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The Sunday School
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STRANGE FIRE
By Mrs. Paul E. King

"Stop picking on me!" Justine cried, as she got to her feet and started for the door. "I guess I'm old enough to know what's right and what isn't," she shouted to her brother.

Ronald intercepted her mad dash for the door. With his hands holding her by the shoulders, he said, "Justine, listen to me; be sensible and

reasonable: you have no idea what you're getting into. You're embracing the wrong thing. It's error. Pure error!"

"Take your hands off me, Ronald Brownlee, or I'll scream until someone comes in from one of the other rooms to see what's happening in here."

"Justine, you wouldn't!" Ronald exclaimed in utter disbelief as he released his grip on the slender shoulders.

"Try me and see," came the instant, sharp retort. The brunette's dark eyes snapped with something akin to profound hatred.

Blocking the doorway with his tall frame, Ronald said brokenly, "Oh Sis, you've fallen so far! I never would have believed this had I not seen it for myself. You're warming your hands beside a strange fire; someday -- soon -- you're going to get burned. You know better, Justine. What you are practicing and embracing is false. It's demonic, even. You'll break Father's and Mother's heart, if they ever find out. And they will. Yes, eventually, they will; things like this have a way of getting out."

"Not unless you squeal," the girl snapped. "Now go back to your own dorm room and leave me alone. Who told you about me anyway? Whoever it was, I wish you'd tell them that what I do is none of their business and that I'll thank them for not meddling. I'm old enough to decide what I want to do or don't want to do."

"Like I said, these things have a way of getting out and of becoming exposed. One more thing, Justine -- '. . . And be sure, your sin will find you out.' Also, '. . . for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.

"'For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.' You're heading down the wrong road. It's strewn thickly and heavily with sin and wickedness and evil and. . . ."

"Get out of here, Ronald. Get out! O-u-t!" she shouted, shoving her brother through the now-opened doorway and slamming it shut behind him with a banging noise.

Ronald heard the key turn in the lock and knew he was locked out. He felt his heart hammer wildly inside his chest. He wondered what he could do to turn his sister about-face, back to the path of righteousness. Or was it too late?

He glanced quickly at the slip of paper which granted him permission to see his sister for a brief period of time, then he crumbled it up in his hand and stuffed it into his pocket. Mrs. Jennings, who was over the girls' dorm, had been kind to him. Would he dare talk to her about what was happening to his sister? he wondered. But, no, this was a secular college. He doubted that Mrs. Jennings was a Christian. More likely than not, she may even make fun of him and tell him that he needed to broaden his views and his thinking and begin to study about some of the newer, faster growing religions, as offered and taught in the college curriculum.

Broaden his thinking! The mere thought was so utterly repugnant and distasteful as to make him feel nauseated and ill. That was exactly what advice his sister had heeded. She had taken one course out of curiosity -- "only to learn for myself what they actually believe in and do," she had told Ronald when she gave him a quick rundown of all her books and courses.

"Don't do it, Justine," he had warned her and told her. "Drop that course. It's dangerous. We know the right way -- Jesus Christ."

She had laughed and gone her way, stating she was strong enough to not believe everything she read or heard. But she wasn't! And now she was so deeply involved with, and entrenched in, the satanic occult until nothing short of a miracle could free her and get her out of it.

Ronald groaned as he walked across the hilly, well-kept lawn and beautiful tree-shaded campus toward the boys' dorm. How much different things would be had his sister and he enrolled in the Christian college near their home! he thought silently, wishing the college would have taught the courses he needed to prepare him for what he felt the Lord had called him to do in the secular field. But such was not the case, and thus he had enrolled in the college where he knew he could get what he needed.

Looking back over the past two years now, he realized that, while it hadn't been exactly easy living on campus among the many who were not Christians, it hadn't been too hard, either. In his case, and in direct answer to

his fervent prayers (before enrolling even), the Lord had given him a morally-clean, morally-good roommate.

Leon Kemp was an industrious, hard-working student who didn't squander his parents' hard-earned (college for him) money on riotous living in any form or vice. He even listened attentively whenever he, Ronald, talked to him about spiritual things, his soul's welfare, especially. Twice, Ronald thought his roommate was ready to yield his heart and life to the Lord, but so far he hadn't. Always, Leon was reverent and quiet when he saw Ronald reading the Bible and praying, and on more than one occasion Ron had spied tears in his fellow student's dark eyes. Ronald felt it wouldn't be long before Leon would become converted. With Justine it was different.

Justine! Again Ron groaned. How far she had fallen and drifted! Would she ever come back to the beautiful but despised way of holiness and of holy living?, he wondered. Unlike his roommate, Leon, who knew little or nothing else, she saw Christ's likeness reflected in their parents' day by day living -- their conversation, their attitudes, their patience and love and their continual joy in all circumstances and under extreme duress and pressure.

How crushed and broken-hearted his father and mother would be if they knew, he thought. But then, how did he know they didn't know? God had been faithful to alert them of previous dangers, hadn't He? Perhaps, even now, they were fasting and praying fervently for Justine. Always, she was easy prey for anything new. Was she ever really and truly crucified to self and to the world with all its enticements and allurements? He wondered now. A death to self, by the purging fire of the Pentecostal flame, not only cleansed the soul but gave one the power to resist wrong and evil and made doing God's will a delight and a joy.

Several of the girls with whom Justine ran around were anything but good examples, Ron knew. Each time he mentioned anything to her she reminded him that she was the one choosing her friends, not he. And now, looking back in retrospect, he couldn't help but wonder if, perhaps, those same young women were not involved in the very thing in which his sister was involved. He felt sure they were. They could even have introduced her to it and gotten her involved in it, he realized.

He hurried to the dorm, feeling the need for prayer. He had a fear for his sister that gnawed ceaselessly inside him and this evening it was stronger

than ever. When one turned his back on the Savior and on His proffered love, sure trouble was ahead. The way of transgressors was hard, the Word declared.

Leon was not in the room when he entered it so he took advantage of the golden opportunity and fell on his knees, praying earnestly and sobbing brokenly. If there was any change of heart and life for his sister he knew that God would have to do it: He alone could do it. All the human pleading and talking in the world was totally ineffective. It served only to "feed" her desire and her determination to go deeper into the Satanic cult. His godly advice fell upon bitter-tuned ears. He must save his words for the prayer closet alone, he realized. There he could pour them out in agony and intercession until the burden lifted from his soul. From there, and there alone, the answer would be forthcoming.

It was late when he arose from his knees. He hadn't heard his roommate come in, but Leon was already in his own bed when he turned on the light. He turned it off as quickly as he had turned it on, not wanting to disturb the sleeper.

"Hey, you may leave it on," Leon remarked as soon as the room was again in darkness. "In fact, I think I need to tell you something."

Ronald flipped the switch on and in an instant's time the room was flooded with a cheerful light. "I hope I didn't bother you," he said, "for this is as much your room as it's mine. But my sister has me greatly concerned over what she's involved in. Oh Leon, you can't imagine how grieved and burdened I am for her and for her soul! She . . . she's . . . playing with something far more dangerous than with fire. And she knows better."

By now, Leon was sitting on the edge of his bed. His eyes looked troubled. "I couldn't help hearing as you prayed," he said, with tears shining in his eyes. "I . . . I think it's wonderful. I'd give anything to know someone cared that much about me and . . . my . . . soul."

"I do," Ronald answered quickly. "And in my secret closet of prayer I intercede the same way for you, Leon. I want to know that you are saved and ready for Heaven more than I want anything else for you."

Leon's eyes fixed upon Ron's in a steady, unwavering gaze. "I believe you," he finally replied, "even though I never heard anything like what I listened to tonight. Ron, I'm ready to do whatever I must do to become a Christian. My heart wants what you have. . . ."

Praying was easy; Heaven and earth met together and kissed each other; Leon was gloriously and wondrously converted and made new in Christ.

After the shouting and the holy ecstasy subsided somewhat, Leon said, "I overheard something while I was in the library tonight after a book on research material; it's something I think you'd want to know about."

Ronald listened intently. "About Justine?" he asked quickly.

"She'll be in on it, I imagine, since it centers around what she's into. There's to be a meeting in that big old mansion on Bayfiss Street. Eleven-thirty sharp. Their priest -- Armond Lesvag -- was telling Donald Witts, another of their followers, only he didn't realize I was within earshot when he said it."

For a while, Ronald was silent. Then he said, "I'm going to that meeting, Leon; thanks for telling me."

"I'm going with you," came the roommate's instant rejoinder. "I'll get dressed immediately. I'd have been scared stiff to go before I was converted. But now I have Somebody greater in me than any other force or power on earth."

"That's right, Leon. The Bible says, '. . . greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world' (I John 4:4). Satan will never be able to harm those who are covered by the precious blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. Christ alone is All powerful."

"I've heard enough from you to believe this," Leon answered. "And, too, I've been reading your Bible when you've been out of the room," he added with a smile. "It's powerful, Ron, that Book! Know what? It cut me to the quick. But it drew me, too. I realized that I was guilty and condemned, beneath its probing scrutiny."

"That's because the Word is God, Leon. John 1:1 states, 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.' Now that you have been born of God, make reading His Word a daily practice and habit. Also, do the same with communing with God; pray daffy. You may have to make time for this, but it will be time well spent. And now that you're dressed, let's go."

The drive to Bayliss Street was made mostly in silence. Ron prayed for Justine all the way to the enormous, well-known mansion. Its carefully tended lawns and spectacular flower gardens were visited by many of the students at the college: it was a thing of beauty. But how anyone could have gained entrance to the mansion's interior for a meeting of the occult was a bit of a mystery to him.

As if in answer to his silent-pondered question, Leon said, "I learned, through that brief, overheard conversation in the library this evening, that Professor Harnish will be at the mansion. Also several others of the faculty whose names I couldn't quite understand. If I heard correctly, there'll be many there from out of state,"

"How will we know where this meeting's going to be held?" Ron wondered aloud. "After all, mansions have many large rooms, and this one, we know, is not an exception."

"I heard the ballroom mentioned, so I would imagine that's the place. And with all these out-of-staters arriving, it should make it easier for us to get in. These meetings are never made public, Ron: everything's kept secret and very hush-hush."

Sudden illumination came to Ron then: Professor Harnish and the owner of the mansion were known to be good friends; no doubt each was involved in the occult.

Ron parked his car with the others that were pulling up in the parking spaces, which were fast filling up. He locked the doors and, together, he and Leon fell in step with the motley crowd making their way to the mansion's entranceway and up its wide, curving, marble steps to the heavy, ornate doors, where they were ushered inside by two well-groomed, uniformed men.

Lights burned dimly as they entered the enormous ballroom; it was little more than dark. The air and atmosphere were pregnant with an eerie, evil feeling. That they were in the presence of demonic power they had no doubt. Each pleaded the Blood for covering and for protection.

Once seated, Ron's eyes gradually became accustomed to the room and its surroundings. Candles burned dimly on an altar at the front, their yellow-red-orange glow flickered eerily against a background of blackest black. Suddenly, weird flashes of light darted like demented things across the front of the room and then the ceremony-ritual began as a man, dressed all in black, emerged from behind a black curtain and took his throne seat behind the altar.

"Armond Lesvag," Leon whispered cautiously, leaning toward Ron's ear. "He's the priest. At least, he's one of them."

Ron's eyes were busy searching for a lone figure in the dim light of the crowded room. Suddenly a shrill shriek filled the room. It was followed by an ear-piercing and frightening scream: "I can't do it! I can't! O, my God, help me; I'm lost!"

It sounded like Justine's voice. Armond stood to his feet; his face was livid with rage and anger. "There is another Power here in this room," he announced. "It is disrupting the service."

His eyes, like burning coals of evil and wickedness, probed the now-filled room. Behind him, escorted by two young men dressed in black, a young woman was approaching his throne. She too was dressed all in black. A long, loose-fitting robe fell from her slender shoulders to her ankles. Her auburn hair, loose and flowing, fell to well below her waistline.

"Be gone!" Armond commanded, pointing toward where Ron and Leon sat and taking a step toward the altar just as the woman screamed again, "No! No! I cannot go through with this! I cannot!"

Justine! It was Justine! The two men were shoving her, pushing her, pulling her toward their priest -- Armond.

In a last, desperate effort, she tore herself loose from the men and ran like some wild, hunted animal toward the back of the enormous room.

Ron and Leon were on their feet. They met her before she reached the door. "You're going with us," Ron said softly as he grabbed her and held her fast. She began to protest and to struggle.

"Justine," Ron said quietly, "come. You have nothing to fear; it's Leon and I." Quickly, he led her from the room, almost running, until they were inside the car and well on their way back to the campus.

"Ho . . . how . . . did . . . you happen to be there?" Justine finally ventured to ask when her trembling had ceased, adding tearfully, "Oh, Ron, it's terrible! Almost, I sold my soul to the devil: I was to be made a high priestess tonight. Sometime this afternoon, shortly after I made you leave my room, I became deathly scared and frightened. I felt that if I went through with the ceremony and the ritual, I'd lose my soul and go to hell. O Ron, please pray for me. I'm lost. I've been so rebellious and hard hearted and so hateful and mean to you. Please forgive me. Then pray for me. I want to be delivered from Satan and his power."

Tears swam in Ron's eyes: prayer had prevailed. Justine was coming Home! It would take more wrestling-prayer for her than it did for Leon, no doubt, but little matter: the prodigal was returning -- coming back to Father's arms and Father's forgiveness.

He accelerated the car more heavily.