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GOD'S PERFECT TIMING
By Mrs. Paul E. King

She could hardly believe it. It came so completely and totally by surprise until Shona Leigh wondered again if it was real. She brushed a hand across her eyes, then gazed after the disappearing form of Andrew Paul Gabrielson.

"Lord," she whispered heavenward, "don't let me miss Thy will. I desire only Thy will. If this is of Thee, make it plain and clear to each of us. If not, may Thy Holy Spirit check us. . . ."

Shona walked into the cottage she was sharing with her grandmother during the camp meeting season and sat down in a rocking chair, feeling like she was dreaming. Andrew Paul Gabrielson! He was real, and he was everything she had always wanted, prayed for and hoped for in a young man. But she hardly knew him. Would he be another Jerry? she wondered, shivering with the thought.

Jerry Lee Strang was what everyone called "a fine young man." And to just be around Jerry, in company with others, they were pretty much right. He was outgoing and fun to be around; he was brainy and smart and good looking and he always dressed on the conservative side, never "far out" nor mod looking. Not Jerry. Peer pressure had no effect upon him. He was his own man, knowing what he wanted to do and doing it regardless of pressure and sarcasm from his counterparts.

In church circles he was considered great and wonderful and held in high esteem, always active in the young people's group and anywhere else he was needed. The fellows looked up to him, the older generation admired him, and most of the girls were crazy over him. Jerry, meanwhile, dated rarely and was friendly to all. That is why, when he had asked her -- Shona Leigh Major -- for a date, she was shocked. She thanked him kindly and sweetly but refused.

Shona Leigh sighed now, recalling how he had pursued her and how she kept turning him down until it became an embarrassment to her. It was even more so when Jerry cornered her early one Sunday evening in the church foyer and said, "Hey, what's wrong, Shona? All our life we've gone to the same church, and when I ask you out on a date you turn me down flat like I'm poison. Why don't you like me? Do you think I'm not good enough for you? What's wrong? What have I done?"

"Oh Jerry!" she remembered having answered. "I do like you. You know I do. We've been life-long friends."

"Yeah, oldies."

"Oh come off it; you know what I mean: We've known each other all our life. And shame on you for even allowing that evil thought to spring from your lips, about my feeling you're not good enough for me. This isn't the case. And you know, deep in your heart, I don't feel this way. That would be evil and vain of me and I could no longer have God's smile of approval upon my life and in my heart, both of which I have the sacredly sweet consciousness that I have. All praise to His worthy name."

"Then what is it? I mean, why won't you go out with me?"

"Simply because I'm not ready to begin dating, Jerry. I've been praying for God to lead me and guide me."

"And you don't think I may be His answer?"

"No, I don't. But like I said, I'm in no hurry to begin. I have classes and studies and "

"So do I," Jerry shot back before she finished the sentence. "So how about going with me to the youth rally over at Holly Hill? It's on a Friday night, you will remember, and there's no school on Saturday. No excuse this time."

"It's not been excuses, Jerry; it's been the truth. OK, I'll go if my folks agree, God willing."

She had enjoyed both the ride and the rally. Jerry was good company -- friendly company. He drove carefully and sensibly and the song he sang was beautifully sung and rendered. She hadn't known he was to sing; it was a surprise to her. She complimented him and told him he had a beautiful voice.

They stopped at a clean little roadside restaurant on the way home and enjoyed pancakes and sausage, the best she felt she had ever eaten, and Jerry had her home twenty minutes before her 11:00 o'clock curfew time.

They began dating on a more regular basis after that, once a week, and always on a Friday night. Jerry had tried to persuade her to break over to two nights each week, Friday and Saturday, but she held her ground, and told him Friday night. Only Friday night. He had said she was acting childishly and not at all like a young, mature woman.

"We're friends, Jerry. Friends! Friday night only, or not at all."

He had looked like she slapped him when she emphasized the friends part, she remembered. And in that instant she knew he considered her more than a friend. She saw it in his eyes and on his face. It frightened her.

It was the following Friday night. . . . She had planned to tell Jerry it would be her last time to go out with him. She contemplated calling him and telling him not to come by after her, that she felt she could no longer date him. Then she recalled someone saying this was cowardly, that a true Christian ought to face the individual and tell him/her while looking at them. She decided it was, indeed, the right thing to do. The Christ-like thing to do: She would tell him -- face to face.

Jerry had suggested a ride to a lovely park with a small zoo in another town. They had gone there in the early evening. It was beautiful. She had been surprised, pleasantly so, to see the many parents who were there with their children. It was a family park, she thought, with true thankfulness.

Jerry and she had bought corn and grain and fed ducks and geese and even a couple of swans. They bought a bag of peanuts and tossed them to the waiting monkeys on their island encircled by a moat. It was a pleasant two hours, spent in a beautiful setting of lofty trees, well-landscaped bushes, shrubs and plants and blooming flowers. She enjoyed it immensely, except for the times Jerry had tried to put his arm around her or hold her hand. Then she cringed and walked away from him. She could hardly wait for him to take her home so she could tell him of her decision.

They had stopped to eat at a restaurant along the road on their return trip home and Jerry had seemed moody, she remembered.

"Is something wrong?" she had asked softly. "I enjoyed the park and the zoo, Jerry. It's been years since I was there. If I can remember correctly, there's been quite a lot of change made from when I was there so long ago to now. I believe they've even expanded and enlarged the park."

Jerry made no comment. He picked up the bill, which was not large or big, since she believed that, as a Christian she should never order the most expensive thing on the menu and expect her escort to pay for it, knowing that

he, too, was a student with a part-time job -- like herself -- and that he had little money to spend for things like food.

They walked to the car in silence. Total silence. This was totally unlike Jerry, she remembered thinking. He helped her inside, walked to his side of the car, opened the door, slid behind the wheel, turned the ignition on, then sped away.

She had said nothing until he turned off on a side road. Then, with warning bells ringing loudly inside her being, she said, "Where are you going, Jerry?"

"I'm taking you home the long way tonight, Shona," he had replied with a wicked grin twisting the corner of his mouth.

Shona almost shook now with remembering.

"Please, let's get back on the main road, Jerry," she had pleaded.

"Afraid of me?" It had sounded like a taunt. Or had it been a threat?

"Why should I be, Jerry? After all, the Lord is right here with me, and His Word says, 'For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers: but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil.

"And who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good?' I Peter 3:12-13. We're told to abstain from the appearance of evil, Jerry."

Shona remembered how he had stopped the car so suddenly that she hit her head against the dashboard. And the next instant he had her in his arms, crushed against his chest so tightly that she could scarcely breathe. His hands were moving over her body.

"Jerry! Jerry! No! No! Let me go!" she cried as she tried to free herself.

"Let you go! Ha. Ha. I'm sick and tired of being brushed off when I go to touch you. I've got you and tonight I'm going to teach you a few things. Yes, little Miss Prude, tonight's my night."

He searched for her lips. She jerked her head away, crying out, "Lord Jesus, help me. Please, help me." The next instant, car lights glared brightly in upon them and a police officer was at the door. "What's going on in there?" he demanded.

Like a frightened animal, she sprang from the car and rushed to him, crying, "Please, call my parents. He . . . he . . . tried to. . ."

"I understand," came the quiet response. "And you have nothing to fear. I'll take care of you. But first, this young man has some lessons to learn. . . ."

It was a night she would never forget. Never.

"To think we trusted Jerry!" her father exclaimed, after picking her up at a little cafe back on the main road and taking her home.

"It proves again that the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked," her mother added as she gave Shona's hand a loving and reassuring squeeze.

"I was going to tell him tonight, when he dropped me off at home," Shona said, "that I wouldn't go out with him anymore. He called me Miss Prude, for not allowing him to put his arm around me and to hold hands with him. He tried to do both numerous times; but I wouldn't allow him to. Oh, Mother and Father, God sent that policeman. I know He did. I had just cried out to Him for help -- out loud -- and the very next instant this bright light was shining in Jerry's car and there stood that big, tall, strong looking policeman. Where did he come from, there on that lonely deserted road? I felt like God dropped him out of heaven for me at the very minute I needed help and protection. He will always be thought of as God's guardian angel for me. Oh, God is good! So good! I will never be able to praise Him enough for delivering me.

Trembling now with remembering, Shona dropped to the floor on her knees and began to pray. There were times when the memory of that night still seemed like a nightmare to her and the only thing to rid her of its horror was to pray and to plead the blood of Jesus.

She was still on her knees when Grandma Major stepped into the cottage. "Why Shona Leigh, my precious child, what is wrong?" she asked, as she dropped to her knees beside her granddaughter and wrapped her arms around her and held her tightly to her.

Lifting tear-filled eyes to her grandmother's sweet face, she cried, "I want God's will more than anything for my life, and . . . and. . . Oh, Grandma, will . . . will he . . . be like . . . Jerry? How can I be sure?"

Wiping tears from Shona's eyes, Grandma Major said, "What do you mean, honey; will who be like Jerry?"

"Andrew Paul Gabrielson. How can I be sure he's all right and . . .?"

"Andy all right? Why child, I'd stake my life on him. But how . . . I mean . . . well . . . now I'm confused, Shona Leigh. Andrew's abroad on some mission assignment. I've been helping to support him ever since I knew he was called into the ministry. His mother and I roomed together and were close friends in Bible school. Andrew's father died when he was only twelve years old. He was the only child Roxann and Paul ever had. What a boy! God's had his hand upon Andy for so long as I've known him, which is all of his life. Oh, not from nearby, but from afar. They live out on the west coast. Roxann does, I mean. Like I said, Andy's been in mission work overseas for four years now."

"He's here, Grandma. Here. He's doing the preaching for all the young peoples' services over in the young people's tabernacle. The scheduled evangelist took sick; he had to cancel. And Andrew was available -- home on furlough -- so they called him. He asked me to go out to eat with him tomorrow for supper, God willing."

Mrs. Major released Shona. Holding her away from her, she smiled. Then in a soft, very pleased tone of voice she said, "And of course you are going to go with him. Are you not?"

"I consented to; yes. But... what if it's another case like Jerry? I can't believe he's like Jerry; not at all. I trust him. But I still become frightened when I recall that night of horror. I went out with Jerry as a friend, nothing more. I told him so; that we were friends! To me, he was a friend. I thought I could trust him. . . ."

"Forget about comparisons, Shona. Between the two men, I mean, there is no comparison. None whatever. You have nothing to fear with Andy. Nothing, dear girl. Andrew Paul is spiritual and Spirit-filled, a thing I never sensed, not one time, when I was around Jerry. Andy must feel the Lord is leading him in your direction, honey, for Roxann told me via phone a year ago that he -- Andy -- told her he had no plans of dating anyone until he knew God's will about the matter. Like you, he wants God's will more than anything for his life. I am overjoyed that you two have met. You are almost finished with your nurses' training. . . ." Mrs. Major's sentence trailed meaningfully. Then, with a twinkle in her eyes, she said affectionately, "You'd make Andy a wonderful helpmeet, Shona. And you'd have my blessing."

"Oh, Grandma, don't rush things; especially something that may never be more than a supper date," Shona said, smiling and hugging Mrs. Major. "I feel so . . . well . . . so excited though. And Grandma, for the first time in my life, I know I could care for Andrew Paul, if I'm sure it's God's will."

Mrs. Major raised her hands and praised the Lord. Then she said, "Knowing Andy like I do, I'm sure he's thinking the same thing. His coming here was no mere coincidence. Ah no! This has been by Divine appointment, I am sure, Shona. I know Andy well enough to know he wouldn't have asked you to go out with him unless he has something special to tell you. Be prepared, dear child. I predict that, when it's time for that dear boy to go back to his mission station, you'll be going with him -- as his bride. You see, Roxann and I have been praying for this for years; that if it was God's will, He would bring you two together. Step one is reality -- you have met. I hope you have enjoyed each other's company these five days you've been together in services."

"Oh, we have. It's almost like we've known each other all our life. He said it's amazing how many things we have in common."

"God's timing is perfect!" Mrs. Major exclaimed quietly, raising her hands heavenward again in a gesture of praise and thankfulness. Then, to her Heavenly Father, she said softly, "My lips shall forever sing Thy praises and tell Thy power; O Thou hearer and answerer of prayer! Finish now what Thou hast begun. In Jesus' name I ask it, with thanksgiving."

Shona Leigh felt tears swim in her eyes. God's timing! she thought reverently. Yes, it was always perfect. Always! She raised her hands heavenward and joined her grandmother in praising the Lord.