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THE HIGH ROAD
By Mrs. Paul E. King

Regina Boothby slumped down on the seat of the porch swing and tried to count those who were her friends. At least they said they were her friends. What friends! she thought. Miserable friends. Every single one of them was as unhappy and as unfulfilled as she was, she knew. Oh, they didn't say so; but she knew just as certainly and as surely as she knew she was unhappy that each felt the same as she. Inwardly, that is. And, she asked herself now in silent meditation, where else, other than inside, could one feel unfulfilled?

She felt a wave of pure nausea wash over her at the thought of the sham and the veneer being exhibited and projected by most, if not all, of her close associates. It made her ill. Surely there had to be something more to life than this! she soliloquized again, for the umpteenth time. Surely, surely there had to be! This emptiness and . . . and vacant void that went to bed with her, to haunt her and gnaw at her in her fitful sleep then jump out of bed with her in the morning and ride her back all day long -- surely, there must be something better. Life wasn't meant to be an endless merry-go-round of meaningless nothingness. Or was it'?

She pushed her feet outward and set the swing in motion. Back and forth, back and forth, the swing went, like her life, back and forth, back and forth. And dreadfully monotonous.

"Oh, there you are, Regina!" a voice exclaimed as the yellow sports car screeched to a halt and a tall, statuesque redhead jumped out of the driver's seat. and bounded up the few porch steps two at a time. "'Why aren't you over at Brittainy's house? You knew we were all to meet there. . . ." The sentence trailed in the silence like the tail of a kite in the wind. "Well?" Kristin waited for an answer. "Maybe it's because I don't want to go."

Kristin clucked her tongue, then parroted, "Don't want to go? Whoever heard of such a thing! Everybody waits for a chance to get to Brittainy's house." She crossed the porch to the swing and sat down beside Regina, saying, "All right, what's with you? Why don't you want to go to Brittainy's?"

"Because I don't, Kristin, that's why."

"That isn't even a reasonable answer, Regina."

"I think it is."

"Look, what's eating you? You haven't been yourself for weeks. Why? What's wrong? Everybody's having fun but you."

"Are they, Kristin? Really, are they? Is it fun when doing drugs makes your best friend drown herself? Answer me, Kristin Pellon. And is it fun when you see the picture in the newspaper of your cousin, who was once an honor student, standing on top of a bridge, refusing to come down, then suddenly jumping to his death? Do you call that fun? I don't. I can't. Drugs! Drugs! All the group thinks of is drugs and sensual pleasure and fleeting thrills. I'm fed up with it."

"But you've never tried it," Kristin retorted instantly.

"No, I haven't. What's more, I have no intentions of ever 'trying it,' as you phrased it so 'succinctly.' At least I'll not have to struggle and fight with trying to break off of a habit that is not easily broken; a habit that rides your back like a monkey. Or... or a demon, even."

"What do you know about this?" Kristin mocked. "Don't knock it until you've tried it. Not everybody's killing himself or herself, Regina."

"Too many are. Yes, too many. I can name more. Do you care to hear their names?"

"Of course I don't, Miss Morbid. Well, what do you want me to tell Brittainy? Any message for her?" Kristin asked, jumping up off the swing and walking gracefully across the porch to the steps.

"Nothing, Kristin. Nothing. Just tell her I'm not coming, that's all. It's enough: She'll get the message."

Kristin slammed the car door and, starting the motor, she raced away.

Slowly, tears filled Regina's eyes. She remembered the last party she went to. It was over at Reggie's house. His parents were gone for the week-end and, as usual, they had the house to themselves. This was common to Reggie; he was used to it. Truth of the matter was, he liked it this way. The parties at Reggie's house were big. In all ways, big. You could go and come as you liked, and you could stay the long week-end there, if you chose to do so. Generally, Reggie had the rooms filled up for the week-end.

She -- Regina -- had gone, having been invited by Reggie himself. Why she went, she couldn't quite figure out. Parties just never seemed to do one thing to elevate her spirits. And, for sure, they never had the effect of filling up the empty feeling inside her heart. So why she went she couldn't quite explain to her own heart. Maybe it was because Brittainy and Kristin had told her she "just must attend one of Reggie's parties," that they were "fabulous and beyond any describing. And talk about food!" Brittainy had exclaimed. "You've never seen anything like it -- steaks, ham, chicken, giant shrimp, boiled, barbecued and fried!"

Well, they were right about the food, Regina recalled. But they never did mention anything about the drugs and the liquor and the extreme wickedness that went on unashamedly and openly. Mainly, everyone sat on the floor -- to eat, to drink, to do drugs, to talk -- everything.

"Sit between Kristin and me," Brittainy said to Regina when Reggie began passing the smoking cigarette around. "Try it," Brittainy urged when it was passed to her hand. "Just once, Regina."

"No, Brittainy. No. I have no desire. Not in the least."

"You're chicken, Regina," several in the circle chorused.

"Not as chicken as you are. It's a feat of accomplishment if one can say no to evil when all around him are caving in and saying yes," Regina remembered having replied.

"Whenever did you begin to get religious?" one of the girls asked in shocked surprise.

"Are you all right?" another girl asked.

"I'm fine, thank you. It's just that I choose not to fall into the snare most of you are finding yourself in. And don't know how to get out of, I might add."

"Try it just this once," Brittainy urged again. "You may change your mind."

"I told you no, and I mean it, Brittainy. Anything that drives one to suicide can't be good; that's only sound reasoning."

"But not everybody does these crazy things!" Reggie exclaimed. "Look around you; we're all still here."

"How do you know that you won't do this?" Regina had asked. "After all, what you're 'playing around' with does alter the mind. I don't need to remind you of this. And truthfully, I feel there's a higher road than this."

"Why don't you find it then?" came the quick question.

"I'm searching for it," she had answered immediately.

Brittainy and Kristin were disgusted with her, she knew. Maybe, even, they were embarrassed, she realized, as she suddenly excused herself and left, vowing to never again go to another of their parties. And she hadn't.

Where could she find this higher road? she wondered, feeling a flow of fresh tears spill down her cheeks. And how did one get on it when finding it?

The musical notes of a whistler caught her attention and for a time her questions were forgotten. Alice Chambers! She recognized her immediately. Whatever was Alice doing here on her street?

"Hi Regina," Alice called as she hurried to the porch and sat down on the top step. "How are you doing?"

"Just glad you dropped by."

"Really!" Alice said brightly, smiling broadly. "I'm glad that I came. You see, 'Gina, I was praying for you and I felt I had to come by."

"Really, Alice?" Regina questioned, leaving the swing to sit beside Alice on the step. "Really and truly, were you praying for me? Me?" she asked, incredulous.

"Have I ever told you anything that wasn't the truth?"

"Oh my, no; never. But . . . well, I'm overwhelmed that . . . that you prayed for me."

"I love you 'Gina, and I pray daily for you. Today, however, I seemed to have a special and very heavy burden for you: Like you needed help. Now."

Regina sighed. Then tears came to her eyes. "I . . . I feel so empty inside," she confessed. "Oh, Alice, tell me, please, there's more to life than . . . than what my so-called friends and I've 'tasted' and tried, isn't there? Nothing satisfies. Nothing. I feel so hopeless and so . . . so unfulfilled."

Alice reached over and patted Regina's hand. "There is no satisfaction outside of Christ," she said softly and kindly. "All the parties in the world can't give you joy and peace; nor satisfaction: This is found only in Christ."

"Please tell me more. You always seem joyful and so happy. I'm so very unhappy. And . . . and I'm scared, too."

"Why are you scared?"

"I suppose it's because I don't know what will happen to me if I were to die. You see, several of my close friends committed suicide recently and I . . . I wonder where they are now; this minute."

You will never be able to bring your friends back, Regina, but you can do something right now to prepare for life after death: give your heart to Jesus. He took our place on the cross and He died for our sins. He died so that you and I, and the whole world for that matter, might be saved. But the decision to be saved falls back upon us as individuals.

"The Bible says, 'whosoever will may come. . . .' We must 'will,' or want, to be saved, 'Gina, or the Lord Jesus will not become our Savior. But if we want to be saved, and to be freed from the sins that haunt us and bind us, then He stands ready to forgive us of our sins and to come into our heart. And when we are saved -- forgiven -- then we have peace in our heart: peace with God and peace with man. And this peace never leaves us if we 'abide' in Christ: it stays with us constantly, because Christ is peace."

Regina grabbed both of Alice's hands. Crying, she said, "Please tell me what I must do to get this peace. Do you simply say, 'Come into my heart, Lord Jesus'?"

"Yes, Regina. And ask Him to forgive your sins. Tell Him what you told me; that you are so unhappy and so afraid. Tell it all to Jesus. He'll save you. . . ."

Praying was easy; it was spontaneous. Like an obedient child, Regina bared her heart to the Lord, confessing her sins and telling Him how desperately she needed Him and His salvation. And then, like "sparks from smitten steel," she began laughing and shouting and clapping her hands together for holy joy, exclaiming joyously, "He's come! He's come! I found the High Road: God's High Road; the way of salvation. Oh, He's come. I have peace. Peace! Peace!"

And Alice lifted her happy, overflowing heart in loud praises to the One who had urged her to come. Of a truth, there was "a time . . ." for everything: this was Regina's time!