One Shall Be Taken

By Mrs. Paul E. King

Firelight flickered across the campers' faces as they jabbed marshmallows and wieners onto sticks then held them over the red-hot embers to toast and roast. Strains of "I'm in the Lord's Army" wafted upwards into the tall pines. Jeremy Wadsworth looked at his grandfather and smiled.

Howard Wadsworth winked at his eight-year-old grandson. "I can't sing, Jeremy; I don't know the song."

"Oh, Gramps, you're kidding," Jeremy said, as he popped a sticky-hot, blackened marshmallow into his mouth. "These next ones are yours," he added, as he speared two marshmallows and stuck them over the coals for toasting.

Mr. Wadsworth put up a hand of restraint, much like he was waving a flag of surrender, and said, "No more, Jeremy. I can't eat one thing more. I'm full up to here," and he touched the tip of his tongue with his forefinger.

"Just one more, Gramps! Please! One stack more?"

"Can't do it, my boy. I'm full. Why don't you toast some for Kellendra? She sprained both her ankles, you know, and she looks pretty sad, not being able to get off that wheel chair and have fun like the rest of you are having and doing."

"But Gramps, she's a girl!"

"So...? Girls like gooey marshmallows too, don't they?"

"I s'pose so. But... but..."

"Well, Jeremy, I'm not a Christian, it's true, but I'm going to toast some for her if you won't. Her grandmother's afraid to get close to the fire."

"Why? I mean, well... what's wrong with her?"

"She has fainting spells. I overheard her tell it to another grandmother. I suppose she's afraid of fainting and falling into the fire. I don't know this, but it sounds like a reasonable supposition. At any rate, we're not going to deprive either of them of their share of marshmallows and wieners, are we?"

"'Course not," Jeremy replied as he hurried over to where Kellendra and her grandmother sat and gave them each a marshmallow and a hot dog from his four-pronged stick.
Kellendra's eyes brightened and her grandmother's eyes filled with tears. "What a kind little man you are!" she exclaimed.

"I'll make more for you," Jeremy said, happily, as he hurried away after more.

Howard Wadsworth brushed an errant tear from his eye. Oh to be a boy again, if but for a day! he thought sadly, as he watched Jeremy feed the pair until they, too, could hold no more.

He glanced at the faces around the fire -- all grandparents and grandchildren; no parents -- and wondered what each was thinking. For some grandparents, it was the first time ever for them to be alone with their grandchildren, he knew. He'd heard them say so while everyone was hiking one day.

This cut him deeply. He had never experienced or known this kind of deprivation. Always, his sons and daughters and their mates had shared their offspring with his wife and him. Freely and gladly so. They were privileged to have had them all nearby, too, until the work situation forced them to move to where the plant had relocated. And now Jeremy and his parents were the only ones remaining near. Still, he was happy that at least one family lived close by, and that he and Miriam had one grandson who often came over and stayed with them.

"Grandpa, where were you?" Jeremy asked, breaking into the man's thoughts.

"What do you mean, where was I? I'm sitting right here; same spot I've been sitting in for at least twenty minutes," and Mr. Wadsworth had a twinkle in his eyes.

"You were here but you weren't here; you were thinking again, Grandpa. I know you were. What were you thinking about?"

Talk about "picking" one's brains, this one did, and could!

"Oh, different things. Lots of different things."
"Were you wishing you knew the song about the Lord's Army? I'll teach it to you, Grandpa. It's wonderful to be in God's army, Gramps. Best of all, when you're in His army you know you're ready for Heaven. Those who aren't in His army aren't ready for Heaven."

"Look, Jeremy," Mr. Wadsworth said as he got to his feet, "if we're going out after fish early tomorrow morning maybe we'd better get to bed. How about it? Your stomach's full of hot dogs and marshmallows, isn't it?"

"Sure is. And I'm ready to go. I can hardly wait till we can go fishing, Grandpa." And Jeremy grabbed his grandfather's hand. Calling a pleasant "good-night" to everybody, the two started up the path to where their tent was pitched, in among the thick, tall pines.

The air was redolent with a piney fragrance and every so often Jeremy paused, put his fingers over his lips and said softly, "Listen, Grandpa. Listen! The pine trees are whispering to each other. Hear them?"

"I hear them, dear boy. They make me feel sad."

"Sad?" Jeremy ejaculated quickly. "Oh, no, Grandpa, not sad, but glad. I think they're saying ever such nice things. Happy things. Not sad things."

"I feel sad because your grandma couldn't come along, that's all. But with her arthritis there's no way she could have slept in a tent."

"But isn't it wonderful that the Rockfords opened their private resort again this year so grandparents could be alone for a whole week with their grandkids? Oh, Gramps, this must be the best time ever of my whole life. It's so much fun being alone with you."

"Well, Jeremy, I suppose if I had to make an evaluation of the good, better, and best times in my life, I'd have to agree with you, and say this is one of the best ever times in my life too. I feel almost like a boy myself again, even if my joints are a bit stiff and I got sore muscles on that steep climb up the mountain. But you reminded me of a mountain goat, climbing like you did; sure-footed, cautious, fearless and wonderfully free and agile. I was proud of you."
"But Grandpa, you did great. You were the first grandpa to reach the top. If Billy Milchen's grandma hadn't been in that exercise program Billy said she was in I'm sure you'd have been the first big person to get there, instead of Billy's grandma."

Mr. Wadsworth laughed cheerfully. "It's nice to remember there's no competition here," he said. "Everything we do together is to be done as a memory-maker. I like this. Why Jeremy my boy, I haven't had a time of such total relaxation and rest in years. It almost makes you forget there are troubles and problems in the world."

"Look, Grandpa, there's a firefly! Don't they have the neatest little lanterns you ever did see! God sure knew what He was doing when He made everything. Why, He's wonderful, Gramps. And when He whispered that He wanted to come into my heart and live there forever, and I asked Him to come in and was converted, well Grandpa, that's the greatest and best thing God ever did. Did God ever whisper to you?" Jeremy asked. "I'm sure He'd like to come into your heart, Gramps, for the Bible says God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, and you're part of the world, so I'm sure He meant you, too."

Mr. Wadsworth changed the subject quickly with, "Look, Jeremy! Look! A shooting star."

"Say, that was great!" Jeremy exclaimed as he watched the brief heavenly display. Then, in a deeply thoughtful mood he said, "Know something, Grandpa?"

"What?"

"When Jesus comes to take us up in the rapture I'll be gone quicker and faster than it took for that shooting star to burn out and be gone. That's going to be a wonderful time. And quicker than we can blink our eyes, we'll be gone. Blink your eyes, Grandpa. See how quickly we blink? Well, I'll be gone quicker than you can blink your eyes! That's fast, Gramps. Grandma will go up with Mother and Dad and me. I wish you'd go too, Grandpa. I want you to go. I love you so much."
Mr. Wadsworth cleared his throat, trying hard to push the lumps away that seemed to have popped up out of nowhere. "I love you, too, Jeremy. And one of these days I'll join the ranks of the Lord's army."

"But Grandpa, Jesus could come tonight. And . . . and if He did, you'd be left behind. You're not saved and sanctified wholly, so you wouldn't go up in the rapture." Jeremy's voice carried tears with the statement.

"You're awfully young to be worried with such heavy theological things," Mr. Wadsworth declared suddenly.

Not sure what his grandfather meant, Jeremy was silent for a long while. Then, almost more to himself than to his grandfather, he remarked, "But Jesus is coming, and I'm glad I'm ready."

They got ready for bed then snuggled down into their sleeping bags, laying side by side. Jeremy said his prayers then began singing softly,

"Say, will you be ready when Jesus comes?  
Are you truly born again, washed in Jesus' blood?  
Are your garments spotless, are they white as snow?  
Will you be ready when Jesus comes?"

"Two shall be together -- grinding at the mill;  
Two shall be together -- sleeping calm and still;  
One shall be taken and the other left behind -- Will you be ready when Jesus comes?"

Before the last note had fully died away, Jeremy said, "Grandpa, I wish you'd give your heart to Jesus tonight. I don't want you to be left behind when Jesus comes, and Daddy told me that Jesus could come at any moment. Did you know that Mom and Dad and I pray every day for you to get saved? Daddy says he doesn't know why you don't give your heart to the Lord."

"I'll do it one of these days, Jeremy, see if I don't. I just got so wrapped up in my business that I didn't have time for much else."

"Don't you s'pose that hurt Jesus; to think you never had any time for Him? I'm sure it did. 'Specially after what He suffered for you."
"I'm sure you're right, my boy. But I think it's time now that we get to sleep so we can be up at the crack of dawn and go after those fish. Mm-m! I can almost taste them already as we fry them for breakfast."

"With potatoes, Grandpa. Potatoes and onions."

"Right on, Jeremy! That's what I promised you. And so it's fried fish and fried potatoes and onions for breakfast."

"The Lord willing, Grandpa. You forgot to say that. Daddy says we never know what a day will bring so we're to say, 'The Lord willing,' as the Bible tells us to say. Oh dear, I'm getting sleepy. Really sleepy. Good-night, Gramps. I love you."

"Goodnight, my little Jeremy. I love you too; a whole big chunk and a heap."

Jeremy laughed softly then snuggled down farther into the sleeping bag and with his little hand held in Grandpa's big one, he was soon fast asleep. In a short while Mr. Wadsworth, too, had fallen asleep.

The moon sailed serenely across the sky and, above the tent, the pines whispered ceaselessly back and forth as the night hours ticked away into the very early gray of dawn. And Howard Wadsworth was dreaming. He dreamed that he had been sleeping beside his youngest grandson, Jeremy, when suddenly and without a sound or a movement whatever, Jeremy disappeared from his side. Startled, he tried to scream but could not. He struggled to make a sound but no sound came. It was maddening. Frightening. Frustrating. Again he tried to scream; all that came out was a little yip, like the muffled whimper of a tiny puppy. And then he got awake. It was a dream, he thought, relieved. Only a dream.

Trembling and shaking because of the fearful dream, he sat bolt upright. His body and his pajamas were wet with perspiration. He must have struggled fiercely inside the sleeping bag, he thought. Suddenly the penetrating cold of the early dawn grabbed at his wet body and he reached for his heavy robe which he had spread over Jeremy's sleeping bag after he had gone to sleep. He slipped his arms into the ample sleeves and wrapped it close to himself, shivering violently. Then he reached over to make sure Jeremy was still zipped snugly inside his down-filled sleeping bag.
A cold shiver ran the length of his body and it wasn't from the dampness nor the pre-dawn cold this time; Jeremy's sleeping bag was empty! Empty!

Like one gone wild, he dressed himself then opened the tent flap and looked outside. The fishing trip! Ah, that was it; Jeremy had beat him up and was down at the water, waiting for him.

He ran like he hadn't known he could run, still. But when he reached the water's edge the only sound that greeted him was the softly-gentle lap, lap, lap of the water as it playfully slapped the bank by which it ran and tumbled, and the ceaseless twitter and chatter and song of the now-waking early birds.

His feet seemed to have wings as he ran back to the tent. "Jeremy," he called, trying to keep the panic he felt out of his voice. "Jeremy!"

The pines whispered, whispered, whispered. He threw the tent flaps back as far as they'd go and, on his knees, he crawled inside. The boy's pajamas and heavy slipper socks were inside the sleeping bag in the same position in which Jeremy had gone to sleep in them. But Jeremy was gone! Gone!

Like a mad man now, Howard Wadsworth clawed at the floor of the tent. The rapture! It had taken place! While he slept, the Lord had come! And he was left behind. One had been taken, just like Jeremy had sung, and the other left behind. Oh no! No! The tribulation -the great tribulation! -- He must now go through it. And then what??

"Oh, God! God! Help me. Help me! Please!"

His plea for mercy and help shattered the stillness of the early dawn with an uncanny eerieness. But it was too late. Too late for the plea and the cry!

From a cabin somewhere, the piercing scream of a grandmother reached his ears. "She's gone! She's gone! Susan's gone! The Bridegroom came for His bride. Susan went up; I'm left behind. Oh, God, be merciful on
my soul!" And the wail of the woman was like the wail of a lost soul. It was too late for God's mercy. Too late! Too . . . late!

"Seek ye the Lord while he may be found; call upon him while he is near." He's coming. Oh, believe it. Jesus is coming. Perhaps today! Are you ready, dear reader friend? If not, please don't delay any longer: come to Jesus. Now!