

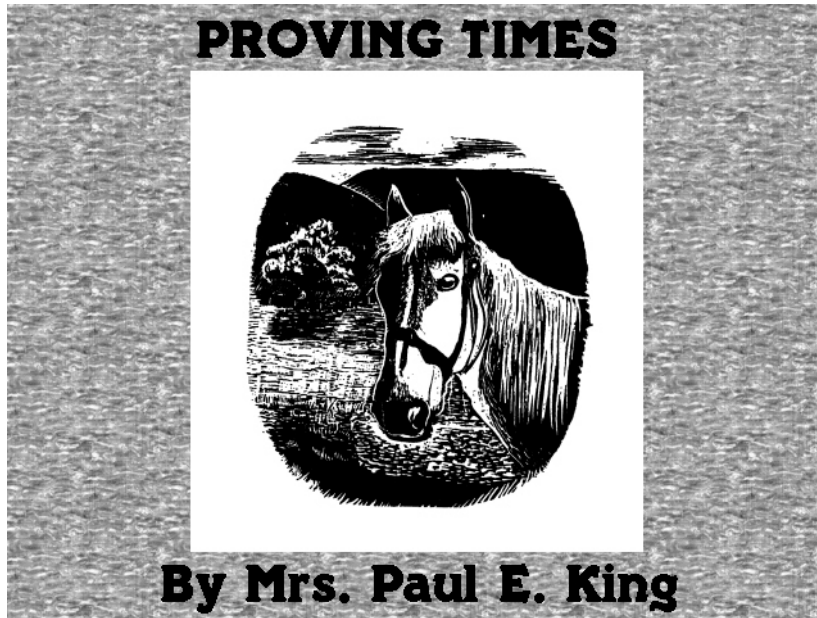
Copyright 2001 By Lucille King
All Rights Reserved and Duplication
Of This Publication Is Forbidden,
Except For Personal Use

* * * * *

Digital Edition 11/09/05
By Holiness Data Ministry

* * * * *

The Sunday School Beacon
March 5, 12, 19, 2000



PROVING TIMES
By Mrs. Paul E. King

Chapter 1

"The true me is my inner self I am no greater than my heart."

David sat for a long time on the fence. Shielding his eyes from the sun with his hands, he watched Midnight. What a beautiful and valuable colt he was! He was jet black -- not a white hair could be found anywhere on his sleek satiny coat. Nor was there a blemish to be detected anywhere on his anatomy. His clear-cut head was almost ideal; his alert, sensitive ears marveled of symmetry, and his beautiful great eyes, set wide apart, were full of fire and intelligence.

Perfect in shape, clean of limb, with a sweeping tail that was the pride of David and his uncle Myron, Midnight made a picture so perfect as to set any true horseman's heart aflame. He was kept out at pasture when the weather was suitable, and from time to time was subjected to careful training by either Uncle Myron or Charlie Johnson . . . the stable groomsmen on Uncle Myron's prosperous farm. He had never yet been harnessed nor had anyone ventured to mount the high-spirited black beauty.

David thought he was the finest thing he had ever seen. He never let a day go by without paying a visit to the pasture to feast his eyes upon the colt's beauty and try to make friends with him.

At first he only ventured to sit on the bars and gaze in wonder and delight while his frisky coltship, as if conscious of the admiration he was eliciting, cavorted and gambled in the most graceful and sportive manner, until, becoming accustomed to David, he gradually ventured nearer and nearer to him, and at last daintily condescended to accept the luscious apple held invitingly out to him.

This was a notable achievement indeed. It went on for well over a week, the horse by degrees becoming so friendly that he submitted to gentle petting. He even appeared to enjoy it, and the many confidential eulogies David showed upon him. It wasn't long till he lost all fear of David and came readily at his call, allowing himself to be led about by the mane and manifesting great affection in his young friend.

He greeted David joyfully when he appeared in sight and whinnied wistfully when he went away, until one day . . . David forgot the proud exhilaration of that moment, although something of fear was intermingled . . . he achieved a mount!

This, however, was totally new and unlooked for to Midnight. He stood motionless for a moment, his graceful head uplifted and his nostrils dilated with mingled astonishment and indignation. The next instant he bounded off like the wind, kicking up his heels and executing other marvelous and frightful gymnastics in his efforts to rid himself of the unaccustomed burden on his back.

A tremendous struggle ensued to see who would be the winner. David, with his strong, lithe arms wound closely around the slender neck and his knees pressing firmly against the glossy sides, clung for all he was worth and -- conquered; while all the time he talked to the startled Midnight in a caressing reassuring voice as they flew around and around the pasture together.

Gradually Midnight slowed his pace. It was a very pleasant, loving familiar voice that was speaking in his ears. As he listened, his fears began to abate; his breakneck speed slackened to a brisk trot, then to a gentle amble, and finally, guided by the friend in whom he began to feel returning confidence, he walked decorously and proudly up to the bars and obediently stopped at the word of command.

David slipped nimbly to the ground. Drawing a tempting apple from his pocket, he presented it to his conquered steed, who munched it enjoyably and immediately began to nose around for another.

"Not today, you black beauty!" David said, his face radiant and his hands busy stroking the shiny neck. "Next time, though, you shall have an extra one."

"'Next time' had better be postponed indefinitely, young man," a quiet but somewhat stern voice remarked just behind him. Turning with a start David found himself face to face with his uncle.

Uncle Myron had been an almost breathless eyewitness of the daring feat of horsemanship, and he had momentarily expected to see his nephew dashed to the ground and maimed or killed -- or the colt ruined by a false step or rolling stone.

He stood out of sight behind a tree, waiting with all the patience he could command for the circus to come to an end and he heaved a great sigh

of relief when David's feet were firmly established again on terra firma . . . and both nephew and horse were unharmed.

David colored scarlet as he met the grave eyes of his uncle. It had not occurred to him that he was taking an unwarrantable liberty. He had long cherished a secret desire that he might help break the frisky colt, and, absorbed in his plans for this result, he had not thought that he would be tampering with another person's property . . . in a most unjustifiable manner. Uncle Myron broke in upon his musings.

"I'm certainly glad you didn't get your bones broken. It could easily have happened, you know."

"I . . . I'm sorry, Uncle Myron," David apologized. "I should have asked you."

"I admire your daring son; and Midnight's had a lesson he will never forget. Through you, he has achieved a very important step of his training. However, this must never happen again. Midnight's a very special horse and I don't want him ruined. Give me your word that you will never mount him again unless I ask you to do so."

"I won't, Uncle. I promise." David swallowed hard, trying to dispel the lump that came up in his throat. "I didn't mean to do anything wrong. I thought I could help to break him," he apologized.

"And you certainly have helped," Uncle Myron remarked, a hint of a chuckle in his voice. "The little scamp seems to like you plenty." His eyes followed the beautiful creature as he trotted gracefully about the pasture. "I prefer however to have the breaking in process conducted under my own supervision." His tone told David explicitly what he meant.

"I understand," David said, "and I shall never mount him again without your permission"

"Be as friendly as you like with him and feed him his apple too, but stay off him," Uncle Myron ordered, turning quickly and heading for the stable.

A few days later the wealthy and prosperous farmer had to leave home for several days on business of great importance.

When he returned, he was greeted with the startling news that a serious accident had befallen Midnight and he was badly lamed.

"How did it happen?" he demanded sternly of Charlie Johnson.

"I can't say, Mr. Shannon, sir. I don't know. I do know that when I went to bring him up from pasture the other night I found him hobbling about on three legs. The vet thinks he's slipped his stifle."

Mr. Shannon suppressed a groan of despair.

"And you haven't the slightest idea how it might have happened?" he asked again.

"No, really, sir. Nothing positive. But I suspect David's been riding him again."

"David promised he'd never again mount him without my permission."

Charlie rubbed his chin vigorously. "It's one thing to promise, sir, and another to keep it," he remarked shortly, and with the air that he could tell more if he chose.

Mr. Shannon said no more. He hurried to the stall where Midnight was kept. When he reappeared he looked very grave and serious.

"Time alone will tell how serious the damage is," he remarked soberly. Turning, he faced David.

"I . . . I heard what you and Charlie Johnson said, Uncle Myron. But I didn't do it. I haven't been inside the fence once since you forbade me to mount Midnight. I've taken him his apple faithfully, but that is all."

"I'm too weary to discuss this further, David. We'll wait till tomorrow." Mr. Shannon's face betrayed his inner feelings.

"But I'm telling you the truth."

The man made no answer. Taking long strides, he walked briskly through the stable door and into the house.

"I didn't do it, Charlie. You believe me, don't you?" David asked in great distress.

"But . . . you did!" Charlie's accusation was like a hard slap in the young man's face. "It's bad policy to cover up one sin with another . . . in this case, the 'other' being a lie."

David was too shocked to speak. He merely stared at Charlie in disbelief at what he had just heard.

At last he spoke. "I'm a Christian gentleman, Charlie, and I don't lie. All liars shall have their part in the lake of fire . . . 'where the fire is not quenched and their worm dieth not,' as the Scripture says so plainly"

Charlie gave a mocking sneer. "Don't try to conceal your sin by quoting Scripture to me," he said, shaking his partially bald and rapidly graying head violently.

"I'm not. Really I'm not. I'm telling you the truth . . . every single bit of the truth." David faced the stable groomsman squarely.

"And what if I told you I'd seen you riding Midnight! What would you say to that? My hair may be getting bald and gray and I tire more readily than in former days, but my eyes still have excellent vision. And I saw you on Midnight the day he was lamed!"

"I really wasn't, Charlie. And what you say doesn't actually make a thing so," David replied softly, feeling no ill will whatever for his accuser.

"Well, now, that is strange!" Charlie mocked.

"Yes, sir, that is strange! I happened to be in the implement shed at dusk and I saw you riding Midnight like the wind. . . ."

"I wasn't on him!" David reaffirmed. "If you saw somebody riding the colt it wasn't I. I was told not to ride him again until given orders to do so and I haven't. I have kept my word."

"Well, now, that is strange!" Charlie mocked again. "But my eyes didn't deceive me: what I saw I saw!"

"But I wasn't anywhere near the pasture that night, Charlie. I was out gathering raspberries for Aunt Sophie till near dark."

For a reply, Charlie merely snorted. "I figure it'll be a whole lot easier on you if you confess it out, David," he retorted sarcastically "I saw you on Midnight; and what I saw I saw!" Thus saying he turned and walked briskly toward the injured colt's stall.

David stood motionless for a long while, his hands bused deep in his pockets but his thoughts far deeper still. What was it his mother had told him so long, long ago when, on another occasion, he had been falsely accused? Ah, yes. He remembered the words and her soft-spoken voice: "Does it really harm you, my son, if someone else believes what is false about you? A million people might believe it but, in realty, you would still be perfectly honest and true; and God knows the real you. Is this not enough?" She had said it so kindly; so wispy and so free from malice.

God knows! His dead mother's voice now seemed very near . . . and so comforting God knows!

"That is enough!" he exclaimed through his tears to his God.

Squaring his shoulders, he walked toward the house, wondering who Charlie Johnson had seen on Midnight's back.

Who did ride the high-spirited colt?

* * * * *

Chapter 2

The day following Charlie Johnson's accusation that David had ridden and lamed Midnight was Sunday. David was thankful for it. Sunday was

always a special day for him; and this Sunday, as he sat beside Aunt Sophie, was a most cherished day. The service was the best yet since having come to live on the farm.

The hymns all seemed to have been selected for him alone and the minister's sermon on the disciples getting into a storm while obeying the Lord's command, gave him new courage and increased faith that God was at the helm of his little ship and was guiding him down the very sea-path which He had chosen for his life.

"I wish Uncle Myron would have come with us," David said, as he drove his aunt home in the car after church.

Aunt Sophie was silent for a long while. She stared straight ahead. A silent tear escaped the thick dark eyelashes and rolled early down her fair cheek. David cast a hasty glance in her direction.

"You . . . you're crying" he exclaimed. "Please, don't cry. I'm sorry if I said the wrong thing."

The woman reached a warm hand outward and touched the strong mannish hand beside her.

"'Tis quite all right, David. I . . . I'm sorry I'm such a baby. Women do cry quite readily and easily, though." She smiled through her tears and David thought she had never looked more lovely. She looked so much like his own dear mother.

"You're far from being a baby, Aunt Sophie," he said, giving the hand an affectionate little squeeze. "Babies don't work like you work; nor do they do all the many acts of kindness and deeds of mercy that you do constantly."

The woman smiled. "You flatter me, my dear nephew. As for your uncle . . . it seems Midnight took precedence over God today. Always, something is in his way. Frankly, I feel like God has allowed this to happen to the colt. . . ."

David gasped. "I . . . don't understand," he said.

"I fear that your uncle has had it in his head to enter the colt in the races. I heard him mention something like this to a friend of his a few days

back. I've been praying hard that God would do anything to hinder. This is such a sinful practice and your uncle's heart is far strayed from his God."

David was silent. In church, his spirit had been transported far above the pasture and Midnight and Charlie Johnson. Now, at mention of the colt, it plummeted suddenly earthward.

"You . . ." he hesitated briefly. "Do you believe that I lamed Midnight?"

Aunt Sophie laughed lightly. "Of course not. I know you didn't do it. You are an honest and upright young man. I have known you since you were a tiny, newborn infant. I know you tell the truth, and what you are told to do or not to do you obey. I remember the night you were converted . . . what a change it made in you! I remember, too, the Sunday morning you got sanctified. Oh, it was so real. Many of us felt the Spirit witness to our heart when you had your personal Pentecost. No, I know you are not to blame for the accident."

A thrill of joy swept over David at this reassurance; then he grew suddenly pale.

"But Charlie Johnson declares he saw me riding the colt."

"Charlie accused you?" Aunt Sophie's face bore an unmistakable sign of incredulity.

"He said he saw me; and what he saw he saw! just like that. But I was out gathering raspberries for your pies and for freezing. Remember?"

"Of course I remember. Now don't worry about it, David. Turn it over to God . . . every single bit of it. Then, when you place it in His hands, leave it there . . . for good!"

"Thanks, Aunt Sophie. I'll do it. You sound just like Mother."

After dinner David went for a walk. Almost unconsciously he wandered down to the pasture; but alas! there was no Midnight there to come whinnying at his call.

He leaned against the fence and wondered who the guilty offender had been. Who did Charlie Johnson see on the sleek, satiny back of the colt? The question troubled him. His brows furrowed in perplexed concern. Another thing bothered him too:

Charlie Johnson had never liked him very well, although he had tried hard to please the man in every way possible without compromising his God-given convictions and Biblical standards. But from the day David had come to take up permanent residence at the Shannon home, Charlie had been short and surly with him. However, he had never manifested so much ill-will as the night he accused him of riding Midnight.

David leaned his head against the railing of the fence to pray. When he did so, something attracted his attention.

"Hey! What's this?" he asked aloud, bending for a closer inspection.

Carefully, he detached a small piece of woolen cloth that had caught under a splinter. Evidently, it had been torn from a garment worn by someone who had been on the fence. He smoothed it out carefully and examined it critically, his eyes all the while growing big and his heart beating wildly from the thoughts that flashed with lightning speed through his brain. Here was his first clue!

"I'll just keep this," he asserted softly to himself. "And someday I shall find the one who wears a suit like this. It's quite possible it belongs to the fellow who rode Midnight!"

He reached into his hip pocket and extracted his billfold. Very carefully he placed the smoothed-out bit of cloth in one of the compartments, then replaced the billfold in his pocket again. In deep thought, he turned his steps homeward.

He went straight to the barn upon reaching home. Charlie was in the stall with Midnight, stroking the lame colt gently and crooning softly in his ear.

"You'd better get well," he was saying. "Your master and I are counting pretty heavy on you getting over this. If only you could talk! You'd tell the boss about that nephew of his, wouldn't you?"

Midnight began a restless stomping of his feet. He whinnied joyfully and turned his face toward the door. Charlie followed the colts gaze. He froze when he saw David standing in the doorway.

Midnight whinnied again, loudly and joyously, his feet, all the while, doing an excited dance.

"What'd you come for?" Charlie asked crossly.

"To see you and Midnight."

"Humph! You may as well not have come then. I don't care to see you and I'd just as soon you stayed away from the colt. Any man who'd cripple a horse. . . ."

"I brought him his apple," David interrupted, ignoring the barbed remark and cold rebuff.

The colt continued his whinnying and prancing. David stepped into the stall beside the magnificent creature and flung his arms about his neck.

Midnight nosed him playfully and gently. He was perfectly content, now that his friend was with him.

Envy toward the young man welled up strong in the groomsman's heart.

"I'd think you'd be too chagrined to show your face in here.., ever! You brazen young man!"

David took the apple from his pocket and gave it to the anxious colt. Turning, he faced Charlie.

"What do you have against me, Charlie?" he asked, to the utter bewilderment of the older man. "I love you, and have nothing in my heart but perfect love for you. Ever since I came to live with my uncle and aunt, you've hated me. I want to be your friend. Please tell me what I've done or what I'm doing that makes you feel as you do toward me."

"You know what you've done! Don't act so innocent!" the man bellowed.

"I'll not argue, Charlie, but I didn't lame the colt."

"Humph! That's your story. I have a different one to tell your uncle. Quite a different one!"

Being a Christian and a peacemaker, David refused to argue. Again, his mother's sweet voice spoke to him from the grave: "Does it really harm you, my son, if someone believes what is false about you? A million people may believe it, yet you would be perfectly innocent, honest, and true. God knows the real you!"

His tender blue eyes looked the stable man full in the face. "I love you, Charlie. I shall be praying for you." With those words David walked through the open doorway, across the sprawling lawn, into the house, leaving Midnight whinnying pitifully after him.

As he entered the riving room, Mr. Shannon laid down the book he had been reading and observed his nephew in a grave but not unkind manner.

"David," he ventured, sitting farther back in the overstuffed chair and folding his hands in his lap, "tell me all you know about Midnight's accident."

"I don't know anything, Uncle Myron. I wasn't here when Charlie brought him up from pasture. I was gathering raspberries for Aunt Sophie and didn't get in till nearly dark."

"Didn't you go to the pasture at all on Friday?"

"Oh, yes; I took the colt his apple around noon and stroked him and talked to him. But he was all right then."

"And you haven't mounted him?"

"No, I haven't. You told me not to; I promised you I wouldn't and I haven't . . . nor will I, until you give me permission."

Mr. Shannon was silent for a long while. He folded and unfolded his hands nervously, his brow, all the while, furrowed deep in perplexing thought.

"If Midnight doesn't get well," he said seriously, "I shall suffer a great loss. However, this would not hurt me nearly so much as to lose faith in somebody I thought a great deal of. . ."

"You mean me, Uncle Myron," David interposed, wondering how much longer the trying ordeal would last.

"God knows, my son." His dead mother's voice and words gave him reassurance and courage. He continued:

"Charlie thinks I'm responsible for the injury, too. He says he saw me riding Midnight. He hasn't told you yet. He said I needed to confess it myself. But he didn't see me; I can't prove it, I know, for no one in the world besides me, and Rags the collie, knows it. Aunt Sophie can tell you though, that I gathered a large pail of wild raspberries for her; and you know I couldn't have ridden Midnight and still have found all the berries I did."

Mr. Shannon looked steadily at David. He was impressed by what his nephew had said. It sounded convincing enough; but who, besides the young man, would have dared to mount the young colt!

After a long pause he remarked, "We'll leave the matter just where it is, David. Sooner or later this mystery will all be cleared up. Maybe the culprit's conscience will get to bothering him and he'll confess. . . ."

Aunt Sophie entered the room just then and the conversation ended.

"Have you heard about Wayne Adams?" the sweet faced woman asked her nephew.

"No, is he ill? I missed him from our Sunday school class this morning and I meant to ask Mr. Adams why he was absent, but didn't get to the back of the church in time to do so."

"He's had a nasty fall of some kind, according to his mother. His head's cut badly and he's in a great deal of pain. I'm sure he'd appreciate a visit from you."

"Was it very bad?" Mr. Shannon asked in concern.

"Mrs. Adams said the doctor had to take twenty stitches to sew the cut up."

David whistled a long, loud whistle. "Twenty stitches! Whew! Must be pretty bad. I wonder how it happened."

"That I don't know," Mrs. Shannon said. "But I think you should see if there's anything we can do, David. I have a fruit basket fixed for him. It's in the kitchen. There's a sack of cookies ready to go, too."

"I'd be happy to go over," David said, following his aunt into the kitchen.

Carrying the heavy laden basket on his arm, David hurled across the fields to the Adams' farm. The afternoon was glorious with sunshine and all the birds seemed to sing their loudest and most beautifully as if to see which could outdo the other in song. As usual, Rags was a faithful companion.

"Stay right here, old pal," David said to the beautiful collie when he stepped upon the porch. "Wait for me. I'll be out after awhile. Wayne's hurt and I'm going in to see him."

Rags wagged his shaggy tail ceremoniously and lay obediently down on the porch, his eyes telling his faithful friend that he understood.

David knocked softly on the door and was soon greeted warmly by Mrs. Adams.

"I'm so glad you've come, David," she said pleasantly, but with a look of grave concern on her sweet face. "Wayne's been a pretty sick boy. You're the only visitor he's had so far."

"I'd have been here before if I had known, Mrs. Adams. Aunt Sophie told me just a short while ago. I'm sorry. . . ."

"He'll be happy to see you. Come right into the bedroom," and she led the way to her son's room.

David was shocked at what he saw. Wayne was propped up in bed by pillows. He looked pale and sickly and his head was wrapped heavily in thick bandages.

"You're some looking sight," he greeted cheerily, extending his hand in greeting.

"Guess I am," Wayne said feebly, managing a weak smile.

"I'm sorry to see you like this!" David exclaimed. "Anything we can do to make things a bit more comfortable for you?"

"Nothing that I know of Mother and Father and the doctor have done everything that's possible. Thanks just the same."

"Here's a basket of fruit and some cookies from Aunt Sophie," David said, setting the fruit on a bedside table. "You know my aunt; she's a great woman, and most generous-hearted. From the feel of this basket, you should have plenty to eat for many a day."

"Thanks, Dave; and thank your aunt for me. Right now I feel too miserable to eat, though."

"I'm sure you do, Wayne. How long will you have to remain in bed? Does the doctor have any idea?"

"He didn't say. I do know that I can't be up, though. I'm powerful dizzy and I can't focus my eyes well, nor can I walk. At times this pain in my head is almost unbearable."

"How'd it happen?"

"Uh . . . what"

"What happened?" David asked again.

"A fall. Silly, too; I'm not a child anymore." Sensing that Wayne was in much pain, David made his visit short. After a fervent and sincere prayer by the sickbed, he rose to leave.

The bedroom closet door was open slightly. As he rose from his knees, David caught sight of a jacket. It held his gaze like a giant magnet. Directly

below the left pocket was a hole! What should he do? Tell the young man or . . .?

"I said, I hope you'll come back again, Dave," Wayne was saying.

"Oh, why, yes I will, I will," David answered dazedly.

Making a quick decision, he bade Wayne a hasty adieu.

What will David do now?

* * * * *

Chapter 3

David walked slowly and deliberately as he left Wayne's house. He was thrown suddenly into a thoughtful and prayerful mood. What was the best thing to do? the wise thing? the right thing?

"Commit thy way unto the Lord; in all thy ways acknowledge Him and He shall direct thy paths." The Scripture seemed to speak calmly to his troubled heart.

He thrust his hands deep into his pockets and walked on, a flurry of thoughts rushing through his brain, each striving for the mastery. Wayne Adams, the guilty one! David had never known him to come near where the colt pastured. Had he done the injuring deliberately?

David remembered past digs and verbal barbs of Wayne's when they attended school together. A lump rose in his throat. Wayne had always been envious of his peer, for David's grades far surpassed his, as well as any and all others in his class. His wonderful experience of salvation and sanctification had kept him constantly the same . . . sweet, kind, gentle, God-like and courteous. This, along with the God-endowed ability to repay kindness and love for hatred and malice, needed Wayne to no end. David recalled a past statement just then.

"Must you always be good!" Wayne ejaculated angrily one day in school when David had taken his stand for truth and righteousness. "You

goody, goody . . .!" He had hissed the words, hoping desperately to anger David.

The latter merely smiled and said firmly, "Truth will stand forever Wayne. I shall stand by it always. Remember the words of the poet, 'Truth crushed to earth shall rise again; the eternal years of God are hers. . . .'"

"Quiet! Quiet!" the young man shrieked. "Who cares about truth! Who cares about being good! Live it up, man! Live it up!"

"I am, Wayne . . . in Christ. Mine is a happy life; a satisfied life, with peace and joy and a good conscience that permits me to sleep at night."

"You and your outdated ideas," Wayne retorted angrily, hurrying down the school corridor away from David.

This, and many another painful and obnoxious incident presented itself to David as he walked homeward.

Aunt Sophie met him at the door

"How is he, Dave?" she asked anxiously.

"He looks bad, Aunt Sophie. Really bad."

"And he's not a Christian either!" Aunt Sophie's eyes took on a troubled look.

"I know it." Very cautiously he asked, "May I talk to you -- alone somewhere, Aunt Sophie? Uncle Myron mustn't hear this."

"Why, yes, dear boy. Yes. But why the secrecy?"

"You'll soon know," was the reply.

"Your uncle's taking his Sunday afternoon nap. What about the arbor swing beneath the wisteria

"Fine. That's fine," David said, following his aunt to the swing.

"I hadn't planned to say anything to anybody Aunt Sophie; but I prayed much as I walked home and I felt I should tell you. Together, you and I must pray about it."

Aunt Sophie searched her nephew's face anxiously.

"I think I know who lamed the colt."

"You do? Are you sure, David? It's wrong and evil to falsely accuse."

Very carefully, David took the fragment of evidence from his billfold and laid it before his aunt.

"I found this encased beneath a splinter on the top rail of the entranceway to the pasture."

"But . . . but . . ." Aunt Sophie began, not understanding.

"The coat belongs to Wayne Adams."

Aunt Sophie's hands flew to her throat. "Oh-h!" she gasped. Then, slowly she asked, "But are you sure, Davie?"

"Positive. After praying with Wayne, I turned to leave. In turning I came face to face with the partially opened closet door. Hanging on the door was the jacket . . . with a hole exactly the size of this piece of cloth."

"Did you mention anything to Wayne about it? Does he know? Aunt Sophie asked, lifting the cloth and looking at it carefully.

"If you mean did I tell him, no. But his face took on a peculiar look when he saw my fixed stare at the coat. I couldn't help staring, Aunt Sophie," David explained. "I was perfectly shocked and so taken by surprise until I did it unconsciously. Now, what shall I do about it. I've committed it all to Christ I want to do the right thing in the right way at the right time."

For a long while Mrs. Shannon was silent. Her head was bowed in prayer. All was quiet and peaceful in the garden save for the lusty singing of happy birds and the soft, low creak of the swing as it rocked gently back and forth.

The lovely head raised then. "I believe you should tell Wayne about the cloth, David. Did he not tell you how he got hurt?"

"No. Each time I asked him what happened, he changed the conversation or turned it off lightly"

"Undoubtedly he's already troubled," Aunt Sophie said. "But we will join together in prayer that God will make him willing to confess."

"I promised I'd be back to see him. Next time I shall take this bit of cloth from my pocket and show him what I found at the pasture fence."

"Isn't the word of the Lord true!" the aunt exclaimed, reverently. "His Word says, 'And be sure, your sin will find you out.' This is certainly no understatement! God uses strange, and many times mysterious ways and things, or people to uncover covered sin," she said thoughtfully, rising and going into the kitchen.

The following day, David again paid a visit on the injured neighbor boy. He took a Christian book along, hoping for an opportunity to read to the patient.

"Feeling better?" he asked brightly, seeing Wayne propped up against the pillows.

"I . . . I'm afraid not," he answered. "But don't tell Mother. She worries so. My head's driving me crazy with pain."

"How did it happen, Wayne?" David asked the question as gently as possible.

Wayne's face flushed momentarily; then all the color drained suddenly from it.

"Would this make it easier for you to explain?" David brought out the piece of cloth.

"Where'd you find that?" Wayne's face was now the pallor of death.

"On a splinter of the rail at the pasture. You rode Midnight, didn't you? He threw you and. . . ."

Meeting David's honest eyes, Wayne burst out defiantly, "What if I did! Nobody's hurt but I. I saw you ride him one day and thought I'd risk a turn myself. That colt's a dandy, all right; but he sure needs breaking in. I tore my jacket getting over the bars. I had a wonderful ride till he reared up in the air and threw me. He sure took a stumble himself Whew! He did me up good. Can't figure out yet how I ever got home, but I did.

"I really saw the stars for a minute. Then everything got black and I was unconscious. When I came around, I tried to get up, but couldn't. So I just laid down on the ground till I was able to drag my body back home."

"Why didn't you tell my uncle what happened? The colt's hurt bad. . . ."

Wayne's face now took on such a look of utter dejection that David felt sorry he had even mentioned the colts condition.

"You . . . you. . . ." Wayne's hand went out in search of David's. "You . . . won't squeal on me, will you?"

"We must do what's right, Wayne; and I wouldn't for the world hurt you deliberately, but my uncle and Charlie think I did it."

"Please, David, don't tell. Promise you won't. At least not till I'm well."

"I'll wait, Wayne; but remember the words from the Bible: 'He that covereth his sins shall not prosper; but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy.'"

"I . . . should have . . . studied the Bible more. . . ."

"I brought a good book along. Thought you'd like me to read to you."

"Not today," Wayne replied. "I feel wretchedly miserable. Oh, this dreadful pain!" with pain and grabbed at his head

"Shouldn't the doctor be called?"

"Nothing he can do. Leastways, he says he's doing everything that can be done."

"I'll pray with you then. God can do the impossible."

"You're some boy!" Wayne said, looking full in David's face. "I . . . I . . . used to call you a square; but . . well . . . I believe I'm changing my opinion some."

You're the only fellow who's concerned enough about me to come and see me. Maybe I'll feel stronger this evening and if you could, I'd like for you to read to me then. . . ."

Thus it was agreed; and when David stepped upon the Adams' porch that evening he knew that something was seriously wrong.

"Come in. Oh, do come in!" Mrs. Adams said, wringing her hands frantically. "He's very ill, David. Brain fever the doctor says."

Several weeks of suspense and great anxiety now followed. Wayne's life was despaired of. David remained much by the bedside of the ill young man, praying fervently for his salvation. "At any cost . . . at any cost, save him," he cried.

Upon returning home from the Adams' one night, looking tired and haggard and worn, he was met at the door by Mr. Shannon.

"Midnight's showing definite signs of rapid improvement," he said with shining eyes. "I feel that eventually he will be as sound as ever. Quite a relief, after all these long weeks of anxious waiting and watching."

"That's great news, Uncle."

"How's Wayne"

"None better."

"Still unconscious?"

"Still unconscious," David answered seating himself in one of the chairs and dropping his face into his hands. "Mrs. Adams' health is on the brink of collapse. She won't leave his side unless she's forced to do so."

"Who's sitting with Wayne tonight, Dave?"

"His father."

Mr. Shannon was thoughtful. He cupped his chin in the palm of his hand. "Wonder how it would be if I took a turn at sitting with the boy?" David's tired eyes brightened.

"Oh, Uncle Myron, that would be such a help! The Adams are nearly worn out with fatigue and worry. But Mr. Adams insisted that I come home and get a decent night of rest and sleep. Said he'd stay in the overstuffed chair by Wayne's bed. I know they'd appreciate your help."

"I'll go then." Thus saying Mr. Shannon stepped out into the night.

Sometime during the night as he sat by the bedside, Mr. Shannon heard a weak, faint voice. It was calling for David. The man bent his ear over the moving lips.

"David . . . you . . . have something . . . real . . . in your soul. I . . . made it . . . hard on you . . . at school; but . . . will you forgive . . . me? Will . . . you . . . Dave? And . . . now . . . you're taking the blame . . . for Midnight, too. I . . . I . . . did it! Forgive . . . me . . . p-l-e-a s-e!" It was a plea for mercy. Tears stole silently into Mr. Shannon's eyes. He listened eagerly, straining hard to hear the words of the boy.

The lips were still and silent for a long time, but the head on pillow tossed fitfully.

Mr. Shannon, shocked and stunned by what he had just heard, sat as one hypnotized.

The lips moved again and the almost inaudible voice continued. "You . . . are a true Christian, David. You . . . have . . . the Lord. I want Him, too. Oh, where is . . . He? Why . . . can't I find Him? You . . . took . . . my blame. You . . .

. . . are . . . a true . . . Christian. You . . . kept still about the colt . . . and bore the suspicion and . . . blame. . . ."

The sentence trailed off to nothingness.

Mr. Shannon sat as one petrified. If the thought of fatigue or drowsiness had ever entered his mind, it was gone now. He was wide awake and alert.

Wayne Adams, unconscious and near death, confessing his troubled thoughts and his sins . . . aloud!

His own wrongdoing and dead profession pricked mercilessly at the wealthy man's heart. He felt as if the room were closing in upon him. Cold sweat broke out all over his body. He trembled violently. One's sins would find him out! Sooner or later, they would! If not confessed when one's mind was clear, God would wrest it from the unconscious body. The thought startled and shook him.

Not realizing what he was doing, his head dropped into his hands. He began to weep.

"Forgive me, O Lord; and be merciful to me a sinner," he pleaded for help. "I've relegated You to second place in my heart and life and . . . You fled. Took your departure from my heart. I want You back again, dear Lord . . . back in my heart. . . ."

A peace heretofore unknown flooded the prosperous man's heart. His joy was indescribable.

The lips on the bed were silent and the head had ceased its fitful tossing. A deep heavy breathing filled the room.

Patting the thin, frail hand on the sheet, Mr. Shannon whispered softly into the ear of the young man, "Thank you, Wayne. It's all right. I'm now all right and you're going to be! I've changed my plans for the colt, too. I was going pretty far downward."

The eyelids fluttered briefly. Quite unexpectedly they opened.

"Where's David?" a voice asked weakly and feebly.

"He's home trying to get a little sleep," Mr. Shannon answered. "But everything's going to be all right."

"Not unless you . . . and God and David . . . can forgive me, it won't," Wayne was saying a look of great distress on his face.

"You are forgiven, dear man."

"You . . . forgive me . . . for what I did to the colt?" The too-large eyes, sunken far back into the head, searched the face of the man eagerly. It was as though every breath depended upon the forgiveness.

"I freely forgive you Wayne."

The eyes on the pillow closed. Hot tears surged from the closed lids and rolled uncontrollably down the white cheeks.

"Tell Dave to forgive me, please. He'll know what for. I'm . . . so . . . weak. Oh . . . if only God would . . . forgive me! Save my soul, Jesus!" he wailed in his weak voice. "Save me! Please."

"He'll do it! He'll do it, Wayne," Mr. Shannon encouraged. "He just saved me . . . the biggest hypocrite in this entire valley, and He's here to forgive and save you."

"Oh, He is! Yes, He is! He's right here! Praise His holy Name!" the young man burst out joyously. "My heart has been washed in His blood!"

With a relaxed, happy smile upon his face, Wayne's eyes closed. He was soon breathing normally and heavily . . . sleeping soundly.

As David sat by his bedside the following day, Wayne said, "I'm so thankful that you stood true to God . . . under all those trying circumstances. You've had your proving times . . . without number . . . and always, you remained the same. It's the thing that put me under mighty conviction. Thank God, I'm a new man in Christ. I've been asking Him to sanctify my heart now. I want a clean heart . . . and pure. . . ."

That evening, before the sun had set completely, Wayne was sanctified. It was a time of great rejoicing for all. Wayne was definitely on the road to full and complete recovery. God was working out His plan and purpose.

Out in the stable, at the Shannon farm, kneeling humbly and in deep contrition of heart, Charlie Johnson was storming the heaven. "Oh, God, give me what that young man David has. . . ."

THE END