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NEW BEGINNING
By Mrs. Paul E. King

Sandy stood inside the kitchen window staring out into the cold winter night. She felt lonely, deserted, and bitter. Nothing was the same anymore; everything had changed since her mother passed away two years ago. Everything! Her once secure, pleasant, and happy life had turned into the gall of bitterness and the abyss of resentment.

She turned away from the landscape of white and made her way into the living room where a fire burned warmly and cozily in the fireplace and candles glowed softly from each of the windows. Their gentle light made halos on the snow outside. Peace; everything spoke of peace. Everything but her heart, that is. Inside her young breast a struggle of such enormity raged as to fill her heart with fear. She had never -- not in all of her better than eighteen years -- known or experienced such bitterness and hatred as since her father's marriage to Martha Tilltosen six months ago. Since then, her days were filled with resentment and hatred toward both her father and her stepmother.

She walked to the fireplace and stared moodily into the glowing embers and the gently-licking flames consuming the heavy log pieces, wondering why her father had married so soon after her mother's passing. Why he had married at all. Wasn't she -- Sandy -- perfectly capable and able -- and willing -- to cook and bake and keep the house! Indeed she was. Her mother had taught her early in life how to do all these things and she had been delighted to help with the work.

The grandfather clock struck eight deep musical notes and Sandy recalled her father's gentle plea before he and her stepmother left the house.

"Please, Sandra," he had said, "if you won't come with us now, for supper at the Eriksons', get out to the watchnight service, please. We always attend, you know."

"That was before. . . ."

Her father's hand had closed gently over her lips. "Don't say it, my dear," he pleaded kindly. "I'm sorry if I have hurt you by marrying Martha; but honey, the loneliness was nearly killing me."

"And I guess you think I don't miss Mother; that I don't know what loneliness is! Especially since you got married and spend so much time with Martha!"

He had looked at her so long without speaking that she felt shame for her hot retort. When he finally spoke, he said, "You don't understand. Maybe someday you will. I will always love your mother and hold her in highest esteem. But now that the Lord has given me Martha, I love her very deeply,

Sandra. She is a good and gracious woman; a God-fearing, godly and upright woman; so like your mother."

"Don't, Daddy! Don't compare her to my dear mother. She will never be a mother to me. Never! She has no right to be using the things my mother used and handled. This house was mother's house."

"And it is now Martha's house, Sandra. Your mother would be shocked -- and ashamed of you -- to hear you speak thus."

"But I hate her, Daddy, this stepmother whom you've brought into my life."

"Oh no. No!" he had cried. "All who hate are branded as murderers by God's Holy Word. And you know that no murderer will enter that Holy-white City. I fear for you, my dear daughter. Yes, I fear greatly. You are being consumed by bitterness and jealousy and envy, which, in the end, will damn your soul and send you into the lake of fire unless you repent and are completely delivered from this vile carnal nature. Now, if you will not go with us to the Eriksons', I have nothing more to say, except that I love you. And please, try to get out to the watchnight service. Goodnight, Sandra."

Sandy felt tears trickle down her cheeks as she remembered the look of pain in her father's eyes. Never, not in all of her life, had she been estranged from her father. Not once. He had always been there for both her mother and her whenever they needed him, no matter what hour of the day or the night. He was a kind and gentle man, so full of goodness and good works. From a child, she had related her earthly father to what God was like since her earthly father so very much emulated the God he served. It was, then, an easy and natural thing for her to believe in God and everything the Bible had to say about Him.

She now felt unutterable shame wash over her as she recalled her sharp, cutting words to her father. Her conscience and her heart condemned her -- lashed her, even. She had never before treated her parent so wickedly. Instead of obeying God's Divinely-given injunction to, "Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee" (Exodus 20:12), and "Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right" (Ephesians 6:1), she had willingly and deliberately violated the

commands, a thing which could do nothing but bring God's wrath down upon her, she knew.

She stood, statue-like, staring into the fire, feeling numb and cold in spite of the warmth and the heat that emulated from the fireplace. She had dared to talk back to her dear, sweet father! Why, why had she done it? It was totally unlike her, and it was the first and only time she had ever been so brazen and bold and brash as to do such a wicked thing. It was wicked. Indeed so. And Psalm 7:11 said, "God judgeth the righteous, and God is angry with the wicked every day."

Intense fear took hold of Sandy. She knew that someday and sometime, she would have to give account of her angry words, her bad and hateful attitude, and of her evil thoughts, to God. It was just as sure a thing as was the Hebrews 9:27 appointment -- "And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment."

The doorbell rang, startling Sandra out of her silent thoughts. Who would be calling at 8:30 in the evening? she wondered, while her heart hammered out its fear inside her chest. All her friends would no doubt be at the watchnight service at church, she knew.

Again the doorbell sounded through the house. Sandy felt paralyzed with fear. And then a familiar voice called her name.

Rushing to the door, she let Marsha inside, exclaiming with relief, "Oh, Marsha, I'm so glad it's you!" She collapsed into the seat of the nearest chair and heaved a heavy sigh of great relief as she added, "I was terrified before you called my name. But, say, aren't you going to the service at church? You never miss. . . ."

"Neither did you, Sandy; not until you allowed that deadly old carnal nature to dictate and rule you. And frankly, I'm not leaving here until you come with me. Now grab your coat and pull that warm cap over your ears and we'll be on our way."

"I'm not going, Marsha."

"Oh yes, you are, dear friend. I've prayed and fasted and wept and interceded for you and over you too long to be defeated tonight. Just what do

you think you'll gain by harboring this dreadful bitterness and jealousy in your soul, Sandy? It's a losing battle no matter how you look at it. You're the loser; in all ways. what's more, you'll burn forever and ever in the lake of fire unless you repent and come back to God and then go on and get sanctified wholly. You know you can't control that old nature within you, Sandy. Romans 8:7 tells us plainly that, 'The carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.'

"Since it isn't subject to the law of God, how can you control it? You've been blinded by the intense bitterness and jealousy you have over your father's marriage to Martha, and this will never make it into Heaven. Carnality is a dreadful thing. It is subtle and cunning and conniving and ever so shrewd and extremely deceptive, and nothing but the purging, burning, cleansing fire of the power of God can burn it out and eradicate it from your heart. Now hurry, we're both going to the service. . . ."

The bitter-cold air and the crunching of the snow beneath her feet gave Sandra a feeling of exhilaration as Marsha and she walked down the sidewalk toward the church. She was glad that her best friend had come by after her. Yes, deep inside, she was glad.

They walked in silence for a while, savoring the sweet, clean fragrance of the newly-fallen snow and the stillness of the night. After some time had elapsed, Marsha spoke.

"It's sad," she said, speaking softly; "this dying of the old year. It sort of grips me in my heart. I wonder if I could have done more than I did for the Lord; if I could have been kinder to my fellowman and more loving and gracious to my parents and my brothers and sisters. Families do have differences, as you know, and we don't always see eye to eye. It tests the real you. I wonder if, in God's great Book of records, I've been all He wanted me to be. Or have I disappointed Him in some way, maybe? Oh, I trust I haven't: I love Him too much to fail Him or disappoint Him."

"Knowing you, Marsha, I'm sure you haven't," Sandy replied. Then, feeling like she wanted to unload -- like she had to unload -- she said, "Oh, Marsha, I'm the one who has been a disappointment to the Lord. And not only to the Lord, but to my dear father, as well. I've been a complete and total failure. You have no idea how hateful and nasty I've been to Daddy and to Martha. I've made their life miserable and sad with my behavior and my

horrible attitude toward them. I have always respected my father and honored him until his marriage to Martha. Something happened to me when I knew he was going to marry her and, then, finally did."

"Like I said, Sandy, carnality is a dreadful thing to allow to lodge and live within one's heart. It is worse than a den of vipers. More deadly, even, since it has the power to damn one's soul in hell's fire. And unless it is completely and entirely eradicated and removed, this is where one's soul will live for all eternity. It gives me chills to even think of it. Especially so since the Lord Jesus Christ paid the supreme price with His life on the cross and made a way for every one of us to be delivered and freed from this awful nature."

"Oh, Marsha, I've been harboring this vile thing inside of me like a welcome friend, and there have been times when I've been extremely frightened by the things it has caused me to say and think and do. It has made me harsh and brash and bitter and it has filled me with profound hatred for Father's bride, who I feel is much too young for him."

"Martha is only twelve years his junior, Sandra. There's nothing wrong with that. Nothing wrong, even, if she were twenty or thirty years younger than he. The Bible doesn't have anything to say regarding age difference when one gets married. Your real problem stems from the jealousy and envy in your heart: you just didn't want your father to marry. Not ever. Even though you knew for eleven months that your mother was dying."

"That's true," Sandra admitted tearfully and truthfully. "I don't see how he could do this to Mother, though."

"Did he never tell you that your mother told him to marry again after she was gone?"

Sandra stopped so suddenly that she nearly lost her balance and fell. Grabbing Marsha's coat sleeve, she exclaimed, "She didn't! I can't believe that. I won't believe it."

"She did, Sandy. She told my mother all about it two days before she crossed over. And then your father told mine the same thing when he and Marsha decided to get married. Ask him if you doubt me."

Sandra was speechless. Then, like one coming out of a shock, she said, "I believe you, Marsha. You've always been truthful and upright and honest for so long as I've known you. I apologize for my hasty retort and denial. It's evident and obvious that I have a lot of things to come to grips with and to bury, once and for all. I've been a puppet in the hands of the devil." She was weeping bitterly.

"Tonight's the best time of all to get things settled, Sandy. You'll have a brand new year and a clean washed-in-the-blood-of-the-Lamb page to begin with and make a new beginning for yourself. Well, here we are. Doesn't that praying sound wonderful? There's power in fervent, united praying," she said as she squeezed her friend's hand.

"There surely is, Marsha. And now I'm going to begin by doing what I know I must do," Sandy answered tearfully, as she hurried down the center aisle to where her father and stepmother were kneeling and praying.

Kneeling beside her father, she whispered something in his ear; then she took his hand. He got to his feet; her hand still held his. She moved over to Martha and, softly, she said, "Mom, forgive me for hating you and treating you so mean and so unkindly. I want you to pray for me, please. I'm sorry. Oh, so sorry."

Martha got to her feet. Her arm encircled Sandra's waist. Together, they walked the short distance from their pew to the altar, Father, Sandra and Martha, in that order. Close behind Sandy, Marsha knelt. As one, they began to pray and Marsha knew with full assurance of heart and soul and an unwavering faith in her God, that this night Sandra was going to have a new beginning; a clean slate and a new heart.