

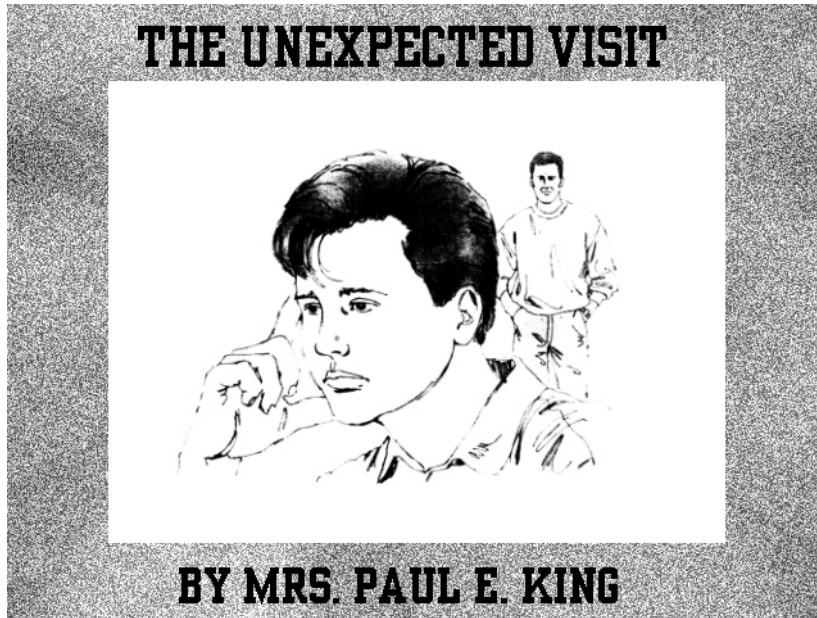
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**THE UNEXPECTED VISIT**  
**By Mrs. Paul E. King**

Jerry dropped his sleeping bag on the floor in Anthony's bedroom; then he hurried down the steps of the split-level house to the family room where Vance and Anthony were in a game of Bible names and locations. It was a great way of sharpening their mind and of readying them for the quiz their Sunday school teacher was going to have at the end of the quarter's Sunday school lessons.

Mr. Thomas was a teacher of teachers and, always at the end of each quarter's lessons he had his class of boys over to his house for snacks and, in many cases, a full-fledged picnic, and for a comprehensive review of the lessons they had just finished in the class. Jerry was amazed over how much he had learned since being promoted into Mr. Thomas' Sunday school class. The man seemed to bring the Bible to life, literally. It was life, he knew, for Jesus, being the Word, was indeed the life. But something about Mr. Thomas seemed to bring it all right down to his -- Jerry's -- day and his time. He had never been in a Sunday school class like the one he was in presently, nor had he ever learned so much about the Bible. He loved the class.

"Hey, Jerry," Vance called, looking up from where he was sitting, "did you hear about Anthony's cousin?"

"Which one?" Jerry asked quickly. "Anthony has more cousins than our apple tree had apples last year." Laughter filled the room.

"You can say that again," Anthony declared with a fresh and hearty outburst of laughter.

"Especially since the frost got the blossoms and your apple crop gave you only twelve apples."

"They were beauties, though," Jerry answered. "The largest apples we ever picked. Dad said he didn't believe he had ever seen any like those twelve that were on that tree last year. But back to your cousin, Anthony, what about him and which one is it?"

"You're going to be surprised when I tell you: this one hails from Alaska, and I haven't seen him in more than five or six years."

"Alaska! Whew! Up among the grizzlies and the polar bears!" Jerry remarked. "I didn't know you had relatives living in Alaska, Anthony."

"I told you fellows I have relatives scattered all over the States, and that's a fact. And need I remind you again that I have dozens and dozens of cousins among the relatives? This Alaskan cousin, whose name is Eric Alexander Rasmussen, is a brainy fellow. His father is my mother's youngest brother. Eric takes after his father, my uncle, in that he is almost a walking

encyclopedia. Uncle Jeremy has enough degrees behind his well-known name for all three of us. I mean, were we to divide his many degrees we'd each of us have enough to make our way in the world among those who are known as intellectuals."

"And this Eric, what about him?"

"He's coming to see us. Us!" Anthony emphasized. "Can you imagine it!"

"Well, that's normal," Jerry stated matter-of-factly. "I'm anxious to meet him. I think it's great that he's coming. When is he to be here?"

"Tonight, God willing; around 7:00 o'clock, Mother informed me."

"That's great, Anthony. Your bedroom's large enough for another guest," Jerry added.

"It's not the space, Jerry," Vance said seriously, "it's what to do with such a brainy fellow when he gets here. I'm sure Anthony's right about his not wanting to share in our sharpening of Bible facts and Bible knowledge."

"He's used to adventure, Jerry," Anthony remarked. "Adventure and excitement of the worldly kind. Uncle Jeremy makes big money. My cousin and his siblings have had everything their hearts have ever desired since Uncle's employment with the government, so my mother has told us with sadness. Frankly, I'm at a complete loss to know what to do to keep Eric from being bored to death while he's here. After all, what does one do for someone who's had everything and whose happiness and pleasures have come from the world?"

"Is he coming by himself?." Jerry wanted to know.

"Yes, he is. I thought that his father or mother may have gotten a yearning to see relatives and friends around here, and that the entire family would be coming. But Mother said he stated he was alone, when she answered the phone a couple of hours ago. Frankly, I'm puzzled."

"He must have a reason for coming," Jerry answered. "I think we should pray and commit Eric to the Lord and stop fretting about what to do

when he arrives. The Bible tells us that the steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord, and since we love the Lord and delight in pleasing Him, I believe our steps -- and our ways -- are being led in accordance to His will and with His plans: I believe Eric's coming is in God's will and His timing. Seldom ever do the three of us get together like this."

"Good reasoning, Jerry. Sound reasoning, really. We'll pray right now, then go on with what we were doing," Anthony answered, as he led the three in prayer and committed Eric completely to the Lord.

Two hours later Anthony's parents greeted the tall, broad-shouldered, courteous and polite Eric as he stood on the front porch after pushing the doorbell.

"Come in. Come in, Eric!" they exclaimed cheerfully. "We're delighted to have you."

"Thank you, Uncle John and Aunt Margaret. I have looked forward to this moment for a long time. I hope you don't mind my sudden, unannounced and unscheduled visit to your home. I realize it isn't the proper thing to do. But when the father of my best friend said he had to make a sudden and totally unplanned trip through here, I felt I had to come along. Is Anthony home?"

"At your service, Eric, and welcome to our home," Anthony cried, hurrying from the family room to greet his cousin, followed by Vance and Jerry.

"You're in for a treat," Anthony announced as he introduced Jerry and Vance. "They're here for the night," he added. "We're working on Bible names and locations plus incidents that happened in and around those locations. It's thrilling, Eric. We have one of the best Sunday school teachers in the world. Maybe, even, the best. It's great that you could come. We'll have a wonderful time together. I know we will. You've really grown."

"So have you, Anthony."

"You're no longer little boys," Uncle John asserted with a smile. "Margaret and I have four young men under our roof tonight and we're proud

of each one. Now, how about something to eat? Your aunt's a marvelous cook, Eric."

"I've never forgotten that, Uncle John, and you may be sure that I'll be consuming my share of her excellent food. But Mr. Hodding and I ate less than two hours ago, so I couldn't eat now. Thank you kindly."

"Then we'll get your bags up to the bedroom," Anthony said.

"He may prefer the guest room," Mrs. Kingsford stated. "It's ready for occupancy, Eric."

"Aunt Margaret, you wouldn't spoil my few days here, would you? You know how close Anthony and I were as little boys. Some of the happiest days of my life were spent right here. All those wonderful walks we took to Fishing Creek and those hikes into Robin Hood Forest! Ah, I have savored each and every memory with a cherished delight and an almost sacred feeling. When life's problems become too heavy and complicated and almost unbearable, I flee back here to this house and to Anthony's room and our Fishing Creek and Robin Hood Forest. I stay here, as long as I need to, in memory, and until I can cope with what is troubling me."

As if a great and brilliant light came on inside Anthony, he recalled the many times Eric and he had discussed spiritual matters and prayed together as little boys down by the little babbling brook which they had called Fishing Creek.

"It gives the creek character," Eric had stated as a little boy, after they had named the brook out of which they had "mined" many a smooth, flat rock and buried them as gold in hollow tree stumps inside the small woods beyond the stream.

"You're quite young to be plagued with 'complicated, heavy, and almost unbearable problems,' dear boy," Mr. Kingsford stated sadly. "I'm sorry about this. What is your problem? We're here to help you."

Eric was silent for a long while. He stared off into space.

Anthony broke the silence with, "Let's get your bags up to the bedroom, Eric. Tomorrow morning, the Lord willing, you and I'll show Jerry and Vance

Fishing Creek and Robin Hood Forest. I go to each place almost daily; only the pretend and glorious imagination of childhood's days are gone. Forever, Eric. They vanished and disappeared completely with young adulthood's emergence. The memories remain, however, and, like yours, mine too will be forever cherished and treasured. I think it will be great fun to find our hidden 'gold,' though. The hollow stumps are still there."

"Thanks, Anthony. But I have something very sobering and extremely serious on my mind. I was going to divulge this to you when we were alone in your room tonight," Eric said. "But I want you to hear it too, Uncle John and Aunt Margaret, and I suppose now is as good a time as any to let you know. I was going to have Anthony tell you after I had told him. But this is cowardly of me, I feel, so I'll tell you now, while we're all together. I came here for a purpose. Maybe for more than one, really."

"Oh, Eric, has something happened to your dear mother, or to my brother?" Mrs. Kingsford asked, putting her arms around her nephew as tears swam in her eyes.

"Our family is facing a crisis, Aunt Margaret," Eric cried as sobs shook his tall frame. "Father and Mother aren't getting along. It's serious. I didn't know what to do, nor to whom to turn. Then I remembered how Anthony and I used to pray and sing and play church in our forest or down by Fishing Creek, and I knew I had to get here. I knew I'd find the answer.

"It seems that we've all lost our way," Eric continued, between sobs. "We have no moorings anymore. No anchor, either. Consequently, we're adrift on a sea of sin, a sea of bickering and arguing and backbiting. We're drifting farther and farther from the things we once believed in and held dear; the things that held us together and made us a loving family. Father's busyness has taken him away from the church and, since Mother doesn't want to go without him, the girls refuse to go. I take Adam with me each Sunday so he won't grow up without some knowledge of the Bible. But it isn't at all like it used to be when Father and Mother took us to church and we all sat together as a family during the worship service.

"I need help!" Eric cried. "This is why I'm here. My soul feels empty and dry and . . . so thirsty. I want to rid it of the bitterness that I feel is seeping into it. I remember how you all prayed together during the family altar times, and how Anthony had his own private time of prayer and Bible reading each and

every day. Your family has solidity; God solidifies and blesses it. Our family is falling apart; it's going the way of the divorce court unless God comes back to His proper place in our home once again."

"Oh Eric! Eric!" Mrs. Kingsford cried. "I have been so burdened for your father. I wrote him and told him of my heavy burden, and I urged him to seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness. I have felt that all was not well with your family."

"Dad's money means nothing to me," Eric said. "I'd rather have the father I remember having had as a little fellow, whose paychecks were nothing to brag about but whose spiritual life and guidance gave stability and nobility and a solidarity to our home, than a single dime of the big money he's now making. I have a father in name only anymore, it seems. He's so busy. But we need him to head up his home. I need help. Our family needs help. I feel I'll die unless God comes to my rescue and saves me and then puts our home together properly again."

"He came to help such as you, dear Eric," Uncle John declared tearfully. "And since it is not His will that any should perish, He's waiting and willing and ready to give you eternal life through the transforming power of His Son Jesus Christ. Open your heart to Him, confess your sins and be obedient to everything He reveals to you and He will save you. Now, as we pray, you tell Him everything that's on your heart just as you told it to us. . . .

What a prayer meeting, and what great forgiveness and glorious victory was Eric's!

"I must call home and tell Mother and Father," he stated. "They wanted to know that I arrived safely. And I feel I must tell them that I have anchored myself in the Lord Jesus Christ and that my soul found its rest."

"By all means, do it, Eric," Uncle John said encouragingly.

Fifteen minutes later, Eric joined the group in the family room. "Mother was crying," he said, with shining eyes and shimmering tears. "She said she was proud of me and that she had been doing a lot of thinking recently. She said she planned to find a more spiritual church than the one we had been going to and that she was going to start going again, God willing.

"Daddy was home! This was great news. He seemed excited and happy to hear my voice. . . . "Eric's tears flowed freely now. "I told him I loved him and that I really missed him. Then I told him I got converted a few minutes ago and that I was a child of God and that, of all things, I wanted him and Mother to come back to God and to experience again the wonderful joy and peace they once knew and had. And, too, I told him I wanted them to rediscover the love they had for each other when they loved the Lord, so our family could be a happy, joyful and united family, like it used to be.

"He told me that he never did stop loving Mother. He said he was just so very busy until he didn't have the time to spend at home like he used to do.

"I begged of him and pleaded with him, to take a job of lesser money and lesser importance so he could once again get his heart fixed up with God and lead his family down the road of salvation and holiness of heart and life and thus fulfill God's designated role for him as the head of the home.

"He wept. Then he asked me to pray for him. He acknowledged his sin and wrongdoing of allowing money and position to crowd God out of his heart and life. I told him that no amount of money he could ever earn, or give to us, would be able to compensate for the loss of the father who, once so loving and caring and God-fearing and godly, had suddenly seemed to have slipped away from us and had become almost a stranger to us. I said, 'We don't want your money, Dad; we want you! We all need you! I need you.'

"I implored him to come back to God and to come back into our lives again, adding how much I loved him and missed him. I told him that, before position and money crowded God and us out, he had always been my ideal.

"He asked me, a second time, to pray for him. Then he told me how very much he, too, had been missing our once happy times together. God is working, I am sure. Now, while I am here, I want in on whatever it is that you are doing, Anthony, to learn more about the Bible. I want to study with you fellows and memorize as many scriptural passages as possible. These will add weight to my anchor. . . ."

Jerry looked at Vance. Vance looked at Anthony. Bored with Bible incidents and names and places? Eric, bored? How wrong could three fellows be! Even a brainy fellow had problems and needed a Savior who

could save and sanctify his soul and make the Holy Word become Life to him.

They were in for a real workout, Anthony knew: a Biblical workout. He was ready and he was excited. Eric would go back to Alaska well fortified and filled with the precious Word of God.