MISTAKEN IDENTITY
By Mrs. Paul E. King

Ours was a rather small town. Small but extremely neat and clean and, proudly we all admitted, we were a closely knit group of Middleville citizens.

Never, in the more than one hundred years of its incorporation, did Middleville have a reported theft or mugging or robbery. Consequently, no one ever thought to lock the door of his dwelling. Each knew the other and trusted and respected each other and his property and property rights. Stores were the exception; they were always locked at night. Not as a measure of distrust but merely out of compliance with insurance policies, et cetera.
Middleville was founded and established on a code of strict religious
principles and moral laws. "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" was the
town's motto. It was not only a motto, it was practiced as well. Children, from
their earliest infancy, were brought up under this wonder-working code and
standard of living and were taught to attend church regularly and
consistently.

Little wonder then that we were all shocked and shook up when Henry
Scroggie reported a theft in his hardware store.

The news of the theft spread like wildfire through Middleville. The
mayor, a man of deep piety and godly character, upon learning of the sin and
evil that had been committed in our town, went into immediate action and
called the town's council members together for earnest prayer and serious
discussion.

"I'm pretty sure I know who the guilty culprit is!" Henry Scroggie
acclaimed.

"You think you know, Henry?" Mayor Hornsby questioned, peering
seriously over the top of his horn-rimmed glasses and staring myopically into
the face of the hardware store owner.

"Well, as I said, I think I know." Mr. Scroggie rubbed his chin pensively.
"I'd hate to accuse until I'm certain-sure. But when I heard this thud in the
store along about two this morning, I got into my bathrobe and hurried
through our apartment to the door into the store. Cracking the door a bit, I
saw the man. He looked an awful lot like Roy Cassater."

The men stared at each other in shocked surprise.

"It would hardly be Roy!" Norman Davis asserted firmly. "He's a loner,
I'll admit, and rather peculiar but I can't believe it's him. In fact, I don't want to
believe that any of our people in Middleville would do such a wicked thing."

"We all hope not, Norman," the mayor said, looking tired. "But not all of
our townspeople are Christians either This being the case, God alone knows
what evils lurk within these hearts. 'The heart is deceitful above all things,
and desperately wicked; who can know it?'" he quoted, shaking his gray head
sadly.
"True enough," Norman admitted. "But could we withhold the accusing finger from Roy until positive evidence attests to his guilt?"

The men looked at each other, knowing Norman well enough to know that he had a reason for making his request.

"That's the only Christian thing to do," the mayor asserted.

Norman fiddled with the pen in his hand. "Sue would be brokenhearted," he said simply and tearfully.

"Sue!" The exclamation came from every lip. Mayor Hornsby pushed his glasses up on the bridge of his nose. "I wasn't aware of the fact that your daughter had romantic designs upon Roy, Norm."

"She doesn't, Mayor. Her designs are spiritual. And I might add, with all the thanks and praise to God, she's been making progress with the boy. Roy's never been the same since his mother passed away. Personally, I don't believe the theft was committed by him."

Henry Scroggie coughed loudly "I don't want to believe it either, Norman. Truth of the matter is, I hope my old eyes deceived me. But whoever it was broke into my store was the image of Roy Cassater. Height, build and all!"

Mayor Hornsby cleared his throat. "We must all seek Divine guidance in handling this matter; nor must we allow news of it to spread."

Norman Davis thumped his pen lightly on the table around which the men were seated. "I'm afraid none of us, including myself, has done anything toward helping Roy since his mother passed away so suddenly Sue alone has sensed the boy's loneliness and utter dejection. She has had him on her heart for weeks. I . . ." his voice faltered and broke. "I feel we'll all be held accountable and responsible to God should Roy's soul be lost."

Every head lowered in sudden shame and humble acknowledgment of Norman's poignant statement.
Bright tears glistened on Mayor Hornsby's drooping silver-gray eyelashes. "I feel I'd like to pray," he said humbly, his voice mellow with tears and compassion. "Anybody care to join me?"

The silence in the room was broken by the instantaneous noise of chairs being pushed away from the table and men dropping to their knees in fervent prayer.

Two weeks later, Roy was back in prayer meeting. Sue's eyes lighted up in joyous anticipation and expectation. It seemed as if the entire church rushed back to greet him.

"You've all been so good to me!" Roy blurted to Norman and the Mayor. "I . . . I was ready to call life quits and to end it all, but Sue . . . ." He stifled a sob. "If it hadn't been for Sue Davis I'd be in hell for sure. She kept me out of hell. She's an angel. A real angel! And I bless God for her and her untiring concern over me and my poor lost soul. She believed in me when others didn't; she cared about my soul when others seemed unconcerned and uninterested, and it has paid off: last night I surrendered to God. I am now a born-again Christian, washed in Jesus' precious Blood . . . all because someone cared and prayed over my soul and I couldn't rest until I got saved"

"Praise God!" a chorus of voices echoed from the church pews.

"Then . . . then . . . you didn't break into . . . I . . . I mean," Henry Scroggie was stuttering like a baby as he ran to Roy and wrapped his arms around him. "I mean -- well, praise the Lord, Roy! Praise the Lord!" he shouted joyously. "I'm glad it wasn't you. I'm glad. Glad!"

Roy's look of total and complete bafflement and curiosity was evidence and proof enough of his innocence. He smiled into Henry's wrinkled old face. "You speak in riddles, Brother Scroggie," he said. "You're glad for something, but what? or why?"

Henry harrumphed and cleared his throat. "I . . . I'm thankful as I can be about something, Roy. Oh, the Lord is good!"

It was Mayor Hornsby who came to Henry Scroggie's rescue "The hardware store was broken into a couple of weeks ago, Roy. The thief was your build, only it wasn't you. Thank God!"
"Henry Scroggie's store broken into!" Roy exclaimed, scratching his head pensively. "Say, why didn't you let a fellow know? I could have helped I know your man, Henry, and he is my build . . . height and all! I saw him only twice. Once, when Mother was rushed to the hospital the night she died; and then he came to our home two weeks ago asking me to join up with him in some kind of business he has." Every eye was focused on Roy.

"What is his business, Roy? Did he say?" the mayor asked

"No, he didn't; and I never thought to ask him. Figured when I got a job it would be in Middleville with the people I know and can trust."

A hallowed silence fell over the men. This, then, was the secret of keeping their young men out of trouble . . . employing them, somehow, in their own places of business and keeping them surrounded by Christian influence and godly principles and guidelines.

"When was your store robbed?" Roy asked Henry Scroggie.

"Two weeks ago last night."

"That's when he was in town," Roy answered. "But I don't know his name nor where he's from nor anything about him. He said he had seen me the night we took Mother to the hospital . . . said he had a part-time job there . . . and he liked my looks and knew I was just the fellow he was needing to go into business.

"Then more likely than not," Norman Davis said, breaking in upon Roy's sentence and speaking carefully, "we can assume, and almost rightly so, that the man is from the city. That's a lead at least."

"And a happy relief for the citizens of Middleville!" Henry Scroggie exclaimed. "When can you begin working for me, Roy? You graduated last year, didn't you?"

"Yes, Sir, I did. I would have applied for employment a long time ago but with Mother's frailty and Father's ailing health . . . well it kept me tied pretty much to home. I almost despaired of living when Mother was taken but Sue proved to me that God does all things well and has a Divine purpose for
everything He does. And it is true. I want a sanctified heart like Sue has and.

"Of course! Of course!" Henry was saying emphatically. "Why not seek it now? Tonight? I need a saved and sanctified young man whom I can turn my business over to. I'm an old man and Middleville needs one of its own citizens to carry the business on. . . ."

But Roy didn't hear. He was hurrying down the aisle to the altar.