - - young teenage boys.

He hurried inside the house. He could scarcely wait until he could tell Mr. Filbright that, come Sunday, the Lord willing, he would be teaching a class of teenage boys. A brand new class. Yes, indeed, Mr. Filbright was right.

Turning on the light, he began dialing Mr. Filbright's number.