

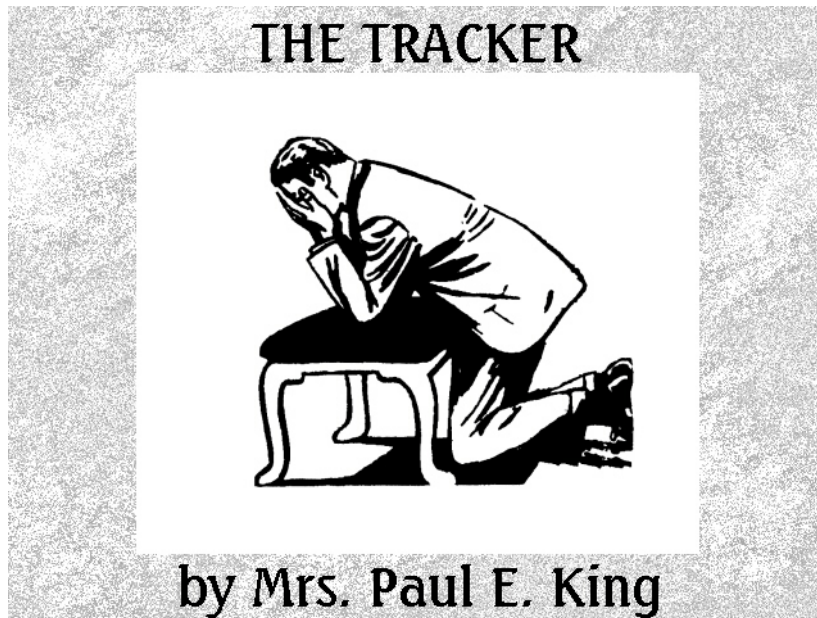
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**THE TRACKER**  
**By Mrs. Paul E. King**

He stared out into the darkness, only, it wasn't dark: lights from the tall city buildings twinkled and danced from thousands of the windows. Along with the shimmering glittering window lights, the neon signs, advertising their clubs, restaurants, theaters, bars and such, lit the streets below him until the shining stars were obliterated from view. This was his world now; the world he had chosen some five years ago; a world of bright night lights,

entertainment and independent living; a world with no restraints from anyone over him; a world where he could do as he pleased.

He had come to the city, gotten a job in the field of his choice and settled into an apartment in the very center of the glitz, glamour and entertainment of the metropolis, relishing every sound that floated up to him from the ever-busy street below him. He even enjoyed the noise of the younger set revving up their motors as they cruised into the early morning hours. These were his peers, his counterparts, young people with whom he now felt comfortable and "at home," though he mingled little with them due to the nature and the hours of his good-paying job. He had his friends, to be sure, and they did many and various things together; things that brought him great worldly pleasure and much laughter and fun, as he phrased it. Still, he was pretty much a loner: a thing of his choosing.

He looked down upon the busy street, watching the slowly moving cars and the people milling about on the sidewalks, some wearing smiles and happy faces, others looking bored, tired and weary. The city seemed never to sleep, so bright were the lights and so full of activity, hustle and bustle were in its streets. The main boulevards, especially and particularly. And he was a part of it all. For five years, a part of it, running his life as he pleased; as he wanted to run it, with no one around to "inhibit," deter or startle him with a single "Thou shalt" or "Thou shalt not."

Five years! he thought, as he walked away from the shiny-clean windows and sat down on the sofa, debating silently how he should spend the evening. It was all before him. Beneath him, really; every kind of entertainment and worldly pleasure was only seven floors beneath his comfortable apartment. It was only minutes away. A fast ride down the elevator to the first floor and the sidewalk and he was there.

Mentally, he calculated the money he would save by not leaving the apartment and by staying home. There was a price tag to worldly pleasure. Sometimes a price so exorbitant and high that no amount of money could or ever would be able to pay for or restore what was lost, defiled and gone.

He sat, thinking. The savings in his bank account was growing, thanks to his determination to spend more evenings in the apartment than to "throw it away" night after night after night. The house he wanted to build was becoming more and more a reality.

He walked to the windows again. The dancing neon lights beckoned him; the signs above the doors lured him, seeming to almost pull him inside. So alluring. So very alluring and tempting. He was familiar with what was inside. Still, the price tag! Was he willing to pay it? Was it worth the short, fleeting moments of pleasure? How much more could he put into his savings by not yielding!

Almost by force, he tore himself away from the well-lighted, busy street. Pulling the draperies shut tight, he picked a book off a shelf and sat down to read, feeling smug for having made the wise decision.

Not far into the first chapter of the book, he tossed it onto the floor. How had he ever gotten it: he wondered, trying to remember when and where he had bought it. Try as he may, he couldn't recall a single circumstance that had led to the purchase of the book. Nor could he remember for how long he had had it, even.

Feeling irritated and restless, he got to his feet and paced the floor. In a fleeting moment he almost yielded to the temptation to make the rounds of the neon lights beneath him, but something seemed to be holding him back.

Back and forth, he paced. Back and forth; from the living room into the bedroom and his office, then through the dining room and the kitchen, making the rounds, back and forth. Back and forth, the book open on the floor in the living room, looking like its "arms" were open wide for him to peruse its contents further.

In disgust, he picked it up and slammed it shut before tossing it into a nearby, comfortable overstuffed chair. At least it didn't have the illusion for an invitation to read it like it did while lying open on the floor.

He poured water into the coffee pot and added the right amount of coffee to make it strong. Yes, he wanted it strong; maybe it would settle him down and quiet the restlessness he was experiencing inside his breast and his being. For four days and nights he had been plagued by it. Tonight, however, it was worse than all four days and nights put together. Was he having a nervous breakdown? he wondered. And where did the book come from? How did it get into his apartment?

Leaning against the counter top in the kitchen, he watched as the coffee dripped into the server beneath, his mind still on the book, not on the fragrant smelling, amber colored brew now fastly filling up the pot.

It came back to him then. Crashing, rolling, tumbling; like a mighty wave it washed over him, unwinding scenes and memories from the past. Vivid scenes, treasured memories, beloved people, sacred places and events. Scene after scene rolled back -- out of the past; a past he had willed to forget and put forever behind him. And, until four days ago, it had been securely put behind him. So he thought, at least.

Feeling like he was suffocating, he poured coffee into a cup and drank hastily of the steaming-hot brew, hoping the caffeine would serve as a stimuli and drive the memories away. It failed miserably.

Pouring himself a second, then a third, cup of coffee, he was transported quickly and forcibly into the past, all against his will; no way could he sidestep it nor thrust it out of his mind.

He remembered the service and the date and the time. He was fifteen at the time. It was in the church where his grandmother attended and where she brought him up in. With his parents having been killed in an accident when he was a mere toddler, his widowed grandmother raised him as her own son.

He was tall for his age, always. Strong willed, too, wanting to do things his way rather than to obey orders and do what he was told. He had gone to church regularly, out of compulsion; sensed God's presence many times. But that particular morning it was different: it was for him. He had never felt God's Spirit deal so strongly with him before. He resisted the call to repentance. Still the Spirit lingered, pleading with him and imploring him to give his heart to God. So strong was the pull God-ward and so mighty was conviction until he trembled and shook beneath it. Still he resisted steeling himself against the Heavenly pull and urgency of the pleading One. And then, suddenly, the Spirit was gone. So was the conviction he had felt. His body ceased its shaking and its trembling. He sealed back against the pew and tried to forget about what had just taken place.

At seventeen he secured employment and upon graduation from high school he was fully employed and out on his own, telling his grandmother

that he could make it on his own. He moved away, wanting to be totally independent and free from the sound of her voice praying for him and his salvation. And he had, so he thought. Until now.

He swallowed the strong, hot coffee, realizing suddenly that, although he had moved away from the sound of her voice in prayer for him, he could never get away from the Holy Ghost, who was tracking him down in the very center of the city with all its attractions, allurements, glamour and glitz. There was no way he could ever escape nor hide from God. Never! No matter where he traveled to nor how far he went, the Great Tracker of Heaven would find and locate him; one could never escape Him, nor hide from Him.

His body trembled and shook now, much like it did in the church service that morning. He set the empty coffee cup down. His hands were clammy cold and wet and trembling. He was at the crossroad again. He was facing a crisis. A serious crisis. An eternal crisis. Would he ever again be visited by Heaven's Divine Tracker and Searcher of the lost if he spurned, rebelled and resisted Him again?

The question shocked him into action. He knew so much. So very much, even though he hadn't acted upon what he knew he should have done years ago. There was a price for this too -- his inaction -- and it would only become even greater and more costly if he continued down the road which he was presently traveling on. Was it worth it, the cost at the end of life's road? Which would it be for him, heaven or hell? He must decide. Now. He sensed it; felt it. It was critical, he knew.

Fearing lest he drop into the fires of hell, he fell to the floor on his knees, imploring God's pardon, forgiveness and mercy on his lost soul, and not until he knew his name was recorded in the Book of Heaven did he get to his feet.

With a song on his lips and peace in his heart, he hurried to the living room where he gently picked up the book which he had so angrily tossed into the chair. He was now ready to read all he could about the Workings of the Holy Spirit, God's great Sheriff of Heaven and the Tracker of lost souls.

THE END

