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HELEN'S SEARCH
By Mrs. Paul E. King

Helen was new in Oakville High. I saw her for the first time, four days after school began, in the library. I had gone down after a book for a reference guide and, as I was scanning the shelves of books, looking for a particular one, I noticed this unusually lovely girl at the end of the aisle.

Momentarily, I forgot what I had come for, so smitten was I by her beauty. I guess I must have been staring at her, for after a very brief time she turned and we were looking each other in the face. I was speechless. Totally speechless. She looked sad, I thought, and her sadness seemed only to more clearly emphasize her delicate features. She reminded me of something; what was it? Oh, yes, that was it -- a porcelain doll. Actually, her complexion had the look of finest porcelain.

It was an embarrassing moment for her, and for me. Neither of us spoke, yet we were drawn to each other by something which at that immediate moment I couldn't define. True, her exquisite beauty nearly mesmerized me for a moment. But there was something else . . . the sad look? partly, yes. Fear. Fear? Yes, it was there too; in her eyes. On her face. And . . . and, yes, a look of hunger, too.

"Excuse me," I finally ventured as my senses regained their proper control again. "I believe you're new to Oakville High, right? I'm Stacie Leighton. I'm glad you're here."

She continued staring at me without saying a word. Then, like coming out of a trance, she shook herself and apologized, saying, "Thank you. Yes, I'm new to the area. I'm Helen Arbor."

"I'm glad to meet you, Helen," I stated frankly, smiling easily, now that the spell was broken. "What grade are you in? I'm a sophomore. I love school."

"I'm glad to meet you, Stacie. I'm a junior, and I'm sure I'd enjoy life a whole lot better than I do if I had answers to some of the questions that are about to consume me. What is there about you that . . . that . . . ? Well, you're different, Stacie. Different! You look like you're at peace with the world and. . ."

"I am, Helen. But it's only because I'm at peace with God."

"What do you mean by that?"

"I mean that one day I realized I was a sinner . . . a poor, wretched sinner . . . on my road to hell, and I cried out to a loving and merciful God to

forgive me of my sins and to come into my heart. And He did. I've had peace in my soul ever since. I know I'll go to Heaven when I die and. . . ."

"Heaven? Hell? That's . . . why, my mother spoke of Heaven and hell before she died!" Helen exclaimed in surprise. "Where did you learn about Heaven and . . . and hell, Stacie? See these books."

She pointed to the rows of books, and then I saw what she was looking at. I shivered: She was in the occult section!

"Don't look for answers from those books," I replied softly and kindly as I place my hand over hers and squeezed it gently.

"Why not? I thought surely I could find answers to my many questions in some of these," she replied sadly but candidly. "They are supposed to foretell the future and to be able to answer one's questions."

"They'll only lead you into deeper depression and. . . ."

"How did you know I was depressed?" she asked quickly, with great surprise. "Sometimes I wish I could die, I get so depressed."

"God knew all along that you get depressed, Helen, and it matters greatly and deeply to Him that you feel this way. He cares about you. He loves you. Greatly and deeply."

"He . . . He does? How do you know?"

"Because His Word tells us so, that's how. He loved us so much that He sent His dearly beloved and only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, to earth to bleed and suffer and die for us -- for our sins -- that we might be forgiven and be converted and spend eternity in Heaven with Him."

"How do you know this? I mean, where did you read it, or . . . or learn about it?"

I realized, suddenly, how very, very privileged I was, to have been born and raised in a Christian home where, from my infancy, the Bible was the number one book in the house. It was read daily, both for family worship --

our collective gathering -- and privately by each and every member in our household.

"I read this wonderful truth from the Bible God's Holy Word," I quickly answered Helen. "Don't you have a Bible?" I asked, seeing before me a golden opportunity to give the most cherished of all treasures to my newly-made acquaintance.

"No, I don't, Stacie. To be truthful, I can't recall of even seeing a Bible. But before mother died, she talked about a Bible and about Heaven and hell. My aunt and uncle told me she had lost her mind and to just overlook anything she told me. But I can't do it, Stacie. Something keeps pulling me back to everything she said. I feel like I'm going to lose my mind unless I can find answers to the things she told me."

"How long ago did your mother die?" I asked gently, feeling real empathy for Helen.

"Seventeen months ago. And I've had to live with an aunt and an uncle ever since. You see, my father died when I was less than five years old. My aunt, who was and is my father's only sister, said he died because he was a fool who took up preaching instead of becoming the doctor for which he had trained and prepared himself. Aunt Ethel declares that Father's hands were 'formed' to be a doctor's hands. Nothing less, her words. My aunt and uncle are wealthy people, and so very proud.

"It seems, from what I was able to piece together during my growing-up years of living with my dear mother, whose very subsistence was dependent upon Aunt Ethel and Uncle Jay after Father's untimely death, that they had very little time for Daddy when he gave up his medical practice, and even less time for my mother, who 'collaborated' with Father; again, my aunt's words.

"Mother's health became fragile after my father's passing, making public work impossible for her. For weeks on end, she was compelled to spend more time in bed than on her feet. Under her careful supervision and her loving guidance and instructions, I learned early in life to be a little housekeeper and cook. And I loved it, because I loved my mother.

"As mother weakened physically I noticed a change come over her. She seemed so very serious minded and quiet. I attributed it to the fact that she had become totally resigned to her lot in life and to her intense satisfaction and joy that I was now able to take care of myself, when and if necessity so demanded, since I knew how to work.

"We had a beautiful relationship, she and I. We loved each other devotedly. Five days before she passed away, she talked to me about spiritual things. Oh Stacie, when she smiled at me and told me that she had made her peace with God and that, now, instead of being sentenced to eternal damnation in a burning hell, she was going to Heaven, I can't tell you how I felt. I had never heard anything like that before. I asked her what it was all about and what she meant by it.

"She was extremely weak, and between labored breathing she asked me to forgive her for never telling me what she knew about God and Heaven and hell, adding that Aunt Ethel and Uncle Jay had threatened to cut off all financial help to us if she ever tried to 'make me religious.' They intimidated my dear, weak, and unable-to-work mother dreadfully, Stacie. Oh, she was such a dear, sweet person."

By now, Helen was sobbing, and I was crying with her.

"Forgive me for breaking down this way," she finally said. "But I must know how my mother could die with a smile on her face and a beautiful song on her lips. She looked more like an angel than a mortal being, when she was in the casket. I feel that my aunt and uncle have deprived me of the most beautiful thing in all the world by blackmailing my dear mother the way they did.

"Like I said, Mother was very weak. But after telling me of my aunt's and uncle's threat, she grabbed my hand and held it tightly. Tears were running down her cheeks and she was whispering the name of Jesus over and over. Then she told me how much she loved the Lord and how much she loved me. And suddenly, she reached up and pulled my face down close to her lips, kissing me and saying that she felt so very strange.

"I became terribly frightened as I felt the taut muscles of her dear hands relax and lose their hold on my face. Then I wrapped my arms around her and wept like a child.

"Very softly, she patted my cheeks and whispered, 'Meet me in . . . Heaven, sweetheart. I'm going . . . there . . . soon. I . . . love . . . you. . . .!'"

"She went into a coma then and never spoke to me again."

"Oh Helen, I'm sorry. But you can meet her again! In fact, she's waiting for you. So, has your uncle moved you all here . . . your aunt and you, I mean?"

"Oh my no. They've gone abroad for a couple of years. I'm boarding with an old friend of Aunt Ethel's. This is why I'm at Oakville High."

"This was all by God's appointment," I said joyously. "Your dear parents' prayers are being answered this very day. All these years, the God who loves you and cares about you has directed your every step and brought you here to Oakville High so you and I could meet and become friends and I could lead you to the Lord Jesus Christ, God's Son, who gave His life on the cross to free us of all our sins. It's amazing how He directed each of us to the library at this hour, when we're practically or completely alone. God's ways are past finding out, Helen."

"I agree with you. Tell me what I must do to know I'll go to Heaven when I die, Stacie. Mother's there. She told me to meet her there. And oh, I do want whatever it was that made her smile and sing before she went into the coma and died. Please help me!"

"Oh, I will! I will!" I answered, as I began praying softly for my friend.

In no time at all, Helen's soft voice was telling the Lord everything she'd told me; and more. She wept brokenly. Her heart and soul was open -- wide. And in an instant's time, it happened: she was born again of God. The transformation was glorious and wonderful. Her face was shining like an angel's and every trace of fear and sadness was gone.

We laughed and cried together, and we felt we'd known each other for years. She was now a part of God's family and her search was over; her deep, inner hunger was satisfied.

We walked together to my locker where I took a New Testament and Psalms from a pastel wind breaker jacket and gave it to her as a gift. Then we went our separate ways, after making plans to meet immediately upon dismissal. She was like a newborn baby; I wanted to do all I could to nurture her spiritual growth.

My feet felt like they had wings.