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AT THE CROSSROADS
by **Minnie E. Ludwig**

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DEDICATED

To my devoted husband, Rev. Theodore Ludwig, whose consecrated life, and love for the
Master, and whose untiring labors for the lost have been a constant inspiration to me, as we have
labored side by side, proclaiming the glorious gospel, this book is affectionately dedicated.

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Chapter 1 MAKING A CHOICE

In the corner of the dimly lighted room, on a low chair, sat little Stephen Ludlow, an orphan boy. His head was resting in another chair before him. Four weeks had passed since his father had died. He was lonesome, tired, and hungry. It was late in the evening and he had not yet partaken of his scanty evening meal.

"Sonny, you will have to vacate! I have rented this house to someone else. You have already lived here several weeks since the rent was due!"

These words were spoken by a hardhearted landlord as he entered, uninvited, the half-open door. The sudden sound of a harsh voice in the room startled Stephen. He lifted his head and looked frightened.

When the man saw the pathetic look on the boy's face, his voice became a little more tender and he added, "You should not live here alone anyway; you had better go to some of your relatives." Then standing directly in front of Stephen and eyeing him critically he added, "Where is your mother?"

"I never had a mother," he answered, and with a choking voice turned his face to the wall, wiping the tears away with the sleeve of his threadbare coat; but soon collecting himself he said, "I guess I'll go to grandfather's house if I can find him. Will you please let me stay in the old shack on the alley, where old Tim used to live, until I can go to grandfather's?"

"No objection at all; I will tell the family moving in here not to molest you there," he said, his conscience feeling somewhat more at ease for not turning the little orphan boy out without a place to go.

"You will find the shed most awfully dirty; better have a housecleaning first -- at any rate, be sure and move out tomorrow. The Browns are going to move in next day." With these words the landlord hastened away.

Stephen had been living there with his father ever since his earliest recollections. His environment was quite different from that of his father when he was a boy.

Charles Ludlow, Stephen's father, was reared in a beautiful little city in Illinois. His father, Stephen's grandfather, was a very prosperous merchant in the city of Elm Point. He had purchased a block in the outskirts of the city and here had built their beautiful new home. He had chosen this location so they might have the advantage of pure air and so the children might have room to play. The family consisted of Mr. Ludlow, his wife, and their two children, Charles and Elizabeth.

The home and surroundings were ideal. A rippling stream, fed by a spring on the hillside, was flowing through one corner of the back yard. There were large and beautiful shade trees, flowers and a well-kept lawn. It was all so beautiful that people in the neighborhood called it the Ludlow Park.

The children, Charles and his sister, were indeed happy. They each had a little garden where they planted flowers of their own. They often made little boats and floated them on the rippling stream. Thinking that a boy's life was hardly complete without a dog, one never-to-be-forgotten day Mr. Ludlow brought a beautiful fox terrier home for Charles, which he immediately named Spot because of the pretty black spot on his forehead.

While Spot and Charles were becoming fast friends and constant companions, Elizabeth became more and more attached to Muggins, her little black and white kitten that Charles had rescued from the hands of some rude boys who were pelting it with stones.

Charles's father and mother were very devoted Christians and members of the church. They loved their children dearly, and their constant aim in life was to lead them to accept Christ in their early childhood and become useful citizens and a blessing to humanity.

When Charles was twelve years of age, their pastor, with the assistance of an evangelist, conducted a revival meeting in their church. At this time Charles saw some of the children and young people, among them his own sister Elizabeth, yield their lives to the Lord, and his soul became awakened to his own need of God. His parents had hoped and prayed that the time had come when he also would become a Christian. One day, however, while he was waiting for his mother, just outside the store, where she was purchasing a few articles, he overheard a conversation which greatly affected his state of mind.

A very dignified looking gentleman, whom Charles recognized as one of the city pastors, and another man were engaged in earnest conversation, discussing the revival then in progress. The minister, with iron gray hair, who in the eyes of Charles looked very wise, made some slighting remarks regarding the revival meetings, especially the conversion of children, saying that he thought it to be the height of folly to expect children not more than twelve or thirteen years of age to become Christians and that he was convinced that it was all merely excitement.

Charles's big brown eyes were fastened on the speaker and for a moment he resented what was said; but the man looked so wise and the longer he listened to his argument against childhood conversion the more he began to waver in the decision he had made the previous night, to give his heart to God.

Charles said nothing to his parents about the conversation he had overheard. But he now seemed utterly indifferent to all that was said, and they were disappointed and grieved at the attitude he took at the service that night. He resented the thought of anyone saying that he was excited about religion.

Charles developed into a handsome, stalwart young man physically. He was tall, broad-shouldered and had beautiful chestnut brown hair and large brown eyes.

Year after year passed by and Charles was now eighteen years of age; and although he was kind to his parents and attended church services and Sunday School regularly, yet the time had never come when he was quite ready to yield to the call of the Master. He was in high school and was now keeping company with a beautiful young woman, Viana Harvey. At the age of eleven Viana had given her heart to Jesus. Charles remembered well when she arose to give her testimony after the Lord had spoken peace to her soul. He could almost see heaven in her soft blue eyes. Her beautiful golden hair, as it fell in curls over her forehead and shoulders, reminded him of the crown the Bible says the saints in heaven shall wear. That was six years ago and she had been true to her Master in all the hard problems she had met in her school life and elsewhere. She was now pianist in the church and had a sweet soprano voice and frequently sang solos. She often spoke to

Charles about spiritual things and urged him to become a Christian. He always agreed that it was the only reasonable thing to do, but invariably deferred the matter to some future time. Mr. and Mrs. Ludlow had always carefully warned their children regarding the evil influence of many of the modern amusements, and thus far neither Charles nor Elizabeth had ever asked to be permitted to attend such as the dance, the shows, or to play cards or attend the Sunday baseball.

One day Charles came home and at the supper table told his parents that the principal of the high school demanded that the history class, as a body, go to the show that night. Charles had informed him that he did not wish to attend and that his parents objected. The professor answered haughtily, "I inform you, young man, that I am teaching this class and not your parents; if you wish to be graduated with the class I advise you to do as you are bidden."

After the evening meal, Mr. and Mrs. Ludlow got into their car and drove to the professor's home. He assured them that the pictures to be shown were all good, historical pictures. Mrs. Ludlow answered, "I do not doubt that the pictures shown tonight will be educational, but I am personally acquainted with several fine young people who refused to attend shows, but who under just such circumstances were persuaded to go, and the same night there were thrown on the canvas some pictures that were suggestive of evil, and after they had once had a taste of such things, they were led on and are now regularly going to see the vilest pictures."

The professor was very courteous, but insisted that Charles must go. That evening for the first time Charles entered the door of a theater building. His schoolmates, who were not accustomed to seeing him there, made some remarks that cut deep. One said, "Hello, Charles, do you feel comfortable?" while another added, "Wouldn't you rather be in Sunday School?"

Charles did not answer, but was cut to the heart. The pictures were all that the professor said they would be, but just when the audience thought it over and all were beginning to move about, the manager stepped to the platform, saying, "I believe you have enjoyed the pictures you have seen, but of course historical pictures are always a little tame; so now we will give you ten minutes of laughter free of charge."

At this moment the professor involuntarily looked at Charles, who seemed to be engrossed in serious thoughts. He then spoke to the manager in a whisper, telling him that he must, by no means, show any but absolutely clean pictures. "Leave that to me," he answered laughingly, "just a little fun, just a little laughter, that is all."

To the manager, accustomed to looking at vile pictures, no doubt this one looked clean. The picture proved to be that of a company of young people at a house party -- yes, there was much laughter, but also enough that was suggestive of evil to poison a clean mind. One thing very noticeable among the girls was the scarcity of apparel; also, that the hero among the company of young men was continuously puffing away at a cigarette and a popular young woman, with painted lips and a boyish bob, occasionally smoking. There was also much vulgar dancing.

The professor seemed ill at ease and at first thought that he should apologize to Mr. and Mrs. Ludlow and Charles, but after a second thought decided not to, saying to himself, "It is no use to cater to their whims."

When Charles left the theater that night some more remarks were flung at him. One said, "Well, Charley, it didn't kill you to go to the show, did it?" Another said sarcastically, "Let me feel your pulse, you look pale"; but one young man among them, Arnold Darrow, said, "You fellows shut up; I admire one who has some convictions." Then turning to Charles he said in an undertone, "Now I really think that you are missing half of your life by not taking in some of these things. Why not attend some of the good shows? Surely there is no harm in all of them. I shall go to see 'Dottie and Her Many Friends' next week at the Empress, and I am told that this is a fine show -- better decide to go with me."

Without waiting for an answer Arnold turned the corner, calling back over his shoulder to Charles, "You think about it; I hope that you will decide to go. My uncle gave me two tickets, and you may have one of them. Good night."

Charles walked home whistling a merry tune, but somehow he felt ill at ease and secretly hoped that his parents had retired. If not, they would doubtless ask some questions in regard to the show and he did not feel at all inclined to talk about it. Again, he felt that they would almost be able to read his thoughts, for he had halfway decided to go to the Empress, just to see what the show was like; however, he would not have his mother to know this for the world. He reached his home, threw the door wide open, and with a hearty "Hello!" good-naturedly flung his cap into his sister's lap. Then seeing his mother reclining in a large rocking chair, he walked straight to her, sat down on her knee, put his arms around her, planted a kiss on her forehead, saying, "Hello, Mumsie, you haven't rocked me for a long time -- now rock me to sleep."

Soon Charles entered his room and was busy with his books. He thought at times that his home was a little foretaste of heaven, all were so kind.

On Sunday morning the Ludlows got into their new car, and with Charles at the wheel, which was his delight, they soon arrived at the church. The pastor preached from the text, "God is our refuge and strength." After arriving at home Charles again sat down on his mother's knee, which he had always loved to do, and taking her face between his hands said, "mother, that was a wonderful sermon."

Charles and his mother then had a long, confidential talk, his mother telling him how his father and she were praying earnestly that he might soon become a Christian and she also warned him of the danger of neglecting the salvation of his soul.

"Mother," he said, "I do want to be a Christian. There is nothing in the world that appeals to me like the life you and father are living."

"Then, Charles," she said, "Why not give your heart to the Lord now?"

Charles did not answer. His mother slipped down from her chair on her knees, laid her hand gently on his, and looked up into his face. Charles knew the meaning of that look, and knelt by her side, bowing his head on her chair while she prayed. His heart was very tender, but she could

not persuade him to yield to God. When they arose he kissed her, saying, "You are the dearest mother in the wide world."

When Charles arrived at home from school the following Tuesday evening he saw a number of cars parked in front of their home and his father and mother coming out of the house carrying several well-filled baskets.

"Just in time, Charles," said his father. "Mother has planned a dinner at Shady Brook for us and has invited a few friends."

"Hurrah!" Charles shouted in boyish glee, and taking a basket from his mother pretended dropping it because of its weight. "Mumsie," he said, "I venture to say that this is full of cherry pies and potato salad; for my part I feel like devouring about two whole pies myself."

Charles heard merry voices at the door. Elizabeth and Viana appeared on the front porch followed by several young men and women, their faces all radiant with happy anticipation of having a good time. Soon they were all seated in the cars and in less than thirty minutes they arrived at Shady Brook. The sun was yet two hours high but the young people suggested that they eat their lunch first.

"Now for a stroll in the woods among the birds, flowers, and ferns," said one of the girls after they had partaken of the bounteous lunch prepared by Mrs. Ludlow. Soon they were all busily engaged gathering wild flowers that were growing bountifully on the hillside near the murmuring brook.

Charles and Viana were walking leisurely along a footpath that led by the stream. They had been gathering flowers until they had all they could carry. Seating themselves on the trunk of a tree that had fallen near the brook, Charles began to weave the flowers, of beautiful blue, into a wreath, with here and there a little touch of delicate pink. He placed the wreath on Viana's head. She was in deep meditation, and seemed unconscious of what he had done.

"Charles," she said, "how good God is! -- could there be anything more beautiful? Look at the golden sunset, and its lovely reflection in the water; the hills with their carpet of green; these pine trees stretching themselves high as if to peek above the clouds to see what heaven is like; the squirrels leaping from one branch to another, shyly peeking at us, and all around us the birds singing their heavenly songs."

She looked at Charles as if to say, "Do you enjoy it all as I do?"

For a few moments Charles looked at her in silence, and then answered, "Yes, God is good, and you have painted a beautiful word picture of it all, but you have failed to give it the last touch. Allow me to add, and Viana Harvey and Charles Ludlow here to enjoy it all." Charles then added slowly, "Viana, you never looked as beautiful as you do now. I sometimes feel that an angel's hand must have touched you and made you so beautiful."

"No, Charles," she said with a reproving smile, "not touched by an angel's hand, but what beauty of soul I possess is, because my heart was touched by the hand of my crucified and risen Lord."

Viana did look beautiful. She wore a lovely dress of blue, made with her own hands, just the shade of her large, soft blue eyes. Her silken blond hair, which she cherished as a gift of God, and therefore had never bobbed, was carefully arranged. Beholding her, with the wreath that Charles had placed there resting on her head, and her pure soul washed in Jesus' blood within, it would indeed be difficult to conceive of anything more beautiful.

At this moment they heard merry voices. Elizabeth's voice rang out, "Oh, hand me my camera!"

In a moment she had it adjusted. Viana modestly lifted the wreath from her forehead, but Charles, taking it from her hand, said, "Oh, please, Viana," and placed it back on her head, then, forgetting that he would be a part of the picture, was looking at her with a satisfied smile when he heard the click of the camera.

"There," Elizabeth said, "if the camera has done good work I shall have that enlarged."

When the last rays of the setting sun were slowly fading away among the hills the happy company got into their cars and soon arrived at home.

The following evening after dinner and family worship Charles, with books in hand, went to Arnold's home. Only a little while and their lessons were finished; then for a time he and Arnold amused themselves by playing some new Victrola records which Arnold had purchased that day. Suddenly Arnold announced to Charles that it was now time to go to the show.

"Now truly, Arnold," Charles answered, "I would rather not go."

"Charles," Arnold said in a reproving tone, "you and I have been close friends for a long time. You should have enough confidence in me to know that I would not ask you to go to any but clean shows. How can you have any knowledge of what shows are like unless you find out for yourself? If you go once in a while, you can speak from experience as to what is right and what is wrong."

Charles yielded; he did not have the grace of God in his heart to help him to withstand the temptation. That night they went to the Empress.

Charles soon discovered that what he had seen in "Ten Minutes of Laughter" was tame compared to what he now saw. When they left the theater, in answer to Arnold's question as to how he liked the show, Charles answered, "I am frank to tell you that I did not like it but, as you say, it will give me some information that I may not be able to obtain in any other way."

However, if Charles had been willing to tell the whole truth he would have been forced to acknowledge that in his unregenerate heart, even now, there was created a longing to look on things that encouraged evil desires.

"By the way," said Arnold, "I have a story that I believe you would enjoy reading. I have just finished it."

"Is it a good story?" Charles asked with some misgivings, as he slipped it into his pocket.

"Yes, I think it is," he answered, "at least it is a thriller."

Charles decided that if it did not prove to be a good story he would not read it. When he entered his room and began to read he discovered that it was what he had always termed a trashy novel, and of course he would not allow himself to read it; however, when he looked it over he noticed that the story was somewhat similar to what he had seen at the show that night. Before he was aware of it he was so fascinated by it that he read until two o'clock in the morning.

When he saw what time it was and how it affected his state of mind, he despised himself, for he realized that he had broken two good resolutions: first, that he would never read anything that would be harmful to his morals or that would becloud his intellect; second, that he would always get the needed rest for his body, and unless absolutely necessary never retire later than ten or eleven o'clock.

The following morning Charles arose much later than usual, and when his parents expressed surprise at the late hour he had come home, he told them about the new Victrola records and left them under the impression that he had spent all the evening at Arnold's home playing these. However, Charles was ill at ease, for he was conscious of the fact that for the first time in his life he had premeditatedly deceived his parents. He could not look at his mother across the breakfast table in the same confident way as before. He had gone to the show, which he knew to be against their wishes, and had deceived them by leaving them under the impression that he had spent all the evening at Arnold's home. There was a longing in his heart to be alone with his father and mother and confess all, and ask their forgiveness, and he was on the verge of taking this step when he heard Arnold whistle. This was a signal for him to come out, so they might walk to school together.

Months passed by, and after yielding to the first temptation that started the downward course of Charles Ludlow, with the passing of every day it became easier to yield. It was not long until his parents became aware of the fact that he was drifting deep into sin. They entreated, they warned, and in all kindness tried to prevail on him to break away from his sinful companions but all to no avail.

Viana also had many serious talks with him and this always deeply affected him. Again and again he solemnly vowed that he would give up his evil ways, but when assailed by temptation he weakened and broke every vow that he had made. She finally told him frankly that if he continued to pursue that course their close friendship must cease.

All this sorely grieved Charles, but he knew that Viana loved him and therefore did not believe that she would carry out her threats.

The last days of school drew near and Viana received an urgent invitation from her aunt and uncle in Nebraska to spend her vacation in their home. She decided to go.

In his heart Charles had decided that he would soon leave sin, but since he had gone as far as he had, he would, as his companions said, first have a few more real thrills. He would sow a little more wild oats. Arnold encouraged him in this, saying, "Have a little more real fun and then I shall turn back with you, and we'll both be good."

The evening before Viana was to leave for her aunt's home, Charles went to see her. She saw him coming as he turned the corner a block away. He and Arnold stood, for some time, under the electric light, both smoking cigarettes. That evening she told him that, since he seemed to have formed stronger attachments for novels, shows, the dance, and cigarettes than for her, she could no longer keep company with him. He pleaded with her, but she was firm in her decision, saying, "Charles, you have made many promises only to break them all -- you must consider my decision final. Remember, however, that I shall always pray for you."

With these words she bade Charles good-bye. Early the next morning she took the train that carried her many hundred miles away.

Charles walked home slowly. Oh, how he despised himself for having yielded to the allurements of sin, but even then, he was lighting a cigarette. Nearing the home, he threw the cigarette away. His mother was sitting in her armchair reading the Bible. Her eyes were red with weeping. When he entered he greeted her saying, "Hello, mother," and proceeded to go to his room, his heart so near breaking that he even forgot to kiss her good night.

Just as he reached for the doorknob, his mother said in a soft tone, "Charles."

He stopped. She drew near him, put her arms around him, saying, "Son, mother loves you and God loves you, and we are praying for you."

"Thank you, mother," he answered. She then kissed him tenderly, and he went to his room. She did not know the battle that was raging in his heart, for he had not told her the real cause of his grief.

Charles sat at his desk with bowed head until far into the night; then with sudden determination he lifted his head, saying, "What is the use? I have broken father's and mother's hearts; I have disgraced my only sister; my life is such that Viana, the dearest girl in the world, can no longer keep company with me. I am going."

With these words he arose, took his suitcase, packed it, and, as if afraid that he might change his mind, hastily slipped out of the back door.

It was yet many hours until train time, and he did not wish to linger where any of his friends might chance to see him. Fearing also that the ticket agent at Elm Point might recognize him, he did not wish to purchase a ticket there, so he decided to walk to Lowland, the next town, six miles away.

There was a beautiful highway directly to Lowland, but, not wishing to travel where an acquaintance might chance to see him, he chose for the first four miles a side road. Near the corner where this road joined the highway, Charles came upon a little vine-covered cottage, nestled in a beautiful grove of maple trees. He wondered why there should be a light in the house at this time of the night. Just then he heard beautiful voices in song floating out into the still, midnight air. He thought strange that there should be singing after midnight. As he drew near he could see, in one of the rooms, a woman lying on a bed, and a group of people standing near, among them some young men who were singing.

"Someone is sick, and perhaps dying," Charles said to himself, as he slipped noiselessly along the fence.

Yes, a dear mother lay dying; she had been serving her Master faithfully for many years and now He was coming to take her home.

That evening the physician had informed her husband that she could not live through the night. She, too, was beginning to realize that her earthly pilgrimage was rapidly drawing to a close. As the evening shades were falling she had a long, serious talk with her husband, telling him how she loved him, and that she greatly desired to remain with him in his declining years. "But," she added as a heavenly smile was stealing over her face, "Jesus will sustain and help you; His will is that I should go to be with Him this night."

She had closed her eyes and had been very quiet for several hours. Then suddenly, at midnight, she had opened her eyes and looked at her husband as if about to speak.

"What is it, dear?" he said as he took her hand tenderly in his. "Do you wish anything?"

"Oh, no," she answered faintly, "I was just thinking how I would like to hear my boys sing once more, but it is midnight and I would not want you to ask them to come now."

For many years this dying saint had taught a Sunday School class. "Yes," she told the Sunday School superintendent, "give me the boys' class, I love the boys. You know Jesus took one of my treasures -- my dear little Ray -- home to heaven, and ever since I have had a warm place in my heart for the boys."

She had faithfully labored and prayed, until the twelve boys -- now young men -- were all Christians. Among them was a quartet with beautiful voices. To these she referred when she said, "I would like to hear my boys sing once more."

Her own son, also a member of her class, immediately stepped to the telephone and asked all the class to come. When they arrived, she was overjoyed. She took each one by the hand and

spoke to them very tenderly, admonishing them to live true Christian lives. "And now," she said, "I know you will sing for me once more."

"Mrs. Baugh, what shall we sing?" asked one of the boys as he leaned very close.

"Son," she answered, "I was just thinking that many times in your lives you dear boys will have to make a choice for right against wrong -- you will come to many crossroads -- my prayer is that you may always make the right choice -- sing for me once more that beautiful song, 'The Wayside Cross.'"

It was while the boys were softly singing this song that Charles was drawing near the house. He could hear the words distinctly:

"Which way shall I take?" shouts a voice on the night.
"I'm a pilgrim a-wearied, and spent is my light,
And I seek for a palace that rests on the hill;
But between us a stream lieth sullen and chill.

"Which way shall I take for the bright golden span
That bridges the waters so safely for man?
To the right? to the left? ah, me! that I knew!
The night is so dark and the passers so few."

"Near, near thee, my son, is the old wayside cross,
Like a gray friar cowl'd, in lichens and moss;
And its crossbeams will point to the bright, golden span
That bridges the waters so safely for man."

The last notes of the beautiful song had died on the still midnight air. Charles was leaning heavily on the fence and was trembling. Had he not been standing in the deep shade of a large tree with its branches hanging low, where not even a wee ray of moonlight could penetrate, then a passer-by might have seen a very pale face and tear-moistened eyelids. His lips were moving, he was repeating over and over the words of the song, "Which way shall I take? -- Which way shall I take?"

Suddenly, as if awakening from a deep sleep, Charles reached for his suitcase and turned to go his way. He was only a few steps from where the side road joined the highway. At the crossing of the two roads he stopped, for he was not certain which road led to Lowland.

"What is that? -- why -- that -- that looks like a cross," Charles said, as before him he saw a tall, rustic post with a crossbeam. The moon was shining brightly and he drew a bit nearer. On one end of the crossbeam he saw a hand pointing homeward and in plain words he read, "Elm Point," on the other end a hand pointing in the opposite direction, and the word "Lowland."

This cross was an old landmark which had been standing there for many years. Nestling close beside it were the beautifully painted federal and state highway signs, but Charles did not even notice these.

"But this one," he said faintly to himself, "it looks so much like a cross and is pointing homeward."

While Charles stood there quietly and in deep meditation he again heard the boys singing. The dying saint had requested that they repeat the song. The words sounded so much like a beckoning voice from heaven to Charles's weary heart that he involuntarily turned his face upward to the beautiful, starlit sky while he listened.

"Near, near thee, my son, is the old wayside cross,
Like a gray friar cowl'd, in lichens and moss;
And its crossbeams will point to the bright, golden span
That bridges the water so safely for man."

"Yes, I ought to go! Oh, I ought to go back home!" Charles said as he drew near and let his hand rest on the crossbeam that bore the name Elm Point.

"This old wayside cross points homeward," he said. "But I cannot! It is no use to linger here; I cannot go back home, I am not worthy."

With suitcase in hand he wearily trudged the road that led to Lowland, away from father, mother, sister, home. He arrived at Lowland a few moments before the train was due and purchased a ticket for Chicago.

Charles took a seat in the rear end of the coach, for he did not wish to be noticed should an acquaintance chance to be on the train. He felt relieved when he saw no familiar faces. He tried to rest, for it was now just three o'clock and he had not had any rest, but his head was throbbing with pain and his heart was sick. He laid his head back and closed his eyes. In his mind's vision he could see his mother and father as they arose in the morning and found his room vacant, his bed not touched, his clothing and suitcase gone. He could now almost hear his mother weeping. Then they would search for him in vain. Viana, too, would perhaps hear about his disappearance before she took the train or would read about it in the paper. Then suddenly his eyes opened wide and he leaned forward, reaching for his suitcase as if to hasten back home. Suddenly the thought had come to his mind, Would his loved ones think that he had committed suicide? If so, it would almost kill them. But he did not get off at the next station. Had he only done this, then time might have written a different story in regard to Charles Ludlow's life.

He must, however, relieve his dear ones of this anxiety. They must not think that he had taken his own life. Had he not left so hastily he would, no doubt, have thought of leaving a note. With trembling hand he took his fountain pen, a Christmas gift from his sister, and some beautiful stationery, a gift from Viana, and began to write. His courage almost failed, but he felt he must do it. Having finished the letter, he handed it to the mail clerk on the train, that it might bear no postmark.

* * * * *

Chapter 2 THE VACANT ROOM

When Mr. and Mrs. Ludlow awoke early in the morning, after the sudden departure of Charles, not knowing that he had left, they did not arise immediately but spent some time in conversation and prayer. Mrs. Ludlow's heart was aching. She recalled the sad and discouraged countenance of Charles the previous evening.

"Dear," she said to her husband, "Viana Harvey called a few days ago and told me that she had, after much prayer, come to the conclusion that she could no longer keep company with Charles since he is persisting in going the ways of sin. I have never seen the poor boy look as sad and discouraged as he did last night when he came home. He even started for his room without kissing me good night, something he has never done since he was a baby. I did not sleep much last night and I fear he did not. Once I thought I heard him moving about in his room, and I had about decided to go to him and try to comfort his breaking heart. Then all got quiet and, thinking he had gone to sleep, I thought best not to disturb him."

"Charles loves Viana," Mr. Ludlow answered, "and if their close friendship is broken, it will almost break his heart. Viana is one of the most beautiful Christian girls that I have ever met, but we cannot blame her for giving him up if he refuses to become a Christian. I had always hoped, however, that Charles would change his ways before it would come to this. We will do our best to encourage him not to give up the fight against sin, and will continue to pray that he will get saved. Then the Lord will help him fight his battles."

While Mr. and Mrs. Ludlow were engaged in earnest conversation they did not know that Charles had left during the night. They talked for fully an hour, then knelt down by their bedside and prayed earnestly for his salvation.

It was now seven o'clock. Charles usually got up at six-thirty but, thinking that perhaps he had spent a sleepless night, they had decided to let him rest until later. When breakfast was prepared Mr. Ludlow rapped at the bedroom door but there was no response. He rapped a second and a third time. Receiving no answer, he opened the door and was surprised to find the room vacant. His face turned pale. He stood as if in a daze for a moment without uttering a word. Mrs. Ludlow hastened to his side, thinking that he had taken suddenly ill; but he shook his head, saying, "Mother dear, I am all right, but -- O Charles, my boy! my boy!"

Mrs. Ludlow, seeing the untouched bed and the empty closet, swooned away and, in a faint, fell into her husband's arms. They laid her on a couch and sent for the family physician. She was soon in a measure restored, but was confined to her bed most of the day.

The family and friends searched Charles' room for a note that might have been written by him, but all in vain. They decided to ask the aid of the police department to find the lost boy, but

all to no avail. That evening a beautiful picture of Charles appeared in the evening paper with a request that the public assist in finding him.

Mrs. Ludlow overheard a conversation of some neighbors who suggested that perhaps Charles had committed suicide. She uttered a deep moan and sank away into unconsciousness. Strange -- but she had not once thought of this.

Could it be possible, she now thought, that her dear boy had given way to despondency and taken his own life?

The physician and kind friends stayed by her side throughout the day while Mr. Ludlow and his friends tried in vain to find some trace of Charles. No one had seen him leave; he had not purchased a ticket at the Elm Point depot, and by evening more than one person feared he had taken his own life.

All day long and far into the night they tried to find some trace of him but failed. At nine o'clock in the morning, when Mr. Ludlow and Elizabeth were in the act of persuading Mrs. Ludlow to take a little nourishment, the doorbell rang and the postman handed Elizabeth a letter. She immediately recognized the handwriting as that of her brother.

"A letter from Charles! A letter from Charles!" she cried excitedly, and handed it to her father.

With trembling hand Mr. Ludlow opened the letter and read:

Dear Mother, Father, and Elizabeth:

Before this letter reaches you, you will have discovered my vacant room. I love you as much as ever, but the reason I am leaving home is, I have brought disgrace upon your dear family name by my sin life. My life is such that Viana refuses to keep company with me any longer and I cannot blame her. I am not worthy of her. It is all my fault, but it is breaking my heart.

I regret, more than I am able to tell you, that I have brought all this sorrow and grief to you, my dear ones. Had I followed your advice and given my heart to God when a boy, and then followed in your footsteps as you were following the Lord, then all would be different now. Do not think, however, that I am expecting to go on recklessly. No, I shall try to break away from all of my sinful habits and someday, when I am a Christian, living a clean life, I trust that you will let me come back home.

Please do not worry over me, for I am not worthy. My first step downward was when I heard a minister speak lightly of revival meetings and of childhood conversions and I decided not to become a Christian at that time. My next step was when I saw the show, "Ten Minutes of Laughter," with its underlying suggestive and immoral trend. It awakened in me a desire to drink a little deeper from the cup of sinful pleasure.

Again I ask you to forgive the past and someday I trust that God will forgive me. Please do not grieve over me.

Charles Ludlow

Mr. Ludlow and Elizabeth knelt down by Mrs. Ludlow's bedside and gave thanks to God that Charles was yet alive and earnestly prayed that the Heavenly Father might heal his broken heart, and save his soul and bring him back home.

Day after day passed by and weeks slipped away into months, and months into years, and yet no word from Charles except the letter written on the train. The light in the front hall of the Ludlow home was never turned out at night and the front door was never locked. Many times in the still hours of the night mother and father arose, when they heard footsteps nearing the house, hoping to see the prodigal son return.

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Chapter 3 ALONE IN CHICAGO

After a few hours' riding on the train Charles arrived in the city of Chicago, lonesome and homesick. After eating a scanty breakfast he began to look for employment. With the ambition of becoming a lawyer still burning in his heart he went to several lawyers' offices, thinking perhaps he could get a position there. An elderly man, Mr. Brinkerton, who had practiced law for many years, seemed favorably impressed with Charles and showed some interest in him.

"Young man," he said, "my advice to you is, if you now have no money to continue your education, that you work for a year or two, save your money, go to school, and finish your college course. A personal friend of mine, Mr. Bruce, a very successful businessman, is now looking for a trustworthy young man to fill a vacancy. Take my card, tell him I have sent you, and if you can qualify he will give you a chance. I will call him up and tell him of your coming."

Charles thanked him and hopefully went his way. He took the streetcar and soon arrived at the large business house. He entered the office, presented the lawyer's card, and was told by a young lady at the desk to be seated. She informed him that in a few moments the president of the company himself wished to interview him.

Charles took a seat near the window, looking out into the busy street. He was engrossed in deep thought. An aged gentleman with a kind face was sitting near. He looked at Charles for a few moments, then addressed him, saying, "Young man, I suppose you wish to see the president, Mr. Bruce, in regard to getting the position now open."

"Yes, sir," Charles answered, "I am very anxious to get a good position with a good, reliable firm like this one."

"Pardon me, young man, for the liberty I am taking in speaking so freely to you, a stranger, but I am interested in young men. It seems but a day since I was interviewed by the president of a large business corporation like this one. I judge from your appearance that you are a young man who has had good training. I hope that you will succeed in getting the position made vacant by the death of a very close friend of mine. I have been in close touch with this company for many years and I know it to be a fact that every young man who has held this position has been rapidly promoted. Two of them now hold much stock in the company and are wealthy men. If you can qualify, your future is made."

"You may come now," the young lady at the desk said to Charles. She led the way to a beautiful, spacious private office. A very dignified gentleman with a kind face was seated at a large desk. He asked Charles to be seated in a chair to his right.

"Your name is Charles Ludlow?" he said.

"Yes, sir."

"And you are looking for a position, my friend, Mr. Brinkerton, has informed me."

"Yes, sir, I am very anxious to get a good position with some good, reliable firm."

"There are a few questions that I wish to ask before we go any farther. The place that is open now is a very responsible position and I am very careful whom I employ for this particular place. The questions that I wish to ask are these: Do you use intoxicating liquor?"

"Well, no, not now," Charles answered hesitatingly. "I did but I have quit."

"If you ever did, that is against you," he said seriously. "Do you smoke cigarettes?"

"I do, but I expect to quit that also," he said with a downcast look.

"I am sorry, young man, but there is no need of interviewing you any further," Mr. Bruce said in a kindly but firm voice. "We never employ young men who use cigarettes." He then reached forth his hand to bid him good-bye.

"You do not feel that you could give me a chance, providing I promise never to smoke another cigarette?" Charles asked.

"No," he said, "I cannot run the risk of employing a cigarette user. But in order that you may better understand why I take this position, I shall ask you a few more questions. Did your parents consent when you began the use of cigarettes?"

"No, sir, they were very much opposed to it."

"How long did you smoke before your parents were aware of it?"

"About four months."

"Then you were successfully deceiving your parents for four months?"

"Yes, sir."

"Do you not see, young man, that the very beginning of the use of tobacco breeds deceit? The great majority of young men who will deceive their mothers -- the best friend a young man has -- will, when opportunity affords, practice deception with their employers. For this responsible place we must have a young man whom we can implicitly trust. Again, we need a young man with a clear mind and steady nerves, and cigarette users usually have neither. Every boy who graduates from high school knows that this is scientifically true. To fill responsible places, this firm never employs men who use, or ever have used, cigarettes. As an experienced, and I think successful, businessman, my advice to you, young man, is, Never smoke another cigarette. It has already crippled your usefulness and you will perhaps never be the success in life you would have been had you never used tobacco, but you are young and can, to a great extent, overcome the effects of it. Yes, I see a tear in your eye; you are sorry now. But remember that there is a law that will never be revoked, 'whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.' Do not get discouraged, however, but face the future bravely. Ask God to help you and you will yet win out."

Charles went his way with a heavy heart. He repeated slowly the words of Mr. Bruce, "Remember that there is a law that will never be revoked, 'whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.'"

Charles was in search of work all the rest of that day and the next. The third day he saw a sign in the window of a small grocery store, "Clerk Wanted."

"How much experience have you had?" asked the proprietor. Charles was forced to acknowledge that he had none.

"I must have an experienced man," he answered coldly.

"If you will give me a chance I shall do my best to make good," Charles said bravely.

"If you are willing to begin with small wages we might try it for a week."

Charles began to work immediately. His salary was soon increased, but was never very large. Out of his small earnings, however, he was saving a little, placing it in the bank, with the hope that someday he would be able to go to school again.

Fully determined to turn from his sinful ways, Charles for a time carefully avoided the companionship of those who were traveling the downward road of sinful pleasure, but one day he made the acquaintance of a young man who was rooming in the same building, who was also alone in the city, having left his home in Tennessee to make his fortune in the large city of Chicago. Soon they drifted together, and with him Charles began to indulge in questionable amusements. When once again he was caught in the whirl he soon drifted fast into all of his old habits. One evening at

a dance he was introduced to a beautiful young woman, Judith Delver -- if indeed the word beautiful may be used when applying only to face and figure, for in Judith there was neither beauty of character nor of soul; however, even a casual observer would soon notice that she was very popular among the class of young people with whom she mingled, and she had many suitors.

From the first evening that Judith met Charles Ludlow, she was attracted to him. He was so different from most of the young men who frequented the dance, for the great majority of them had formed evil habits in their childhood and sin had left its mark in the stooped shoulders, the sallow complexion, and the dull eye; while Charles had not been drinking from the cup so long. He walked erect, was now a little more than six feet tall, a fine specimen of young manhood.

Judith carefully laid the meshes of her net for his feet and poor Charles, charmed by her beauty and deceived by her flattering words, stepped into the net. She soon discovered that his training had been different from hers and thus was careful about her conversation in his presence. She invited him to her home, but not until she had instructed her parents as to their conduct while he was there. Charles dressed well, was always carefully groomed, and Judith's parents, thinking he must be a young man of means, received him with open arms. However, after a few weeks of acquaintance they ventured to question him concerning his business. He told them that he was a clerk in a grocery store. When they learned this they immediately treated him coldly and informed Judith that she must not keep company with a poor man. She, with a toss of her pretty little head, told them that she would do as she pleased. They forbade her to invite Charles to their home. She was indignant at this. After this they attended dances and shows together, but he never again entered her home. At last, while in the whirl of pleasure and intoxicated by the influence of a series of pictures which they saw filmed of a young couple who eloped because they were opposed by the girl's parents, Judith suggested to Charles that they do likewise. A few days later they obtained a license and were married by the judge.

They rented a house to begin housekeeping. Judith insisted on buying very expensive furniture on time payments which put them heavily in debt. She had never cooked a meal, nor taken care of her own room. She was petted and spoiled, the deceived parents thinking their daughter, because of her beauty, would someday marry a rich man and have servants, and would not need to learn the art of housekeeping.

After a few unwilling attempts to cook a few meals she informed her young husband that she never did like housekeeping and therefore he must prepare his own breakfast each morning, so that if she wished she might sleep until noon. "Your lunch," she said, "you can get at a nearby lunch counter, and for our dinner we will go to the LaFountain Hotel. You see, that will be much more pleasant for me."

Charles protested, saying that they could not afford this on his small salary. But she had been petted and humored all her life and had always had things her own way and now informed him that she had never been anyone's slave and never would be. Judith won out, as she usually did.

Poor Charles was bewildered. His concern was how it would be possible to live extravagantly, as Judith insisted on doing, and make ends meet with the salary he was getting. At this time, because of ill health, his employer was compelled to move to a milder climate. Charles

had proved to be so dependable that he became manager of the small store. This meant some increase in salary, which was encouraging, and he could pay off a few dollars on their furniture every week.

Charles often felt his heart sinking within him when he thought of how different their home life was from that of his parents. He often suggested to Judith that they attend church, but she told him not to get such foolish notions into his mind. "My mother and father never went to church," she informed him, "and I am sure we can get along quite well without it."

A year had now passed since Charles and Judith were married and the third of June, Charles's twenty-first birthday, little Stephen was born. Charles was happy, and when the nurse was in the act of taking the baby to Judith he insisted on doing it himself. To his sore disappointment, however, she only cast a glance at him, saying, "I guess our good times are over now. I suppose you will want to stay at home and take care of the kid instead of having a good time."

All Charles could say was, "O Judith," and heaving a deep sigh he handed the little bundle back to the nurse.

Charles sincerely hoped that after the baby came Judith would take some interest in home, husband, and child, but to his sore disappointment it proved to be just the opposite. When the baby was only a few weeks old she informed Charles that she did not intend to waste her time taking care of him, and that they would have to hire a nurse so that she might not be hindered in her social life.

Charles tried to reason with Judith, showing her by some figures just how far his salary would go, paying rent, making payments on their furniture, grocery bills, etc., but she insisted that she would not keep house. Soon Charles had all the home duties to perform as well as the care of the baby between working hours, while Judith was reading novels or was attending some social function.

Charles dearly loved the baby and became more and more attached to him. This seemed to anger Judith. He waited long for Judith to suggest a name, but it did not seem to occur to her that the baby ought to have a name. She was not enough interested in him. When he was four weeks old Charles watched for an opportunity, and one day when she seemed to be in a good humor he took the baby, and sat down by her side, saying, "Now for a pretty name for our baby -- What shall we call him?"

She answered, with much indifference, "Call him anything you please. I am sure I don't care."

With a heavy heart Charles walked to the other room, sat down in a rocking chair and rocked the baby to sleep, wiping the tears from his eyes, while Judith continued to read her novel, seemingly not in the least aware of the fact that she had said anything out of the way.

The subject of naming the baby was never again mentioned but from that day Charles called him Stephen, partly because his own father's name was Stephen, but also because, when a boy, the Bible story about Stephen had always appealed to him. She was not enough interested even to ask any questions about the name until about six months later while reading a novel in which the hero's name was Steverton. She looked up at Charles while he was washing Stephen's face and hands, which had been neglected all day, saying, "Where did you get the name Stephen? Was he the hero in some story?"

"Yes, and a brave one; may our little Stephen face his martyrdom, that seems to be awaiting him, as bravely as the other Stephen did," he said as he kissed his chubby little hands.

Judith did not hear Charles' answer, for she was too much engrossed in the novel she was reading.

One evening when Charles, weary in body, came home from his work after a hard day at the store, he noticed that Judith seemed unusually cheerful and was attired in a new and very expensive hat and gown purchased that day. After he had greeted her as usual, he looked for the baby. When he did not find him in the crib he inquired of Judith where he was.

"Oh, yes," she answered, "I was going to tell you how fortunate I was. Yesterday Mrs. Gadder and I went to the matinee while I left the kid with the colored woman in the next block. I asked Mrs. Gadder if she knew of a girl I could hire. She told me that she would advise me to take the baby to the day nursery on Vine Street, only two blocks away. Since it is on your way to the store you can take him over there each morning when you go to work and then bring him home in the evening. I took him over this morning and have made arrangements to that effect. It is really a day nursery, but perhaps we can prevail on them to keep him several evenings a week so that we can go out in peace.

While Judith was telling Charles all this she was standing in front of the mirror adjusting her new hat and admiring her lovely new silk dress. When Charles did not answer she turned to him, saying, "Isn't it grand that I should discover such a place?" But the last words almost died on her lips before they were spoken, for when she looked at Charles it frightened her. His large brown eyes were flashing like fire; his fist was clenched; his jaws were set as he stood there looking at her. For a few seconds, that seemed like hours to Judith, he did not utter a word. Then taking a step nearer he fairly shrieked, "Judith! Judith!"

After staring at her for a moment in fierce anger, suddenly his muscles relaxed and he sank into a chair, his elbows resting on his knees and his face in his hands. In a few moments his whole past life as a panorama passed before his mind's vision: the tender care he had received at the hands of a devoted mother and a proud father; his happy childhood and young manhood until -- yes, until he rejected Christ; the first show; the first novel; the first dance; the first cigarette; the first cards; and now this -- yes -- this. Then with a convulsive sob and a broken heart he sobbed out, "O Judith, Judith! is it possible that you have no mother-love for our baby, our own little Stephen, your own flesh and blood? Do you mean to say that your whole life is to be spent for self, in vanity and pride, and that you will not care for your own baby?"

"Well, Charles," Judith said with a sneer, "is that what all your fussing is about? I thought the way you looked at me and the way you acted that something dreadful had happened. It looks as if you never will enter into any of my plans. Can't you see that it will make it much more pleasant for me if we take him to the nursery? It will relieve me of any bother with him all day and I will not be everlastingly tied down at home. As for telling me that I ought to take care of him because he is my own flesh and blood, I always told you I didn't like kids and would never be a slave to any." She then added impatiently, "Now make haste, Charles. If you hasten and dress we can eat our dinner first before you run over and get the kid. Then we can phone from the hotel and see if they will not keep him while you go to the dance with me. I made a date for tonight with Mr. and Mrs. Gadder. There is going to be a swell dance and I purchased this hat and dress especially for that occasion."

"O Judith," Charles said in seeming despair, "I might as well try to reason with the wind as to reason with you." He then entered the bathroom to wash his hands and, glancing around the house, it was plainly noticeable that Judith had not turned her hands all day to tidy up the rooms. The beds were not made; she had not even washed her own breakfast dishes.

After a few moments of impatient waiting she stamped her foot forcibly on the floor and said, "Charles, will you ever hurry? I am hungry; hasten and dress so we can go!"

"Judith," he said, "you may go to your dinner; I do not feel like eating anything this evening."

"All right," she said, "if you are going to pout because I am going to have something to say once in a while, then do as you choose, but I am going to have a good time."

She left the house, slamming the door behind her. On the steps she stood in deep thought for a moment, knitting her brow, then said to herself, "What did I do with it? Oh, yes, I remember."

She opened the door and called back to Charles, "You will find the check on the mantel in the front room."

"What check?" he asked.

"The check for the kid; the lady over there keeps dozens of youngsters. You don't suppose that you could get him without a check, do you?" she said as she closed the door and was on her way to the hotel.

Slowly Charles walked into the front room and took the check and looked at it; then leaning on the mantel he buried his face in his folded arms and breathed a prayer, "My Father in heaven, is it possible that my baby, my own dear little Stephen, was taken over there to be checked like a piece of baggage, and now, while my wife -- his mother -- is going to the dance, I must present this check before I can get my own child? O Lord, why all this? -- yes, I know why all this -- sin."

Without eating dinner and with a heavy heart Charles took the check, walked two blocks to where the nursery was located; it seemed like so many miles. There on the corner stood a large

house. Slowly he ascended the steps. He could now hear children weeping. With great effort he took courage to ring the doorbell. A young woman with white apron and cap opened the door. For a moment there was silence, neither of them spoke. Charles felt a lump gather in his throat that threatened to choke him and for a moment it seemed that he would not be able to utter a word. The young woman in a businesslike manner said, "What can I do for you?"

With great effort and barely above a whisper Charles said, "I have come to get my baby."

"Your check please," the maid said.

Charles had forgotten to hand her the check. He produced it and she stepped from one baby to another until she found the one with the right number. She wrapped a blanket around him, put him into his cab, and without another word, but with a motion of her hand toward the door, Charles took him away. The moment Stephen saw his papa he almost leaped from the cab, he was so overjoyed. His eyes were red as if he had been weeping much during the day. Charles took him in his arms and pushed the cab home. Stephen put his little arms tightly around his father's neck as if to say, "O Papa, please never let me go back to that place where they are all strangers to me."

When Charles arrived at home he played with the baby for fully an hour, after which he fed him and soon he was asleep, cuddled up in his father's arms. He tucked him away to bed and then for a few moments found relief in tears, but soon recovered himself and was deep in thought as to what course he should take. Should he permit Judith to continue to do as she was doing? Should he permit the baby to be taken to the nursery every day, and each evening present the check and bring him home while Judith continued her round of pleasure? It was either that, or else there was just one other thing to do, and that was to write his parents, confess all to them, and then ask them if they would take the baby. He was certain that Judith would not object.

After a long, hard struggle he decided on the latter course. After two years of silence he sat down to write his father and mother. He wrote a long letter, and with aching heart slowly folded it and slipped it into the envelope. Then with bowed head he muttered to himself, "Oh, I cannot send this letter, I cannot send it! Oh, this cup is so bitter! Must I drink it?"

The clock on the mantel was striking the hour of two and Judith had not yet come home from the dance. He passed by the crib, bent over it, and just then Stephen opened his large brown eyes, looked at him, and with a smile stretched forth his hands pleadingly. Charles took him in his arms and kissed him saying, "Sonny, you know Papa loves you, don't you?"

At this moment the door opened and Judith stepped in, saying as she removed her hat, "Well, well, are you still up with the kid? You don't know what a good time is. I had the time of my life tonight, but, oh, I am tired. I feel like sleeping for a week."

She was soon ready to retire and as she turned the light out in the bedroom she called to her husband, "Charles, be sure and do not forget to take the kid over to the nursery when you go to the store in the morning. I want to have a chance to sleep until noon if I desire."

Charles did not feel at all inclined to answer her. He rocked Stephen to sleep, put him into his crib, and then retired -- but not to sleep.

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Chapter 4 DEATH OF JUDITH

The letter which Charles had written to his parents, asking them to take Stephen, was never mailed. Day after day, each morning he took Stephen to the nursery and each evening, presenting his check, he brought him home. Three years had slowly dragged away and, with the passing of weeks into months and months into years, all of Charles's high ambitions had also slowly slipped away. He was faithfully discharging his duties as manager of the little store and going through the same routine at home. He arose at six o'clock in the morning and prepared his own breakfast, washed and dressed Stephen, fed him, and took him to the nursery and again brought him home each evening. Then, although weary in body, he would sweep the floors and dust the furniture and perform all the other little details common to housekeeping. He had for some time given up going to the hotel with Judith for his dinner because she refused to allow him to take Stephen, saying that a fashionable hotel like the LaFountain was no place to take kids.

After he and Judith had been married three years Charles made his last payment on the furniture. A great burden was lifted when this was accomplished, and, now and then, a little ray of hope would spring up in his heart that, even yet, he might be able to lay aside a little money, go to school, and carry out his ambition of becoming a lawyer.

He decided not to tell Judith that the furniture was paid for, but one evening when he felt lonesome, and Judith seemed in good humor and his own heart craving companionship to share his joy with someone, he told her how happy he was because, after three years of toiling and economizing, the last payment on the furniture had been made. She, however, seemed not to hear what he said but began to tell him of the wonderful hero in a novel that she had just finished, not realizing that by her side sat a man who, by the help of a true wife, would doubtless be a real hero and not an imaginary one in a cheap novel. When Judith did not answer, Charles thought that she had not heard what he said and was glad; for if she knew that the furniture was now paid for, he felt certain that she would insist on living even more extravagantly than before.

Two weeks later, one evening when Charles arrived at home, he saw a car parked in front of the house and wondered who had come to visit them, or he thought that perhaps it was some salesman who was in the house demonstrating his goods. While his mind was occupied with these thoughts Stephen, who was walking by his side, stumbled and fell, his forehead striking a rock. Charles picked him up and carried him into the house, greeted Judith, and went into the bathroom to wash the blood from Stephen's face, and then immediately busied himself with the housework. Judith seemed ill at ease and very nervous. She was sitting on the couch, pretending to be interested in a new deck of cards she had purchased. Finally with an air of impatience she proceeded to the kitchen, where Charles was now washing dishes. She stood in the door for a moment in silence, waiting for Charles to speak. When he did not seem to notice her she said

impatiently, "Well, Charles, I see no need of pouting; you might as well speak and tell me whether you are pleased or displeased."

Charles looked at her in surprise, saying, "What do you mean, Judith, pleased or displeased at what, washing dishes?"

In anger she fairly shrieked as she said, "Why, Charles, do you mean to tell me that you walked right by my new car, parked in front of the house, and did not see it?"

Charles's face turned pale and he dropped the dish he was wiping, breaking it into many pieces, but he seemed not to notice it. He looked at his wife for a moment in silence, and then with perfect self-control and in a low but firm voice said, "Judith, do you mean to tell me that you have purchased that expensive car? Am I to be your slave forever?"

With a heavy heart Charles resumed his task of washing dishes. Having finished his work in the kitchen, he took the sweeper to sweep the rug in the living room. Neither he nor Judith had money to pay down on that car?"

With a toss of her head she arose and, turning on her heel facing Charles, said, "Well, I know full well that there will be a storm, but I shall face it like a heroine, and the sooner it is over the better it will be for both of us I presume," and with great emphasis she added, "I took the seventy-five dollars which you gave me to purchase my spring coat and made the first payment on the car, and I inform you now, Charles, that I have made arrangements for you to pay the remainder in monthly payments, just like you paid for our furniture; you told me that the furniture is now paid for. I have decided to wait for my coat until your next payday so that I might have the car now."

Charles rose to his feet and with a calm but firm voice said, as he stood before Judith with both of his hands thrust deep into his pockets: "Judith, I inform you that I shall not pay one cent on that car. I shall give you from my salary each month, the same as before. If the car is ever paid for, it will be paid from that money. I certainly shall not pay for it."

Much enraged Judith answered: "Charles Ludlow, you are the most selfish person that I have ever met in all my life. You are not worthy of having a wife, but deserve to live and die an old bachelor. The very idea of your wanting to hoard up your money and deny me every necessity of life! If ever there was a miser on earth, you are that one. If you would go to the shows with me more frequently you would learn a few things; you would discover that a woman has some privileges. Last week I saw the play, 'The Modern Wife,' and I want to tell you that woman in the play was a real twentieth century heroine. She bought diamonds, and the very best and most expensive clothing, and a three-hundred-dollar pet dog, and then made her husband pay for it all. I admire a woman who has some backbone. Her husband was one of those old fogies whose vocabulary consists of a few sentences such as I hear you utter so often, 'We can't afford it,' 'We must live more economically,' 'I will not go into debt.' I declare, I despise such language. Charles Ludlow, I serve notice on you right here and now that I am going to have a good time, and you, my husband, will have to pay for that car. For once, I shall demand my rights and show you that I have as much backbone as the woman I saw filmed in that play. I began making my plans immediately

while sitting there beholding how that woman worked it. As soon as the car is paid for I shall get a dog. Mrs. Gadder paid only one hundred dollars for hers and it is the cutest and sweetest little thing that I have seen for a long time. I shall get one that will cost at least one hundred and fifty. I want to outdo her at least that much.

"Charles," she continued, "what is more beautiful than to see a nicely dressed woman driving a high-powered car and one of those dear little dogs sitting by her side with its head out of the window? That very thing has been the ambition of my life, and at last I am beginning to realize that my dream is going to come true. Whether you like it or not, I shall have a car and a dog."

"Judith, I shall not pay for that car," Charles answered, and said no more.

He did not feel inclined to cook his dinner that evening, so he and Stephen went to the nearby restaurant. When they were about to leave the house, Judith stepped into the front room with her hat and coat on, saying, "Charles, I want you to take me to dinner this evening."

"Why, Judith, you have not asked me to go to dinner with you for months!" Charles said in astonishment.

"I know I have not, neither am I asking you now; I am only asking you to take me to the hotel. You know that I have never had an opportunity to learn to operate a car, and I do hope that you will not permit me to walk to dinner when I have a new car standing before the house. You do not need to eat with me; you may take the kid and go to your old dinky restaurant for your dinner, but I do insist that you take me to the hotel first. After dinner I want you to teach me how to operate the car and after that you may feel assured that you will not have to take me again. As soon as I know how to drive I shall go where I please."

"Judith, I shall never set my foot inside that car to take you anywhere, and if you ever learn to drive it someone else will teach you, for I will not; and as for paying for it, I repeat, you are responsible and not I."

Judith left the house in a rage, saying: "I am disgraced forever if my neighbors see me walk to dinner when I have a car standing before my door. You, Charles Ludlow, will not take your wife to dinner but spend all your time with that kid. I am sure all of our neighbors are wondering why I ever married such as you."

With these words Judith slammed the door and was gone.

Charles did not answer, but went to the restaurant, ate his dinner, and came home. Judith returned in about an hour. Charles was surprised, for she usually remained longer, and frequently did not return at all but went from the hotel to a dance, card party, or show; but she had reserved this evening for learning to drive the car. Charles had informed her that he would not teach her, but she was determined to "demand her rights." In anger she threatened, she commanded, and at last she pleaded, but all to no avail. Charles was firm and would not yield.

"Will you let them come and take the car back?" she said. "If so, you will lose the seventy-five dollars I paid down."

"No, I lose nothing," Charles answered. "I gave you money to buy a coat; if you have spent it for something else then you are the loser."

In anger Judith threw herself across the bed and wept convulsively. Charles and Stephen went out for a walk. When they returned Judith had retired.

Several weeks had now passed. The car salesman had taught Judith to drive. Each evening about the time when Charles came home from the store Judith was leaving for the hotel. One day, however, after an unusually hard and long day at the store, for he had worked an hour at his books after closing time, when Charles reached his home he was surprised to see the car still parked in front of the house. He wondered why Judith was yet at home. While ascending the front steps, and before he had time to open the door, he heard moans and weeping. Hastening into the bedroom he found Judith tossing wildly on the bed in agony and pain. She had taken suddenly ill and was in such distress that she had not been able to reach the telephone to call for help.

"Why, Judith," said Charles, "are you ill?"

"Yes, I am dying and you don't seem to care or you would not remain at the store all night," she wailed out between sobs and moans. "Get the doctor quickly or I'll die before he arrives."

Charles hastened to call the physician and in a little while he arrived. As soon as he looked at Judith and after asking a few questions, he cast a glance at Charles which told him that the case was serious. He then informed them that Judith must be taken to the hospital immediately to undergo an operation. He told Charles that even with an operation it was a question whether her life would be spared. Judith was rebellious, saying that she never would consent to an operation, but that she had her plans all made to have a good time during the summer using her new car.

"My dear woman," said the kind physician, "as a doctor I inform you that if you do not consent to an operation you will likely not see the sun rise tomorrow morning, much less ride in your new car."

When Judith still protested, the physician, while waiting for the ambulance to arrive, sat down by her bedside saying: "My dear Mrs. Ludlow, I am not a Christian, and perhaps have no right to speak as I do; but my mother is a true Christian and has taught me the right way and therefore I feel that it is my duty to inform you that the few hours you have left on earth you had better not waste making plans for this life. If you do not undergo an operation immediately, then your hours on earth are indeed numbered. If we do operate you have only one chance out of a thousand to recover. I would advise you to make your peace with God, instead of making plans for this life."

When Judith heard these words from the physician she opened her eyes wide, and staring at him cried out, "O Doctor, I can't die! I can't die! I won't die! I am not ready. O Doctor, don't let me die!"

Charles was weeping; he went to her side and put his arms around her, saying, "Judith, I am so sorry you are so sick. If you will ask the Lord He will help you."

Oh, how he wished that he were a Christian so that he might be able to pray for her! Her pain was too severe to speak much, but Charles could hear her sob again and again, "Oh, my sins, my sins!"

At this time the ambulance arrived and they were ready to carry her out. When they reached the door she cried out, "Oh, wait a minute! Please wait a minute!"

"What is it, Judith? Is there anything I can do for you?" Charles asked, bending over her.

"Oh, yes, Charles, bring Stephen to me. I want to kiss him before I go!"

Charles had seldom seen Judith kiss Stephen, and very seldom had he heard her call him Stephen; she usually referred to him as "the kid." She took Stephen into her arms for a moment and amidst sobs and groans cried out, as she kissed him, "O my baby, can you ever forgive me? My darling Stephen, you never had a mother! How can I answer for my actions when I meet you at the judgment! You will condemn me there! Oh, my sins, my sins!"

She then pushed Stephen away and was hastened to the hospital.

"How soon will you operate, Doctor?" asked Charles after they had arrived at the hospital.

"Immediately," he answered.

"I had hoped," he said, "that there would be time to send for a minister to come and pray for her."

"Mr. Ludlow," the kind physician answered in a serious tone, "even if we should delay the operation for a little while, she will be unconscious before a minister arrives. I am not a Christian but I do believe in prayer. If you are a Christian and will pray for your wife then perhaps, in mercy, God will spare her life long enough for her to get right with God."

Charles buried his face in his hands saying, "O Doctor, I missed it years ago when I rejected Christ! -- no, I am not a Christian."

While the surgeon was busy in the operating room, with his skill trying to save the life of Judith, Charles slipped away into the corner of a room, dropped on his knees, and tried to pray. The thought, however, of rejecting Christ so long crowded in upon his mind and he could not utter a word. Fifty minutes slowly passed away before they brought Judith from the operating room. Charles looked into her pale face as she lay there motionless. "O Doctor, is she dead?" he asked.

"No, Mr. Ludlow, she is yet alive," he answered, "and we have a faint hope that she may recover, or at least that she may regain consciousness and live for a few days."

Judith had the best of care and after a few hours opened her eyes, looked at Charles, and recognized him. To the surprise of the physicians she showed marked signs of improvement, and her mind was clear. No one was allowed to speak to her for some time, but finally the doctor gave Charles permission to speak to her in regard to her soul's salvation. He sat down by her bedside, took her hand, kissed her, and said: "Judith, God has, in mercy, spared your life and you are getting stronger, but the doctor says that you are not out of danger. I would like to ask a minister to come and pray for you."

"Why, Charles," she said faintly, "I wish you would not talk like that to me. I am all right now and will soon be able to leave the hospital. Please don't begin to preach to me now, and don't talk about getting a preacher; you make me nervous."

Charles was deeply grieved at her attitude. He had hoped that her heart would now be tender, but was again disappointed. She turned her face to the wall and he knew it was useless to say any more.

A few days later Mrs. Gadder called, and the physicians allowed her to see Judith for a few minutes. Judith was very weak but they talked about their plans for the summer, saying that they would take their cars and go to the pleasure resorts at the lakes, where things were not so tame, and where there would be plenty of dancing and other amusements. After Mrs. Gadder left and Judith had rested for some time, Charles asked her if she would like to see Stephen for a few moments.

"There is that same old story again," she said with a frown. "Do you suppose that I want to be bothered with the kid now that I am sick? It is enough that I have to put up with him when I am well," and she again turned her face to the wall.

"But, Judith," Charles said, hoping to awaken some desire in her heart to make her peace with God, "you are very sick yet and there is very little hope of your recovery. Do you not remember what you said just before we took you to the hospital? You said that Stephen would condemn you at the judgment. I wish that you would let me send for a minister to pray with you."

"Please leave me alone," she answered impatiently. "When I said that, you and the doctor had frightened me so that I thought I was going to die. But the operation is now over and I'll show you that I will soon be well again. I do not want you to bother me any more."

Since the day Judith married Charles her parents had refused to have anything to do with them. They had not seen her since that time. When she took seriously ill, Charles spent much time trying to locate them by telephone and finally succeeded. He informed them of her condition, but they did not seem to be in the least alarmed and answered: "If you think that we will come now and pay your bills, you are mistaken. We know very well that your only reason for informing us of Judith's illness is that you want us to pay the hospital and doctor bills."

Charles heard the click of the receiver as they hung up. He could do no more. However, later the doctor was called to the telephone and Mr. Delver, Judith's father, inquired in regard to

her condition. The doctor informed him that if they wished to see their daughter before she passed away they must come immediately. They hastened to her bedside. Entering the room, they saw two doctors, a nurse, and Charles standing by her side, while Judith was tossing wildly on the bed, saying, "Oh, my sins! my sins! they are all passing before me now."

When she saw Charles weeping, she cried out in a lamentable voice, "Yes, Charles, you urged me to give my heart to God; you and the doctor told me I could not live, but I refused to believe it, and now I must go to meet God with all my sins! How dark -- Oh, how dark! Eternity, Oh, how long! and so near -- Oh, there is eternity just at arm's length! Why, Oh, why did I waste my life in sin, dancing my way to hell! I have wrecked my life, my home, my all!"

Charles tried to point her to Christ, saying, "Judith, can't you pray, can't you look to Jesus? He died for sinners. Try to pray and I will help you the best I can."

Her only answer was a wail -- "Too late, too late!"

At this moment she saw her mother and father entering the room. Her mother pushed Charles aside, saying, "Why do you excite her so? She is all right; she never was a great sinner."

But Judith cried out, "O mother and father, are you here? Why did you not teach me the way to heaven? You taught me the ways of sin and the world, and -- now." Her voice grew faint, and in a whisper she repeated, "And now -- and now -- Oh, it is so dark!" Then all was over.

Judith Delver Ludlow had gone to meet her God.

Some burning tears -- a whispered conversation -- the undertaker -- and Judith's body was being prepared for the funeral.

Charles's face was pale; his beautiful, dark brown eyes had a troubled look. Oh, how his past sinful life was again haunting him!

"Had I only known the Lord myself, then I might have been able to help her," he repeated over and over. The kind doctor tried to speak words of comfort, but what comfort could he give, when he knew that Judith had died without hope in Christ?

The undertaker having taken charge, Charles hired a cab and, sick at heart, he soon arrived at home. There in the driveway stood Judith's new car. She would nevermore ride in it. It seemed that, look where he might, there was something to remind him of sin, and he was so sick of it all. Neighbors had taken care of Stephen while Charles was with Judith at the hospital. When he saw his face at the window, even this caused sad thoughts to crowd his mind. He remembered her words to Stephen, "You never had a mother," and knew this was only too true.

Mr. and Mrs. Delver would hardly speak to Charles. They insisted that by asking her if he might send for a minister to pray for her he had excited her. They attended the funeral but spoke only a few words to Charles, and showed no interest whatever in Stephen, whom they had never seen until that day.

After the funeral Mrs. Delver said to Charles, "You had better place the child in an orphan's home, now that he is deprived of the love and care of his dear mother; he will get better care there than you are able to give him."

Charles thanked her for her interest in Stephen. However, in his heart he had already decided that he would continue to care for him as he had done before Judith passed away.

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Chapter 5 CHARLES AND STEPHEN

After the death of Judith, Charles and Stephen became more and more devoted to each other. They did not miss her very much because she had never been a homemaker. For a time Charles thought he would move to another part of the city, because the neighborhood in which they were now living was fast changing. The better class of people were moving farther north and a low, illiterate class were taking their place; but because their present location was near the store where he was employed, he decided to remain there, at least for a time.

Again and again there was a longing in the heart of Charles to give up his position as manager of the little store, sell his household goods, and go to his parents; but he always deferred it to some future time.

Some years had now passed since he had left his home in Elm Point. Many things had taken place there during the intervening years. His sister Elizabeth had since been graduated from high school and the next year had left home to enter college, where she was happy in her work. She was a devoted Christian and a great blessing among the young people. For two years, while in college, Elizabeth kept company with Theodore Harvey, Viana Harvey's brother.

Two weeks after their graduation Elizabeth and Theodore were united in marriage in the Ludlow home. For a number of years Theodore taught in the Elm Point high school. They had a beautiful little daughter, Grace, who was the idol of all in the community and, because of her bright and sunny disposition, won the hearts of all who knew her.

After finishing high school, Viana Harvey had also entered college. During her college years she had met Albert Williams, a fine young man and deeply spiritual, who was preparing for the ministry. Their love for each other was very beautiful and after much prayer they were engaged and soon happily married. A little girl, whom they named Joy Louisa, had come to brighten their home. She was now two years of age and was the very image of her mother.

Since Elizabeth's marriage, Mr. and Mrs. Ludlow had been living alone. They were still deeply grieved over the disappearance of their son, but were enabled to cast their burden on the Lord, who sustained them through it all. They spent much of their time in the Lord's service, such as visiting the sick, feeding the hungry, and helping the poor and needy; this brought great joy to their hearts. Their home was always open to young men and women who were away from home

and loved ones, attending school in their city; they always found a warm welcome in this hospitable home. Their daily prayer was that their lost boy might, someday in his wanderings, find shelter and a welcome in some Christian home.

Once a year Elizabeth and her husband came home to spend a few weeks with her parents in her childhood home. For her sake, and also because of the cherished hope that someday Charles would return, Mr. and Mrs. Ludlow kept the home and the beautiful yard much the same as when the place rang with the merry laughter of the children. Spot, Charles's pet dog, still had his place in the little square house that he had built for him with his own hands.

Charles knew nothing of the changes that had taken place at the old home, but the desire to go back was becoming stronger as the months and years slipped away. However, he did not wish to return until he had laid up at least a few hundred dollars; and, besides, when he first left home he had decided that he would not return to his parents until he was saved, and he was not yet a Christian. For recreation Charles and Stephen often took their lunch and spent an hour or two in the evening just outside the city at the lake shore. Here Charles had discovered a place where they could be alone. He would usually take a book to read while Stephen amused himself wading in the water or playing in the sand. Charles was very fond of this place because the flowers, the singing of the birds, and the rippling streamlet flowing into the lake all reminded him of his boyhood days.

Here also Charles would meditate as to his plans for the future. Stephen was growing fast and had recently started to school. Then, also, there had still been a secret ambition to continue his education and yet enter the lawyer's profession. At one time he had saved three hundred dollars and had about concluded to take this amount and go to school, partly paying his way through by working evenings, when suddenly Stephen became seriously ill and had to be taken to the hospital. For three months the physicians were making a hard fight for his life. Once every day Charles visited the little sufferer. For several weeks Stephen hovered between life and death, and the suspense was very hard on Charles. Almost momentarily he expected to be summoned to the hospital to see him pass away. To his great joy, however, Stephen slowly recovered until after three months he brought him home. When the hospital and doctor bills were paid Charles discovered that it had taken, not only the three hundred dollars he had in the bank, but he was yet much in debt.

The joy over Stephen's recovery, however, was so great that Charles thought little of the cost. Now for the first time he really gave up his ambition to become a lawyer, but from this time forth his desire was to again lay aside some money and he and Stephen go to Elm Point to his parents and he perhaps get a position as clerk in his father's store and permit Stephen to enjoy the happy surroundings which he and his sister had so much enjoyed during their childhood days.

One beautiful Saturday afternoon, when his day's labor was over, Charles and Stephen again went to the lake. Until this time their little shady nook, seemingly, had not been discovered by others, but that day two mothers came down the footpath and sat down under a large shade tree. One of them had a little boy five years of age, and the other a little girl about the same age. As soon as they arrived on the scene Stephen picked up his little shovel and bucket, with which he was playing in the sand, and sat down by his father's side. The kind mothers tried to persuade Stephen to play with the children; Charles also urged him, but he refused. He sat by his father's

side and with much interest watched the children play. Suddenly he looked at his father as if about to speak. Charles laid his hand on his head, saying, "What is it, Sonny? Would you like to go and play with the children now?"

"No, Papa, I don't care to play, I would rather watch them -- but, Papa, why does the little boy with the red sweater call the lady dressed in blue 'Mamma,' and why does the little girl call the other lady 'Mamma'?"

"Sonny, the lady dressed in blue is the mother of the little boy, and the other lady is the little girl's mother," Charles answered as he drew Stephen close to his side.

Stephen sat in deep meditation for some time, then suddenly again looked at his father, saying, "Papa, I wish I had a mamma. Haven't I got any mamma?"

Oh, how the words of Stephen touched the very depth of Charles's soul! How should he answer that question? He hesitated for some moments and then replied, repeating the words of Judith, "My dear little Stephen, you never had a mother."

Charles felt a great lump rise in his throat and a tear steal into his eye but he said no more, while Stephen looked out over the lake with a faraway look, saying, "I thought everybody had a mother -- I wish I had a mother."

Charles had now lost all interest in the book he was reading. He laid it down and for a full hour he amused Stephen, playing with him in the sand, and then went home. Charles asked Stephen to retire early that evening. He wished to be left alone with his thoughts. Stephen's question, "Haven't I got a mother?" and his own answer, "You never had a mother," troubled him. He knew that the time had come when he must answer Stephen's question and tell him all about the past. With bowed head he sat in deep meditation -- yes, he had now fully decided what course to take. For Stephen's sake, so that he might be warned against sin and Satan's snares, he would tell him all about his own past waywardness and sin. He would tell him all about Judith's life and death, and then he would humiliate himself and write to his father and mother, seek their forgiveness, and go back to Elm Point, no matter what his former friends might think. He had often before resolved to do this, but now for the first time was really beginning to make plans to that effect. He would like to go not later than spring, as soon as school was out, but he felt that he must not go without at least a little money, and he and Stephen must each have a new suit of clothing; but he could make it by spring, providing he and Stephen both kept well.

With this determination he arose and walked to Stephen's bedside, laid his hand on his forehead, saying, "Sonny, you will soon have a mother; my own dear mother, I know, will let you call her mother and she will love and care for you as she did for your unworthy father."

With much interest Charles saw his little bank account grow, and at last all looked hopeful. It was now the first of May; only about a month and he and Stephen would leave Chicago. On Saturday they went downtown, and Charles purchased a beautiful, blue serge suit for himself, just like the one he wore when he left his father's home; also a nice suit for Stephen, a suitcase, and

some other articles for their journey. His plan was to go home on his and Stephen's birthday. The third of June he would be twenty-eight years of age and Stephen seven.

That evening Charles took from his pocket a package containing a book, unwrapped it, and handed it to Stephen, saying, "Sonny, here is a birthday present for you. It is a very good book and I trust that the reading of it will help you to be good."

For some time Charles was busy with some writing while Stephen looked at the pictures in his new book.

"Papa, these are beautiful pictures," he said. "I like this book -- is the sweet-faced lady these children's mamma?"

"Yes, Stephen, that lady with the sweet face is the mother of the three children."

"Papa, I'm sorry I never had a mamma," Stephen said as he looked longingly into his father's face.

Charles gathered Stephen into his arms, saying, "My dear little son, I am going to tell you something real soon that I should have told you a long time ago. But until then, and until we go to grandmother's house, it would be very nice if you would adopt the sweet-faced lady in your new book for your mother, for she is a wonderful mother and will tell you many nice things."

The clock on the mantel struck the hour of twelve and Charles was yet awake. Troubled thoughts were crowding into his mind. He had decided to go home and, this being settled, it brought a sense of relief and joy to his heart. But had he not promised his father and mother in the letter which he had written to them on the train the evening of his departure that he would come home someday -- a Christian, and had he not vowed again and again to himself that he would never go back home until he was saved? Now he was making plans for going, but was he making any plans to become a Christian? Tomorrow is Sunday, he thought. Father, mother, and Elizabeth will be in their accustomed places in the church at Elm Point. They will no doubt pray for me -- yes, even now, at this midnight hour, they may be praying that I may go to church tomorrow, on the Lord's day, and give my heart to God. Should he go to church? Should he go now, after not having attended services for eight years?

Another question arose in his mind -- could he who had trampled all of God's mercies under his feet now expect to receive forgiveness? All this caused troubled thoughts to arise, but he finally fully decided that he would attend the church services the following morning and soon fell asleep.

When he awakened the next morning the sun was shining brightly into his room. Stephen also was awake. Charles told him that after breakfast they would go to church and Sunday school.

"What is church and Sunday school, Papa? What are we going to do there?" Stephen asked.

"The preacher and the Sunday School teachers will tell us about Jesus," Charles answered.

The superintendent of the Sunday school tried to persuade Stephen to enter a class of boys of his own age, but he shook his head, clinging to his father's hand. After the Sunday school was dismissed they sat together in the auditorium for the morning service. The singing was beautiful; a man then led in fervent prayer, and just before the sermon two young ladies sang a duet. The anointing of God was on them as they sang the old but beautiful hymn.

Jesus, Saviour, pilot me,
Over life's tempestuous sea.

Charles's face was ashen pale. How often he had heard his mother sing that old hymn! They continued to sing.

As a mother stills her child,
Thou canst hush the ocean wild.

Yes, Charles remembered well how often, in childhood, his mother had kissed away his tears, and now they were singing, "As a mother stills her child, Thou canst hush the ocean wild." Could it be possible that Jesus could comfort his troubled, sin-sick soul as his mother had healed his childhood ills?

Now the minister arose to announce his text. His subject was "The Love of God." He had chosen for his text the very familiar words that have been the means of leading many a weary heart to the foot of the Cross, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

The anointing of God was on the minister and Charles's heart was very tender. At the conclusion of the sermon he longed to respond to the altar call and go forward for prayers, but instead he took Stephen's hand and together they slipped out at a side door.

During the week Charles was very busy adjusting matters in the store, as well as his private affairs, for his departure. He was looking forward now with great anticipation to the third of June, when he would go home and see his mother and father.

The following Sunday Charles and Stephen attended the evening service. The subject of the sermon was "The Prodigal Son." The minister's words made a deep impression on Charles, for he had now been a prodigal from his earthly father's house for eight years. When the minister emphasized the fact that, although the prodigal son was unworthy, yet the father welcomed him home with great rejoicing, Charles bowed his head and wept bitterly. He thought of how unworthy a son he had been, and yet he felt certain that his father and mother at Elm Point would gladly welcome him home with rejoicing. In conclusion the minister stated that even now the Heavenly Father was waiting for prodigal sons to return home, and that He would freely forgive all the sins of the past.

With his head resting on the back of the pew before him, Charles continued to weep. He again thought of the time when at the age of eleven he had heard a minister preach from the text,

"Choose ye this day whom ye will serve." He also recalled the midnight hour when he stood at the crossroads between Elm Point and Lowland and heard the quartet of young men sing by the bedside of a dying mother the beautiful hymn "Which Way Shall I Take?" He had never been able to erase this from his memory.

No one seemed to know just how it all happened, but suddenly, when the minister was closing his Bible, he saw a strong young man coming forward and in a moment he was kneeling at the altar with bowed head. Charles Ludlow was at last yielding his strong will in submission to the will of God. Had he taken this step seventeen years before when, at the age of eleven, the Spirit of God was striving with him, time would have written a different story in regard to his life.

Just when Charles knelt down at the altar the soft tones of the organ began to sound forth and the choir sang softly, "Come home, come home, ye who are weary, come home." Several other penitent souls also found their way to the altar. The minister and several of his people knelt by their side and engaged in fervent prayer. In a very short time all but Charles were enabled to trust God for deliverance from sin. Christian people continued to pray for Charles. It was very evident that he was penitent, but it was hard for him to believe that God would forgive one who had rejected Christ so long. They prayed for him and encouraged him to trust in the mercies of God and the atoning Blood, but again and again he sobbed, "O Jesus, I have rejected Thee so long; how can I hope to receive forgiveness?" The minister quoted many promises but his only answer was, "That cannot be for me."

Finally, in order that he might better impress Charles with the great love of God for sinners, the minister said: "Young man, if you have a father and mother and should you ask their forgiveness for any wrong committed, do you believe they would forgive you?"

For the first time Charles lifted his head, and looking at the minister answered, "Oh, yes, I know they would forgive."

"Then," said the minister, "do you believe that your father's and mother's love for you is greater than the love of Jesus who died for you?"

There was a serious look on his face and for a moment he was silent, and then answered, "No, Jesus' love for me is greater than any human love."

Immediately he turned his face heavenward and with his right hand lifted said, "Yes, Jesus, I do believe; and trust Thee now for the forgiveness of all my sins."

A heavenly light came into his face. He rose to his feet saying, "Thank God, He has taken away the heavy load of sin that I have carried so long; His Spirit now bears witness with my spirit that I am His child."

Charles went back to his pew, put his arms around Stephen, and kissed him, saying, "Sonny, you have a Christian father now; we will now have a Christian home and read our Bible and pray together."

Monday was usually quite dull at the store, and this day Charles was glad, for he had taken his Bible and wished to have some time to read and pray. When he entered the store he discovered that already all the clerks were present. Charles embraced this opportunity to tell those working for him of his conversion. With tear-moistened eyes and deep emotion one of the men clasped Charles's hand, saying, "I rejoice that you had the courage to take that noble step, and I feel that we should all do as you have had the courage to do, and I shall be glad if you will remember me in your prayers."

During the day Charles found some time to read his Bible and pray. At noon, instead of taking his regular hour to eat his lunch, he decided to fast and pray, asking the Lord to sanctify him. He went to the storage room, where he would not be disturbed. There alone, seated on a low stool by the window, amidst boxes and barrels, he read the Scriptures and then, with the Bible open before him, he prayed, pleading the promises of God. True to the Word, the Holy Spirit entered, cleansing out the carnal nature, sanctifying his soul. Great peace flooded his soul, his joy was unbounded. When the clock struck the hour of one, time for Charles to resume his work, he put his Bible into his pocket with the assurance that his heart had been cleansed through faith in Jesus' blood.

At the close of the day's labor, and after he and Stephen had eaten their evening meal, Charles took his Bible and read such portions from God's Word as Stephen could understand. He explained the words regarding the fall of man, the promise of the Redeemer, Christ's birth in the manger, His wonderful life and work on earth, and His death on the cross for the salvation of the world. It all sounded very wonderful to Stephen and he listened with much interest.

"Papa," Stephen said with deep emotion when Charles closed the Bible, "did you hear that beautiful story for the first time Sunday when we went to church?"

"No, Sonny, I have known this story ever since I was a little boy. My father and mother told me about it when I was much younger than you are now."

"But, Papa," he added in great earnestness, "did you know all this for such a long, long time and did not give your heart to Jesus until yesterday?"

Charles wiped tears from his eyes, saying: "Stephen, I am very sorry that I did not give my heart to the Lord many years ago, but a man who looked very wise in my eyes said that it was only excitement and I decided to wait. I regret it all very much now and I do not want you to do as I have done."

After a few moments of silence Charles said, "You must now retire, for I wish to be alone. I must write a very important letter yet this evening -- just one week from tomorrow we expect to go to grandfather's house. One evening this week we shall once more go to our quiet place at the lake and then I shall answer some of your questions. I shall tell you all about my boyhood and young manhood; I mean to keep nothing from you. You shall know it all in order that you may profit by my mistakes and that you may not do as I have done."

* * * * *

Chapter 6 A SAD ACCIDENT

It was not an easy task to write a letter such as Charles was about to write. There had been eight years of silence and he had no assurance that his parents were yet living. However, he was now a Christian; of this he knew they would be glad. He gripped his pen firmly and rapidly wrote page after page. He again asked their forgiveness for his past wayward life, and then informed them of the glad news of his recent conversion and sanctification. He told them of his hasty marriage to Judith and of her death, and that he had a dear little boy, now seven years of age. Then with glad heart he informed them that he and Stephen were planning to come home and that, if possible, he would like to get employment in his father's store and he and Stephen live with them in the dear old home.

Charles finished the letter, addressed it, and was about to go to the street corner and drop it into a mailbox. But with his hand on the doorknob he stood in meditation for a moment; then turning around said audibly, "No, I shall not mail it until Friday, for I do not want them to receive it until about two days before we arrive, or they will be held in suspense too long." He dropped the letter into the old suitcase which he had already begun to pack for his journey.

The following evening Stephen hastened home from school -- was not this the day when he and his papa would once more go to the beautiful place at the lake shore? He had wondered all day what it was that his papa had promised to tell him that evening. When Charles arrived Stephen had, to the best of his ability, made preparations for the evening meal.

They lived four blocks from the car line and while they were hastening to catch the six o'clock car a large automobile, operated by a bootlegger who was intoxicated and speeding to evade the officers, struck Charles and threw him thirty feet. Stephen, who was walking by his side, was not injured. The driver, fearing arrest, hastened away and was never apprehended.

Stephen hastened to his father's side, crying, "Papa, Papa, are you hurt? -- Papa, speak to me. Are you hurt?"

People who were sitting on their front porches hastened to the scene; the police were called and soon arrived. At first everyone thought that Charles had been instantly killed. However, in a few moments he showed signs of life and, regaining consciousness, asked for Stephen. Stephen knelt by his side, again asking, "Papa, are you hurt?"

"Yes, Sonny," he answered, his breath growing shorter, "I believe Jesus is going to take me to heaven -- I -- I -- am sorry to leave you -- but -- but I am so happy in Jesus."

For a time he was again unconscious, but only for a moment. Again his eyes opened. He looked at Stephen, smiling, and with great effort spoke a few words, saying: "Sonny, you go to grandfather's; they will love you -- open the suitcase -- the suitcase, the lining in the suitcase." Then again there was a pause, his breath was growing very short.

"What is it, Papa?" Stephen said weeping, as he bent over him.

Those standing near said he was delirious. But one more effort -- he spoke again as he drew Stephen near and kissed him. "Be sure and tell grandfather and grandmother -- tell them I got saved and I am -- going to heaven." After another moment of silence he looked at Stephen again and whispered, "Elm Point, Elm Point -- Stephen dear, meet Papa in heaven, good-bye," and with a beautiful smile on his face he passed away.

Stephen was now weeping bitterly and would not be comforted. The news of the accident had reached the near neighbors of the Ludlows and among those who seemed to show some interest was an aged man, whom the neighbors all knew as "Old Tim." Stephen addressed him as grandpa.

Old Tim lived in a little, one -- room shack on the alley in filth and sin; but in respect for his gray hair, Charles had never allowed Stephen to call him "Old Tim," but had taught him to call him grandpa. For this reason it seemed to be generally understood by the shiftless, drinking neighbors that Old Tim was Stephen's grandfather, and the few who knew better did not seem to care. Old Tim took full charge of the arrangements for the funeral, and Stephen, the little, brokenhearted orphan boy, clung to him as his only friend.

Old Tim now left his back -- yard shack and moved into the house with Stephen. After a few weeks he began to sell one piece of furniture after another. The neighbors took notice of all this, also that he was intoxicated more frequently, but they all enjoyed drinking as well as he, and so did not molest him. He was kind to the boy and no one interfered with his otherwise strange behavior.

Several weeks after the death of Charles, one evening Old Tim did not come home. That day he had sold one of the best rugs and one of the most expensive pieces of furniture. Stephen never saw him again. That night Stephen, lonely and sad, cried himself to sleep, as he had done frequently since his father's sudden death. To the question asked by inquisitive, but disinterested, neighbors as to what he expected to do, Stephen always answered that he was expecting to go to live with his grandparents.

The neighbors, thinking that he referred to Old Tim when he spoke of his grandfather, did not question him any further. But Tim did not return, nor did Stephen know where he was, and so the little orphan boy was left all alone.

Once the policeman stopped when he saw Stephen sitting alone on the front porch, and said, "Son, are you living here all alone?"

"Yes, but I'm going to grandfather's house," he answered.

The policeman went his way. It had not yet occurred to Stephen that he might not be able to find his grandfather.

Soon the supply of food in the house gave out and Stephen had to resort to the few dollars he had in a little bank that his father had taught him to keep hidden in the corner of an old dresser drawer, but this also was fast disappearing.

The sun had gone down and it was a damp, chilly evening. Stephen was in his accustomed place when he was sad. His elbows were resting on his knees and his face in the palms of his hands. He was seated on the front steps. A newsboy, known among the children of the neighborhood as "Freckles," was coming home, whistling a merry tune. Passing Stephen, he displayed two bright silver dollars.

"What's ther matter, kid?" he asked, when he saw the sad countenance of Stephen. "You look sorta glum -- haven't you got nothin' ter eat? Why don't yer work like I do en make lots O' money? Then you kin buy lots uv things."

"I don't know how," Stephen answered sadly.

"You don't know how?" Freckles said with a puzzled look. "Do you mean you don't know how ter sell papers?"

"No, I don't knew how to sell papers, but I have only seventy -- five cents left, and I don't know where to get any more money now that Papa is gone -- come to think of it, I don't know where grandfather lives -- I've got to do something. Maybe I could sell papers like you do and make some money."

"Course you could -- I'll tell you, kid," Freckles said enthusiastically, feeling quite important because of being able to help one whom he considered more unfortunately situated than himself, "I heard the boss say he could use another feller, en I'll tell you what I'll do -- if you'll go with me termorrow mornin' en stan' on my corner with me, I'll lam you the trade, en I'll help you to git a corner uv yer own. Don't you forget it, you kin make money; some rich guys give me a whole quarter sometimes fer one paper. What you say, will you go?"

"Yes," said Stephen timidly, "if you will help me."

"Sure pop, I will. I'll be here en call fer you in the mornin'.

"All right, thank you," said Stephen, half-frightened and yet encouraged because someone showed real interest in him.

Freckles went his way, whistling the same merry tune, but suddenly stopped, then turned on the heel of his right foot, pushed his cap back on his head of abundance of auburn hair, threw his sweater back and thrust his hands deep into the two pockets of his ragged trousers, came back and stood directly in front of Stephen, eyeing him critically, and said, "Say, kid, wuz that yer dad that -- that bootlegger runned over en killed 'im?"

"Yes, that was my father," Stephen answered with a deep sigh.

"Well, where's yer mom?"

"You mean my mother?"

"Yes. Where's she?"

"I never had no mother. I wish I had one but I'm all alone since Papa died."

"Ah, pshaw! You can't put that over on me. 'Course you had a mom, everybody has -- I jest s'pose she runned away, or sumpin' like that -- anyway, kid, you kin make money if you want ter. I make 'most all ther living 'fer me en Mom. My dad he drinks en smokes en chews en gambles, he don't never make no money. Dad'll not get ter see these here two dollars. If he knowed I had 'em he'd buy booze with 'em. I tell you, kid, I hain't never gon'na drink no booze, 'cause that takes all the money a feller kin make. I'm gon'na save my money en be a millionaire someday." Then as suddenly as he had come, Freckles turned on his heel and walked away saying, "I'll stop for you tomorrow mornin'."

Stephen sat in silence for some time; he felt troubled at the thought of standing on a street corner calling loudly, "Pa-per? pa-per?" However, he had only seventy-five cents left and must earn money some way; again, he thought of Freckles' words, "'Course you had a mother, everybody has," and this made his heart feel very heavy. He could not keep the tears back and walked slowly into the house. It was now getting dark; he threw himself down on the floor close to his father's desk and sobbed aloud. "O Papa, can't you come back? You must come back to me, Papa! I never had no mamma and now you are gone too. O Papa, do come back to me!" Then remembering his father's dying words saying that he was going to heaven, he added, "O Jesus, come and take me to heaven too; I don't want to stay here alone, I want to go to heaven where Papa is!"

He wept until he finally fell into a troubled sleep. Later a noise in the street awakened him. He lifted his head; his arms were aching; all was dark except a faint glimmer of light shining through the window from the street light. It was midnight and without turning on a light and without supper Stephen crawled into bed, where soon sleep brought balm to his breaking heart.

Early in the morning Stephen was awakened by loud pounding on the door; when there was no immediate response, the knocking was followed by several hard kicks that made Stephen shudder. He looked through the window and there stood Freckles. When he opened the door Freckles said in a loud, commanding voice, "Yer ready ter go?"

"Oh, no," Stephen answered, "I just got up and I haven't had any breakfast yet, and I forgot to eat supper last night."

"Well, I tell you, kid, we can't have no loafin' on ther job if we 'spect ter make money in this ere business -- got anything ter eat in ther house?"

"Yes, a few buns, but I'm cold, I wish I had some coffee."

"Well, you got a gas stove -- 'twon't take but a minute to make coffee; I'll wait fer ye."

In a few moments the coffee was made and little Stephen ate his buns without butter and drank his coffee without cream or sugar, and soon they were ready to start for their day's work.

"Say, kid, better take yer sweater," said Freckles.

"Oh, yes, I'll get my coat."

Stephen went back into the house and into the bedroom to get his coat. There in the clothespress he saw his father's coat hanging; he buried his face in its folds for a moment and sobbed, "O Papa, I wish you were here to pray with me before I start this awful day. I know you would ask Jesus to help me."

Then it occurred to Stephen that he himself could ask Jesus for help. Quickly he dropped on his knees and with upturned face said, "Dear Jesus, please help me today. Amen."

He felt strengthened and did not dread so much now to go out and face the task before him, for he felt confident that Jesus had heard his prayer.

When Freckles saw Stephen come out with his nice coat and tie and polished shoes he looked at him with some suspicion and said, "Say, kid, you look too much dressed up. I'm 'fraid the guys will all think you're a millionaire 'stead uv one uv us newsies -- well, at any rate, you can't eat clothes en such like. Yer got'er have sumpin' ter eat, en you can't buy nuthin' ter eat unless you got sum cash, so come along."

Freckles talked incessantly and Stephen rather enjoyed it, for it helped to occupy his mind so that he did not continually think of his sorrow. Freckles continued, "I'll tell what I'll do, kid" -- this was one of his favorite expressions -- "fer a day er two, while you are a'lamin' we'll divvie up all we make -- now that's fair, hain't it? I'll tell you why I sympertize with a feller that's down en out; it's 'cause I wuz there myself once. I 'member once when Mom she wuz sick, en Pop he wuz off on a drunk, en it wuz jes a rainin', en a rainin', hard fer days en days, en nobody wouldn't stop on the street en buy no paper, en fer several days I made nuthin', en fer a whole day I wuz a standin' in wet clothes, en fer a whole day I didn't have a bite ter eat; if I'd live ter be a hundred en ninety-nine years ole I'd never fergit how my poor ole stomech it jest gnawed en gnawed; en I'll tell you, kid, bein's as we're nabers, ez long ez I'm a makin' good money I never want you to put in a day like that un' I put in -- that is," he added slowly and thoughtfully, "providin' you don't loaf on ther job. I'm dead set agin' loafers. I s'pose it's 'cause my dad he loafes all ther time.

"Here we are," said Freckles, "here's where we git our supply."

Soon he had his papers under his arm and, hurrying away, dodged through the crowd so fast that poor Stephen, unaccustomed to such, could hardly keep up with him. At a very busy street corner, where pedestrians were hastening in every direction, Freckles stopped.

"Here, kid, here's where we stop," he said; and, with the movement of an expert at his business, Freckles laid down some of his papers, laid a brick on top of them to keep the wind from

blowing them away; then hastily fixed the other papers under his left arm, every few minutes calling out, "Paper? paper? paper, Mister?"

Suddenly he gave the brick a kick which sent it over the curbing, at the same time handing a man a paper, giving him change for a quarter; then quickly picked up the papers that were lying on the walk, handed them to Stephen, saying, "Say, kid, I got so interested in my business I 'most fergot that I had a partner -- here, take these papers en stan' there by ther post -- Paper, Mister?" he would call every few moments to passers-by, while talking to Stephen. "Here, take these papers en stan' there by the post en jes sorta watch me fer a while; I won't 'spect you ter sell any fer a while yet, you're jes larnin' now. But if a feller sorta looks at you, then jest lift up a paper en say, 'Paper, Mister?' en 'fore yer know it you'll be a sellin' some."

While Freckles became busily engaged selling quite a number of papers, a very richly attired lady looked at Stephen and smiled; he timidly lifted a paper and said faintly, "Paper, Mister?" The lady smiled again and took the paper, handing Stephen a quarter. While he was fumbling in his pocket for some change the lady smiled again saying, "Keep the change, little boy."

Stephen lifted his hat saying, "Thank you."

The lady had just passed on when a man came hastening by, and Stephen took courage and again faintly said, "Paper, Mister?"

The man thrust his hand into his pocket, threw a dime at Stephen, grabbed the paper, and jumped on a moving streetcar. Stephen was much bewildered. Freckles, ever alert to every movement his partner made, called out, "What's a worryin' you?"

"I owe that man some change," Stephen said, almost ready to cry, "and he got away so quick that I didn't have a chance to give it to him."

"Ah, kid, that's jest 'cause you don't understand their language yet. When a feller gives you money, no matter how much it is, en then hurries away, he's jes a sayin' by that, 'Keep ther change.' Don't you fergit it, if they're a wantin' change back they'll wait fer it all right -- but say, kid, how much did that there lady give yer?"

"A whole quarter," Stephen answered with a broad smile, "and she said I should keep the change."

"Good fer you, kid, you're a larnin' fast! You'll soon be a millionaire -- but say, when you speak to a lady you arten' to say, 'Paper, Mister?' You arta say, 'Paper, Lady?'"

"Oh, yes," Stephen said with marked embarrassment. "I know, Papa taught me that but I was so excited I just forgot, but I'll try and remember the next time."

The day seemed rather long for Stephen and he came home weary in body; yet he enjoyed it so much more than sitting at home alone all day grieving over the death of his father. Freckles

informed him on the way home that they had made good money and that each one's share would be one dollar and fifty cents.

"Now, kid, set your alarm fer in the mornin'," Freckles said when they arrived at Stephen's house. "We can't loaf on ther job en 'spect ter make money.

"I don't know how to set the alarm; Papa always did that."

"I'll show you how, I had ter lam that long ago," Freckles said. He set the alarm, then walked away whistling his merry tune. Stephen ate a scanty meal and was soon in bed asleep.

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Chapter 7 THE TWO NEWSBOYS

"Say, kid, what's yer name? I've been a callin' you kid 'cause I never knowed yer name," said Freckles when he and Stephen started out on their second day's work in the paper selling business.

"My name is Stephen, and I wish you would call me Stephen. I don't like to be called kid. My papa said that people ought not to call children kids. He never called me kid; he always called me Stephen."

"Stephen -- Stephen," Freckles repeated slowly. "Well, that sounds all right, but when I can't think of that high-soundin' name then I 'spect I'll be callin' you kid fer short -- well, we'll git 'long 'bout ther names. Everybody calls me Freckles; I guess it's 'cause of the brown spots on my nose en all 'round on my face, but that ain't really my name. My 'nitals is the same as John D. Rockefeller. I wish Mom she'd call me John D. Rockefeller, 'cause you see I'm gonna be a millionaire some day. I hain't a-workin' so hard fer nuthin'."

For several days the two boys worked together and divided the profits; however, soon Stephen took his place as one of the regular newsboys and it was "up to him," as Freckles told him, to make good.

Just when he was getting somewhat accustomed to his work, Stephen had another sad experience. It was at this time one evening, when he was unusually weary and had not yet eaten his scanty evening meal, that the landlord, uninvited, stepped into the house and informed him that he must move out of the house in which he and his father had always lived and which he now called home.

For almost nine years Stephen's father had, without once being a day late, each month mailed a check for the rent to the landlord. When for the first time the check failed to arrive the landlord was not at all uneasy. However, when a whole month had slipped away and no check had come he came to inquire regarding the cause of delay. He had learned of the death of Charles from one of the neighbors before he entered the house to speak to Stephen.

Stephen did not know that the house in which he lived belonged to another and that he should have paid rent. It frightened him when he was told that he must move, but he felt somewhat relieved when the landlord gave consent for him to move into the shack on the alley where old Tim had been living.

As soon as the landlord had taken his leave Stephen went out to look at the shack and found it very dirty. He cleaned it to the best of his ability. That night, lying on the floor near his father's desk, Stephen again wept until slumber brought rest to his aching heart.

Old Tim had sold much of the Ludlow furniture that had real value and had spent the money to purchase liquor. Stephen moved his own, and what Tim had left of his father's clothing, a few chairs, a small table, and a rug. He was not able to move heavy furniture and, besides, there was not room in the shack for many pieces.

Soon a man and woman entered the door who announced themselves as "the Browns, who have rented the house." From all appearances they were of the same shiftless class of people who were now occupying most of the houses in the neighborhood.

When Mr. and Mrs. Brown discovered that the furniture had not all been removed they spoke very unkindly to little Stephen; however, when they drew from him the sad story of his father's sudden death they spoke a little more kindly.

"But, little boy," said Mrs. Brown, "is your mother dead also?"

"No, ma'am, I never had no mother," Stephen answered sadly, again wondering why everyone asked that question. Mrs. Brown smiled sarcastically, saying as she turned away and went into the other room, "You're the first kid that I have ever seen who never had a mother."

Stephen was puzzled and wanted to cry.

"Well, kid, whatcha gonna do with this stuff in here?" Mr. Brown said impatiently, addressing Stephen in a harsh tone. "There isn't room for it all in the old shack."

"I don't know what to do with it," Stephen answered, and was about to weep but with great effort kept the tears back.

They finally helped him move a dresser, his father's desk, and a bed into the shack. Mr. Brown then carefully looked the furniture over which remained in the house.

"Will you sell what is left in the house?" he inquired of Stephen.

"I guess so."

"I'll give you twenty-five dollars for it is it a bargain?"

"Yes, I guess so, I can't get it all into the one little room."

"All right, I'll give you the money in the morning."

Mr. Brown telephoned to a second-hand furniture dealer, who bought what was left of the furniture for seventy-five dollars. The following day he gave Stephen twenty-five and put fifty into his pocket, saying to his wife, "That was easy money; I wish I could strike a bargain like that every day."

Stephen and Freckles still frequently walked to work together. Freckles expressed surprise when Stephen informed him that he had moved out of the big house into the shack on the alley.

"Whatcha do with all ther ferniture you had in ther big house?" he inquired, always having an eye for business.

"All that I could find room for I put into the shack, and the rest I sold to the man who moved into the big house."

"I s'pose yer got lots of money fer it."

"He gave me twenty-five dollars for it."

"He did? Whew! Whew!! Whatcha gonna do with all that pile of money?"

"I don't know, I put it into the desk drawer."

"Into the desk drawer!" Freckles said excitedly. "Why, kid, you can't keep money in a desk drawer! If my dad knowed that you put it there, why, it wouldn't stay there fer en hour -- en you don't mean ter tell me that yer gonna leave it there today while yer gonna go away? You hike right back en git that twenty-five dollars, er someone will sure git it," Freckles commanded with wild gestures.

Stephen obeyed; he had not thought of people being dishonest. Soon he returned and the two stepped into an alley to count the money.

"Sure 'nuff, kid, you got twenty-five dollars -- my, but yer 'most a millionaire now!" Freckles said excitedly. "Tell you what you better do, kid. My mom tole me that durin' the civilized war, years, en years, en years ago, they used ter dig a hole in ther ground en bury their money so ez no one could git it, when they had lots uv it like you have now -- you better put it in a tin tobacker box en bury it in the back yard. Then Dad nor no one else kin swipe it from you, 'cause they don't know where it is. If yer don't someone will sure git it."

That evening after dark, Stephen and Freckles buried what they considered quite a fortune, in the back yard.

"There, now," Freckles said when they had carefully put the dirt back and placed a few old bricks on top of it, "if you should make more money a sellin' papers then you kin use then you kin bury that too."

Stephen, however, was never able to add to the money that was buried in the rusty can, but gradually he was compelled to use even that which he and Freckles had placed there.

On their way to work the following morning Freckles drew from his pocket a package of cigarettes, struck a match, and began to smoke. Stephen had seen him do this almost every day and it grieved him. His father had faithfully warned him against the use of tobacco; Freckles was the only friend he had and to see him smoke cigarettes made his heart ache. At last he summed up courage to speak to him about it, and said, "Why do you smoke, Freckles?"

'Cause I want ter be a man, and want ter be a millionaire someday," was the quick reply.

"Why, Freckles, what makes you say that? Do you think that you look more like a man when you smoke than when you don't? My father did not smoke for years before he died, and he sure was a fine man, and your father smokes all the time and look what he is -- and then, how can you expect to become a rich man and a millionaire if you spend your money for cigarettes?"

"Well, I hadn't jest thought uv it in that way -- but, kid, you jest watch all ther big guys a-passin' by you on the street corner, who've got money -- why, they all smoke."

"Yes," Stephen answered thoughtfully, "it does look as if most of the rich men smoke. But can't you see, Freckles, that if they didn't spend money for cigarettes, then they would have that much more left?"

"Say, kid, I believe you're right." Freckles said, now thoroughly interested. The simple mention of money always interested him.

"Lem-me see; I spend ten cents a day fer cigarettes," he said, knitting his forehead, "ten cents a day -- lem-me see, that would be seventy cents a week; say, kid, if I didn't smoke I'd have seventy cents at the end uv every week ter lay aside fer my millionaire fund that I'm 'spectin' to start."

Then grabbing a newspaper he held it up against a telephone post and began to put down some figures.

"What are you doing now?" Stephen asked.

"I'm a doin' some figurin' -- lem-me see, I said seventy cents a week -- four weeks in a month, four times seventy -- yes, sir, here it is, sure nuff, four times seventy is two dollars and eighty cents. Whatcha think about that! Now while I'm a figurin' I'm a gonna find out how much I've been a wastin' all this time -- come here, kid, help me figger, hain't that right? -- twelve months in a year -- yes, sir, here it is, twelve times two dollars and eighty cents is thirty-three dollars and sixty

cents; en I've been a smokin' fer two years -- two times thirty-three dollars en sixty cents is sixty-seven dollars en twenty cents."

Freckles squinted his eyes, looked at Stephen sharply, and then repeated slowly, "Sixty-seven dollars and twenty cents." Then he jerked his cap from his head, threw it to the ground with all the force he could muster, whirled around on his heel several times, and then, as his custom was when speaking very seriously, he threw the corners of his ragged sweater back, thrust both hands deep into his trousers pockets, and stood directly in front of Stephen. Looking straight into his eyes, he again repeated slowly, "Sixty-seven dollars and twenty cents -- I'm the biggest fool in ther world -- en why haven't I been a-doin' some figurin' before this time? Here I'm most workin' my head off to become a millionaire, en then I've been a puffin' sixty-seven dollars en twenty cents up in ther air. Say, kid, here's a guy who's gonna have some sense. Two years from today there's gonna be sixty-seven dollars en twenty cents in my pocket, en not in that there man's pocket who's runnin' that terbacker stand 'round the corner"

With these words Freckles took the still smoking cigarette from his mouth and a package from his pocket, and threw it all violently to the ground, saying as he crushed it with his heel: "You robber you! -- you thief! You've been a robbin' me now fer two years; you got sixty-seven dollars en twenty cents out uv me, but you'll never do it agin. I'll jest show yer who's boss under my hat."

Freckles made sure that the cigarettes were all crushed under his heel and then grabbed his cap and what papers he had left, and he and Stephen went their way. He was usually very talkative but he was not in a talkative mood after such a discovery. Stephen embraced this opportunity to say what was on his mind.

"My papa told me," he said, "that he once had a wonderful opportunity to get a very good position and a chance to work himself up to become a partner in a great business and become a rich man, but because he smoked cigarettes the rich man would not hire him. The rich man told him that the young men who smoke do not have a clear mind to think, and do not have steady nerves like they would have if they did not smoke, and that cigarette smokers are not always dependable but are often deceitful, and so Papa just begged me never to use tobacco, and I ain't going to. Papa quit smoking but it was too late to get that good position and so he never got rich.

"If you don't mind, Freckles, then I'll just show you something that my papa wrote in my notebook not long before he died. He had copied it from some leaflets that some nice ladies who are called Woman's Christian Temperance Union had written and from a book that that rich man, Henry Ford, has written to show boys how bad it is to smoke cigarettes."

"What'd you say? -- that there rich man Ford who makes all the Ford cars? -- why, kid, he's a millionaire, en don't he think a feller arta smoke cigarettes?" Freckles said excitedly as he snatched the notebook from Stephen's hand. "Come, let's sit down here on this here old box in the alley en let's read it."

The two sat down together and Freckles began to read.

"Thomas A. Edison said, 'I employ no person who smokes cigarettes,' and again, 'I would prefer to see a boy with a revolver rather than a cigarette.'

"O boy? -- now whatcher think about that? Do you know who that ther Edison is? -- well, I'll tell you, I don't jest know how much money he's got, but he's ther feller who's sure got some brains, 'cause if it weren't fer him then I don't suppose we'd have no 'lectric lights en no phonergrafs nor nuthin'. If that there feller is agin terbacker then we'd better look out, fer he sure knows sumpin'. What else yer got in that there book? Let's read the rest.

"Luther Burbank said, 'No boy living would commence the use of cigarettes if he knew what a useless, soul-less, worthless thing they would make of him.'

"I tell you, kid, that there's another stunner, fer that there Burbank was another feller who shure had brains. En here's one of that big motor company, I'm a gonna read that.

"Cadillac Motor Company.

"This poster was posted conspicuously by the Cadillac Motor Company throughout its large factories in Detroit, Michigan. The notice is in part, "We think it a disgrace for grown men to smoke cigarettes, because it is not only injurious to their health, but it is such a bad example to the boys. . . . In the future we will not hire anyone whom we know to be addicted to this habit. . . . We are proud to say that none of the prominent or executive men in this company use cigarettes. They believe the effect to be injurious.""

In amazement Freckles looked at Stephen saying, "Well, well, well, what yer know 'bout that? Now I'm gonna see what all ther rest of these big fellers got ter say 'bout it," and he continued to read.

"Justice David Brewer of the United States Supreme Court said, "No cigarette victim can climb to the top of the ladder."

"Dr. Lewis of Harvard University said, "No young man that smokes ever graduates at the head of his class."

"Bob Burdette said, "A cigarette smoking boy is like a cipher with the rim knocked off.""

Freckles stood in silence for a moment, then threw the notebook to the ground, jerked his cap from his head and threw it violently against the side wall of the old shed, then whirled around on his heel several times, repeating, "A cipher with ther rim knocked off! A cipher with ther rim knocked off! -- don't that beat you!"

Then picking up the notebook again he said slowly, "Well, let's read ther rest; jest as well know all 'bout it now, what a big fool I've been all this time.

"David Starr Jordan, "Boys who smoke cigarettes are like wormy apples, they drop long before harvest time." .

"E. R. Harriman, the great railroad magnate, said, "I would as soon have an insane man at the throttle of a locomotive as a cigarette smoker."

"Horace Greeley made the following statement: "Show me a drunkard that does not use tobacco and I will show you a white blackbird."

"Dr. D. H. Cress said, "It is estimated that ninety-six per cent of our youthful criminals are cigarette addicts."

"Dr. T. D. Corothers said, "No person can be in complete possession of his faculties and power of control and exercise the highest efficiency possible, who uses tobacco."

"Marshall Field & Co., Chicago, Ill., greatest department store in America, if not in the world, "For many years it has been our policy not to employ boys who make a practice of smoking cigarettes, as we believe it to be detrimental to their development."

"Here are the views of George W. Alden, head of Alden Mercantile Co., Brockton, Mass., "My experience has taught me that cigarette smoking boys are woefully lacking in both ambition and decision. They soon become dull, smoke-befuddled boys. I let them know that cigarettes spoil boys for my business."

"Hudson Maxim, who has world renown as the inventor of high explosives for use in battleship guns, comes out squarely against the cigarette in this fashion: "If all boys could be made to know that the cigarette is a maker of invalids, criminals and fools -- not men -- it ought to deter them some. The yellow finger stain is an emblem of deeper degradation and enslavement than the ball and the chain."

"Now what yer think uv all that?" Freckles said very seriously as he closed the little notebook and handed it back to Stephen. "Jest 'magine a feller bein' a ciper with ther rim knocked off -- why, there wouldn't be nuthin' left -- he'd be nuthin', that's what he'd been then think uv a feller bein' no more'n a rotten apple."

"Now, jest look here," Freckles continued, "since I'm beginnin' to think about these here things I figger this way -- now here's a feller who wants ter make money en he goes to that there millionaire, Henry Ford, en asks fer a job. Well, Henry Ford he looks him over en says, 'No, sir, I kin not use you 'cause you use cigarettes.' En then he goes to ther Cadillac Moter Company en asks fer a job there en they say, 'No, sir, no job here neither fer a feller who smokes cigarettes.' En then he tries it right here in the big 'partment store, Marshall Fields, en they tell him, 'Nothin' doin' here neither, fer you smoke cigarettes.' By this time he's about feelin' like a ciper with ther rim knocked off; but then a feller's got ter work en make money en he goes to another city en tries Alden's big 'partment store en they tell him right ter his face, 'No, sir, a feller who smokes is smoke-befuddled en is woefully lackin' in ambition en decision -- no job here neither fer a cigarette smoker.' Then ther feller says ter himself, 'I've got ter have a job. I'll try the railroad; I kin sure git a job there.' Then that there millionaire railroad man, that there honorable Mr. Harriman, meets him en says ter him, 'Me hire you? No, sir; I'd as soon have an insane man at the throttle as

you, 'cause you smoke cigarettes.' Now tell me, kid, how kin a feller with 'sperience like that 'spect ter climb to ther top of ther ladder? It sure is beginnin' ter look ter me like he's a cipher with ther rim knocked off."

Freckles was now thoroughly aroused, "What gits me is this," he continued: "Why do these here fellers who look like they arta know sumpin' 'cause they graduates from the grades in school, en from high school, en from college, en from there semertary, why do they use terbacker? Well, I suppose," he added rather indifferently, "I suppose they're same as me, they don't know nothin', 'cause I never knowed it 'til a minute ago when you told me 'bout it."

Freckles walked away a few steps and then suddenly turned on the heel of his right foot and again stood facing Stephen. Pointing his index finger into his face, he said, "Here's 'nother thing, Steve, that I never could figger, 'fore you ever tole me these awful things 'bout terbacker. I never could figger how a young feller could walk on ther street with a nice, pretty girl, en she a-lookin' so pretty, en he a-blowin' terbacker smoke right inter her pretty face. En then when a man has such a awful nice wife en maybe carryin' a nice baby on his arm, I never could figger, until I found out that a man who uses terbacker is a cipher with ther rim knocked off, I jest couldn't figger how he could do such a thing. You know, kid, I always wanted a sister, but I never had none. But when I get growed up I'm gonna go with some nice, pretty girl, en then someday I'm a gonna marry her but you'll never see me blow smoke inter her pretty face."

Stephen was glad that his words spoken to Freckles, and what they read from the little notebook, the words of great men and women, had made an impression for good on Freckles' mind. They walked in silence for some time, then Stephen said, "Papa told me that he, a long, long time ago, used to drink and smoke and swear but he quit it all when I was a tiny little baby. As long as I can remember he didn't do these things any more."

Then turning to Freckles he said timidly, "I wish you wouldn't swear, Freckles; I don't like to hear anyone swear."

"How do you s'pose a feller kin help it?" Freckles answered rather impatiently. "My mom she swears, en my dad he swears, en seems like 'most everybody 'round me swears -- but then I s'pose I arten to anyway -- I'll tell yer, kid, I'm gonna try to quit."

At this time they were passing a church and Stephen asked, "Do you ever go to church, Freckles?"

"Go ter church? -- go ter church? I should say not; 'course I don't go ter church! Why, kid, I couldn't dress swell 'nuff to go ter church! I never wuz in one uv them things in my life, en I don't 'spect I ever will be. Why? Do you ever go?"

"Yes, I went a few times before my papa died -- and, Freckles, the people who go to this church are not stuck up. One Sunday night when we went my papa went to the front and got down on his knees and prayed, and told Jesus how sorry he was that he ever drank and smoked and swore and -- well, he just told Jesus how sorry he was for all the sins that he had ever committed, and then after a little while he got up from his knees and said that Jesus had forgiven all the bad

things that he had ever done. O Freckles, Papa was so happy! He looked just like the picture you see of angels. He was happy all the time after that. Then he told me that he wanted me to give my heart to Jesus, too, so that I might be a good boy and a good man when I get big; and he said that the bad people who will not let Jesus forgive their sins cannot go to heaven -- and, Freckles, when Papa died he was so happy; he smiled and told me that Jesus was taking him to heaven. I'm going to do like . Papa did. I want to give my heart to Jesus. I would go to church all the time, but every time I go as far as the steps to go in, I feel so bad because Papa got killed and I always have to cry and then I run back home."

Freckles listened very attentively while Stephen was speaking, and after walking for some time in silence he turned to Stephen and said very seriously, "Kid, wuz it that there church we jest passed where you say your dad wuz made so happy? Let's go back en look at it again."

They walked back slowly and stood in silence for a few moments in front of the beautiful church building.

With both of his hands thrust deep into his pockets, Freckles broke the silence, saying, "Say, kid, I'm a-comin' to this here church someday if this is where a feller kin get his swearin' fergiven -- I sure wish that I had never swore nor nothin'."

Both Stephen and Freckles slowly walked away; neither one spoke a word for some time.

Stephen was very lonely and often hungry. One gloomy evening while he was sitting alone on a box in the alley, leaning against the wall of the shack, some boys, who frequently played in the alley with their dog, made their appearance and tried to get Stephen interested in their sport, but his heart was too heavy to care to play.

"Say, kid," one of the boys said, "tell yer mom ter give us sumpin' ter eat fer this here dog; he's hungry as a rat."

When Stephen did not answer but seemed indifferent, the boy said impatiently, "Ah, you stingy kid, I say, tell yer mom ter give us a bone fer this 'ere dog."

"I haven't got any mother," Stephen answered somewhat indifferently.

"Yer haven't? Then where is she? You're jes a kiddin' 'cause yer don't want ter ask her fer sumpin' ter eat fer the dog."

"No, I never had no mother," Stephen replied sadly.

At this the boys all laughed and said, "Ah, kid, yer don't know nuthin'; 'course you had a mother; everybody has"; and calling the dog after them they ran down the alley.

Stephen sat in silence and in deep meditation for a long time after the boys had gone.

"There is that same question again about my mamma," he said to himself. "Oh, I wish that I had a mamma like other people; then everybody wouldn't make fun of me 'cause I tell 'em that I never had no mother."

He then thought of his father's plans to go to his grandfather's house, and the words he had spoken the night before he was killed: "Grandmother will let you call her Mamma, and she will love you!" Then he added with a sigh, "Oh, if I only knew where grandmother lives, then I could go to her."

Then suddenly he recalled the words of his father, "Sonny, it would be nice if you would adopt the sweet-faced lady in your new book for your mamma until we go to grandmother's house."

Strange, but Stephen had not seen this book since the evening his father had presented it to him, which was the evening before his sudden death. Stephen hastened into the house determined to find the book. After a long search he found it among some other books in one of the desk drawers. He eagerly opened it and began to turn its pages. There he found the picture of the sweet-faced lady. "That sweet lady is going to be my mamma," he said and tenderly kissed her.

Stephen did not see Freckles for several weeks and he was very lonely. Some boys gathered each evening in the little park a few blocks away, to shoot marbles. Stephen became interested and sometimes, until very late, spent his evenings there. One day just at dusk when Stephen was about to go to the park Freckles walked into the little shack and greeted him with the words, "Hi, kid," and sat down on a chair near the door, without saying another word.

"Well, Freckles, where did you come from? You haven't been here to see me for a long time," Stephen said in surprise. Then noticing the troubled look on Freckles' face he added, "What's the matter? Are you havin' trouble?"

"I sure have. You 'member ther day when you told me yer didn't want me ter swear any more? Well, t'oder day Dad en Mom they got into a terrible fight, en they were both jes a-swearin' en a-swearin'. En when Dad he went out uv ther house I says ter Mom, 'Mom, I'm a-tryin' ter quit swearin', I wanter go ter heaven when I die.' Then I says, 'Mom, you arter quit swearin' too en help me be good,' en then I went out ter play with ther boys. En later I comes in the house agin en Mom she wuz in ther bedroom jes a-bawlin' en a-sayin', 'Jesus, fergive me! -- fergive my sins!' I tell yer, kid, it skeered me. En when Mom she saw me comin' in she says ter me, 'O Freckles, I want Jesus ter fergive me, I'm sich a wicked sinner!' En then she says ter me that her mother she wuz a good Christian en if she had follored her ways she wouldn't be so wicked as ter swear en such like. Well, Steve, my mom she got happy en didn't swear no more. But what's a-worryin' me now, my mom she's sick, en ther doctor says she's a gonna die in a day er two, en if my mom dies my dad he'll beat me most ter death. He'd a' done it more'n once if my mom hadn't stopped him. Dad, he's off on a drunk now en Mom a-dyin'."

Freckles arose to go, saying as he walked to the door, "Well, I must go en see if Mom wants a drink or sumpin'."

"O Freckles, I don't want your mamma to die," Stephen said weeping. He threw himself on the floor and found relief in tears. He had lost interest in going to the park for that evening. After weeping for some time he arose, took the book. Mother, again looked at the picture of the sweet-faced lady, and then read a chapter in the book. He was charmed with the sweet and tender words that this dear mother spoke to her children. All through the next day he was thinking about the three children who had a kind mamma who really loved them.

"And my papa said I should adopt this sweet lady for my own mamma," he said. "I'm going to do that and then I can tell people that I have a mamma. Then everybody won't make fun of me 'cause I tell them that I never had no mamma.

Stephen discovered in reading his book that his adopted mother did not consent for her children to play promiscuously with other children, and that she insisted that they do not stay out late, but come home before dark and retire at an early hour, so that they might get plenty of rest, that their bodies might develop properly. Stephen immediately decided to obey her and not remain out at play after dark.

The next time he went to the park to play he started for home at dusk. The boys called to him, saying, "What's your hurry, Steve? Don't go yet."

"My mamma said I must come home before dark."

"Ah, come and finish the game."

"No, I must go; Mamma wants me to come home early."

"All right, if you're going to be tied to your mother's apron strings, then go on," they cried out sarcastically.

"I would rather be tied to my mother's apron strings than not to have a mother at all," Stephen answered and walked away whistling.

In the next chapter, the sweet-faced lady was giving a twilight talk to her children regarding the care of the body, instructing them about daily care of the teeth, proper exercise, frequent bathing, and the need of fresh air when sleeping.

The reading of this good book had a marked influence on Stephen. Each evening he read at least one chapter and tried to follow its teachings. The next twilight talk was a lesson on courtesy. Stephen was careful to notice that his adopted mother taught him to lift his hat whenever he met ladies of his acquaintance, and to be courteous at all times to everybody, and not to forget to say, "Thank you," whenever anyone, old or young, conferred a favor on him, and not to take his place at the table until all were ready to be seated. Stephen was delighted and bravely tried to obey her every command.

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Chapter 8 FRECKLES' SORROW

Five days had slipped away since Freckles had imparted to Stephen the sad news of his mother's illness. Stephen was becoming very anxious to learn whether she had recovered or had passed away. He had not once ventured to go to Freckles' home because Freckles' father was intoxicated most of the time and he was afraid.

One evening while Stephen was seated on a low stool peeling . potatoes for his evening meal, suddenly the door was thrown wide open and Freckles entered, and without .speaking a word took a seat near the door.

Stephen looked up and, seeing the sad countenance of his little friend, said with much feeling, "O Freckles, did your mamma die?"

Freckles simply nodded his head.

"Then what are you going to do? I don't want your papa to beat you," he said and began to weep.

"Yes, and whatcha think? My dad he's a gonna move termorrow. My mom she wuz buried yesterday, en my dad says he's not a gonna pay so much rent, en he's gonna live in a little bit uv a dark old room in an old dirty basement 'way, 'way off on ther other side uv ther city, en I don't think that I'm ever gonna see you agin, 'cause it's so far away. My dad he's drunk this very minute, en if he knowed I wuz over here he'd 'most kill me. He's a-lyin' on the bed drunk en thinks I'm a-gitten supper. I jes' runned away, 'cause I wanted ter see you first 'fore I have ter go so far away. But I'll have ter go now or Dad he'll wake up en lick me fer goin' away. I s'pose I'll have ter make a livin' fer me en Dad all ther time en spend all my money that way that I wanted ter save fer my millionaire fund, but if Dad wouldn't lick me so much then I wouldn't mind it so much. Sometimes I feel jest like runnin' away -- but then I guess Dad he'd have ter starve en I wouldn't like that, neither. Well, good-bye, kid -- I've gotter be goin'."

Stephen came back into the shack, threw himself on the floor, and found relief in tears. "Oh," he sighed as he laid his hand on his heart, "I feel 'most as bad as I did when my papa died!"

Stephen's father had known the value of good books, and also the evil influence of harmful ones. He knew from experience what the reading of cheap novels had done for him; therefore he had determined to supply Stephen with good books. Mother was the first one he had purchased for him, and, because of his sudden death, it proved to be the last and only one. However, the influence of this one good book directed the channel of Stephen's whole life for good and changed the course, not only of his own, but directly or indirectly, that of many other lives.

The temptations Stephen met as he began, in his loneliness, to reach out for companionship were strong and subtle. It was only natural that a boy at his age should seek the companionship of other lives. With no loving father's or mother's guiding hand, he mixed and mingled with any boys who chanced to be playing near enough to be convenient for him to join them; however, whenever

perplexing questions presented themselves to his young mind, his only sure refuge was to consult his adopted mother. This mother was very wise in her dealings with her children and not only forbade them to do certain things but always gave them a reason for her demands. This appealed to Stephen's young heart and mind. While he was playing at the park one day, the boys decided that the following day they would all go to a picture show together, and asked Stephen to accompany them. He was reluctant about giving them an answer. He remembered that his father had not approved of going to shows. He told them that he would ask his mother if he might go.

Arriving at home, Stephen opened his book *Mother* and again looked at the beautiful picture at the beginning of the chapter of her twilight talk to her children on modern amusements. There was the sweet-faced lady sitting in a low rocking chair; her son Edwin, nine years of age, was sitting at her right, leaning on her arm; Dolores, aged seven, at her left; and baby Kathryn sitting on her mother's lap.

Stephen read the chapter which began with a question asked by Edwin, "Mamma, is it right to attend picture shows?" In this, her sixth twilight talk to her children, the sweet-faced lady proceeded to answer this question.

"My dear children, Edwin, Dolores, and Kathryn, I suppose you have taken notice that your papa and I never attend the modern picture shows. We have reasons for this, and in answer to Edwin's question I shall give you a few of these reasons.

"By far most of the pictures that are being filmed today are very harmful to the morals of boys and girls as well as older people. We are aware of the fact that, even when such pictures as might be called educational and elevating are shown, usually the same evening others that are very harmful are also thrown on the canvas. By far the most of the pictures produced today are about robbery, murder, and other bad things. Many of the heroes and heroines in the pictures drink, smoke, swear, and dance. The scarcity of attire on the actresses is very harmful to look at. The sacred institution of marriage is often held up to ridicule. In order that you may better understand what I am trying to impress on your minds, and why I know it is wrong to attend present-day movies, I will tell you of some things that came under our own observation.

"A very dear friend with whom your papa and I have been acquainted for a long time, and who is a very devoted Christian, had the following experience: I shall relate it to you in his own words. I was traveling on the rear platform of a streetcar in a very large city in the West. Two men who were at the head of some of the large movie theaters in that large city also rode on the platform of the car. I overheard their conversation, which was as follows:

"Good morning, Mr. Bee, how is business?"

"If you refer to the financial side of it, then I would say very good; but if you refer to any other phase of the whole industry, I would be frank to say that it is rotten to the core."

"Yes," Mr. Bee answered thoughtfully, "I confess that I agree with you, for if we undertake to show clean pictures, such as might be termed educational and uplifting to the morals of the people, then our halls are empty. On the other hand, the more suggestive, degrading, and unclean

the pictures are that we film, the larger the crowds that enter our halls. Like you, I confess that I am disgusted with the business."

"Now, children," said the sweet-faced lady, "if that is the way these men who are in the moving picture business feel in regard to it, then do you think that those of us who wish to live clean lives should shun such places? I am sure that these men were right, for do you not remember that only a few days ago your papa read to us from a daily paper what happened in one of the Southern states? Here is the clipping, I shall read it to you.

"A seventeen-year-old boy was arrested in this city this morning, who six weeks ago held up and robbed a train single-handed. When questioned by the judge as to how he conceived the idea of undertaking such a daring thing, he answered, "Judge, a week previous to committing the robbery I sat in a theater building and there I saw a picture thrown on the screen in which a man robbed a train single-handed and got away with it. When I saw that, Judge, I said to myself, That can be worked, and, Judge, I worked it and got away with it -- at least for six weeks before I was caught."

"You see, dear children, that this seventeen-year-old boy was taught crime right in the picture show where thousands of other young people and children also go and look at the same things.

"A few years ago, when your papa and I were living in one of the Western states," said the mother, "in that city several buildings were broken into and robberies committed. The officers, although making diligent search, were not able to apprehend the criminals. One day a ten-year-old boy at school was seen with a loaded revolver. His schoolmates were frightened and told the teacher, who then called the police. The boy was arrested; at first he was very stubborn and would not divulge anything regarding his actions. After much questioning he finally confessed that he and eleven other boys, all between eight and twelve years of age, had committed the robberies. They had broken into different buildings and had stolen money, jewelry, and other articles. When pressed by the authorities he confessed that, for the evening of the day when he was arrested, he and the other eleven boys had planned to shoot and rob a man whom they knew to carry money. For this purpose he was carrying the gun, already loaded. The other eleven boys were then also arrested and corroborated the statements made by the first. All were questioned separately and all confessed that they had seen these things enacted at the movies and they had decided to do the same.

"It is no wonder when young people see enacted on the screen all manner of crimes that they emulate the example. They are there taught first to tolerate and then actually to admire the criminal and the crime he commits.

"Before concluding our twilight talk this evening I shall give you another reason why I think that Christians should not attend the movies, even when so-called clean, or even religious, pictures are filmed. I want to ask the question: Who produces these pictures? In answer to this question I shall give you the words of a man who was formerly an actor on the stage but became a Christian and is now a minister of the gospel. I shall give you his own words. He says:

"I cannot speak for all, but I personally never saw a Christian actor; and if there were any moral ones -- of clean, upright lives, free from the abuses of the day -- I never knew them.

"I have a brother who is two years older than I, and who has followed the stage for more than twenty years. "Brother," I asked, "have you ever met a Christian actor?" and he looked at me as though to say, What a foolish question! Then he answered, "No!"

"Well, have you ever met a moral one?"

"What do you mean?" he returned.

"I mean whose life is clean," and my own unconverted brother answered, "No!"

"That does not mean that there are none but this was his observation of twenty years of mingling with them.'

"My dear children," the mother continued, "do you think that God will bless us if we go to see pictures produced by such people? It cannot please God when godless and frequently immoral motion picture actors and actresses impersonate Jesus Christ, even though in so doing they produce religious pictures.

"The picture show might be made a great blessing if it were controlled by Christian people; but as it is, it has become a curse and is blasting hopes, wrecking homes, and undermining the morals of individuals and nations."

When Stephen had finished this chapter he again . looked at the picture of the kind-faced mother and then said with emphasis, "Mother, your son Stephen has settled it forever that he will not attend picture shows."

When at play with the boys in the park, Stephen carefully observed all that his adopted mother had taught him. He never played later than dusk and was careful about his language; he did not use slang as the other boys did, was courteous to all, especially to ladies and aged people.

When walking to the park and returning, Stephen usually passed a residence which was the home of Mr. and Mrs. Sylvester and their two children, Raymond and Mary. Their home was but a modest little cottage and the furniture not expensive; the yard also was not large but well kept and some beautiful flowers brightened the place.

The family, as Stephen saw them each evening when passing their home, reminded him of his adopted mother and her family.

One evening when the Sylvester family was seated on their front porch, Stephen again passed on his way home from the park.

"Mother," said Raymond, "I wonder who that boy is; I have been noticing him when he plays in the park. He uses such nice, clean language and is always kind to everyone. When the boys

ask him to attend movies, he refuses, saying that his mother does not approve of his going. He must have a Christian mother."

"Yes," Mrs. Sylvester answered, "I have noticed him, and have decided to make his acquaintance and would like to meet his mother."

The following evening when Mrs. Sylvester observed Stephen nearing their home on his way to the park, she engaged him in conversation, asking his name, and persuaded him to play in their yard with their children. At dusk Stephen suddenly stopped, saying that he must go home now; and although Raymond and Mary pleadingly entreated him to play longer, he refused, saying that his mother desired that he come home before dark. He picked up his cap, brushed back his beautiful brown hair, and walked toward the gate.

"Little boy, you must have a very good mother, who loves you very much," Mrs. Sylvester said.

"I sure have and that's why I want to mind her," he answered and with a friendly "good night" was on his way home.

"There is something beautiful and yet strange about that boy," said Mrs. Sylvester to her husband. He shows good training and yet his clothes do not look as though he had a mother's care. Many of the buttons are torn off and, while his face and hands are perfectly clean, I notice that his wrists, neck, and ears have not been washed clean. He has very beautiful hair but it has not had any care and needs cutting badly. I asked him where he lives and he carefully avoided the question, refusing to give me any definite information and immediately changed the topic of conversation. I have about come to the conclusion that his mother must be a refined and cultured woman and now perhaps ill and in poverty and therefore not able to care for him as she should. His father and mother must be poor people, for he sells papers every day. I shall make an effort to find out where he lives and call on his mother. I shall try to detain him here each evening instead of letting him go to the park, until I am able to get some definite information concerning him and his parents."

While the book mother was a great comfort to Stephen in his loneliness and a strong influence to help him overcome temptation, yet there was one thing that greatly troubled him. This dear mother taught her children the great importance of attending Sunday school and church services. Stephen felt that he should go, and more than once he had gone as far as the church steps, but then he felt so lonely and homesick for his father that he would turn back and run all the way home and lie down on the floor and weep.

"O mother!" he sobbed as he looked at the picture in the book, "if you could only take hold of my hand like a real mother does and go with me, then I would like to go to church, and then I would not miss my papa so much."

The more Stephen read this wonderful book, the more he loved the sweet-faced lady whom he now called mother, and the greater became his desire to fulfill her every wish. He made a heroic effort to keep his room, as well as his person, clean. It might have brought tears to the eyes of those unaccustomed to weeping, and have touched the hardest heart, had they seen the little

orphan boy as he toiled alone from day to day. Each evening he set his alarm and arose at six o'clock, prepared a scanty breakfast, ate it alone, then tidied up his lonely room to the best of his ability. Then remembering that his father had set up a family altar after his conversion, and that his dear adopted mother also taught him the necessity of beginning the day with prayer, he each morning read a few verses from his Bible, and then all alone, lonely and homesick for his father, knelt down and tried to pray. Frequently all that he could say was, "Jesus, help me today." At other times his heart was so near breaking that he could not utter a word, but simply knelt by his chair and sobbed. But He who has promised to be a Father to the orphans was bending low, and Stephen always felt comforted and strengthened. After his prayer he went to his day's labor selling papers, and returned home to his dreary shack in the evening weary in body, often too weary and hungry to get much of a meal but frequently eating only a piece of stale bread and drinking a glass of milk, at times falling asleep while seated at the table.

A week later Mrs. Sylvester again detained Stephen at their home and at this time she urged him to bring his father and mother over sometime.

"My papa is dead," he answered sadly.

"Then perhaps you could bring your mother over," Mrs. Sylvester suggested tenderly. "You must have a very good mother and I should like to make her acquaintance."

"I sure do have a good mother," he answered.

"Then will you bring her over sometime?"

"Well -- no -- I don't think she can come," Stephen said hesitatingly and with marked embarrassment.

Mrs. Sylvester was wise and did not press the matter any further lest she drive him away. Before he went home, however, she said, "Stephen, we are expecting to have a chicken dinner next Sunday and we would be delighted to have you come and eat with us. Will you come?"

Before Stephen had time to answer Raymond and Mary both said pleadingly, "Oh, yes, Stephen, do say that you will come. Mother is the bestest cook that you ever saw."

Stephen hesitated; he had never eaten a meal away from home except with his father at the restaurant, but finally consented to come.

On Sunday at twelve o'clock Stephen arrived. Mrs. Sylvester had decided that this day should not pass without finding out more about Stephen's home and his mother. She felt convinced that the boy, and perhaps his mother, needed help from some Christian friends.

After dinner, when they were all seated in the parlor, she again ventured the question, "Where do you live, Stephen? what is your address?"

"I live about four blocks away," he said timidly, then turned his face to the window and looked out with a faraway look as if to say, "Please do not ask me any more questions about my home."

Mrs. Sylvester, realizing that now was the time to press the matter, said: "Stephen, I am sure that you have a lovely mother and I wish very much to make her acquaintance; if you do not mind then, I will walk home with you this afternoon and call on her."

At first Stephen looked as if he were frightened, and then his eyes began to fill with tears. Before Mr. or Mrs. Sylvester could speak again Stephen threw himself on the floor, as he always did when in trouble, and began to weep aloud.

Mr. and Mrs. Sylvester looked at each other in amazement for a moment. Then without speaking a word to each other they both dropped on their knees by his side trying to comfort him, but he was weeping convulsively and refused to be comforted.

At last Mrs. Sylvester lifted Stephen's head saying, "Now, Stephen, we are your friends; won't you please tell us what is troubling you? We may be able to help you. Do you not want me to come to see your mother?"

Suddenly Stephen raised his head up high, threw his arms around Mrs. Sylvester's neck, and amidst sobs said, "O Mrs. Sylvester! I have no real mother, only one in a book!"

Again they looked at each other in silence. It was all such a mystery. Then Mrs. Sylvester took her own handkerchief and wiped his tears away and, stroking his beautiful hair back, said: "Do you mean, Stephen, that you have no mamma? Are your mamma and papa both dead? Stephen, we love you so much and if you will only tell us what is troubling you I am sure we can help you."

They finally succeeded in getting him to open his heart to them and he said while yet sobbing, "My papa is dead and I never had no real mamma, but papa gave me a book that has the nicest mamma in it, and my papa told me before he died that I should adopt her as my mamma, and she is a good mamma and I love her, but you couldn't come to see her like you could if I had a real mamma."

It still all sounded so mysterious, and Mr. and Mrs. Sylvester hardly knew what steps to take next. Mrs. Sylvester questioned him further.

"Did you say, Stephen, that your papa gave you a book and you adopted the lady in the book as your mamma?"

Stephen nodded his head, saying: "Yes, and she is a good mamma, but of course she is not a real mamma like you are. I never had no real mamma, but when I told people that, then they always laughed at me and said that everybody had a mamma, but I never had any. Since I adopted this mamma I like it better, and I love her and I feel like she really loves me."

Raymond and Mary were now both weeping, and Mr. Sylvester left the parlor and walked back and forth several times in the dining room, wiping the tears away. Mrs. Sylvester also wiped tears from her eyes but said with a pleasant smile: "Now, Stephen, I am sure that the sweet-faced lady in your book must be a very wonderful mamma, for she has taught you many good things, and therefore I would so much like to see her. I am certain that I would love her too. Mr. Sylvester and I would like to go along to your house and have you show us that wonderful book, for I do not think that I have ever seen such a lovely book."

Stephen looked at Mrs. Sylvester with a bright smile on his yet tear-stained face. He was delighted that someone was really interested in something he loved.

"Do you think that you would like her?" Stephen said with a smile.

"I am sure that I would; and now, if you do not mind, we will walk over at once, for I do want to see that book."

"But, Mrs. Sylvester," Stephen said hesitatingly, "I haven't a nice house like you have; I just live in an old shack on the alley, where Old Tim used to live."

Mr. Sylvester laid his hand gently on the boy's head and looked at him with a smile, saying, "Now, Sonny, we do not mind at all in what kind of a house you live. We are delighted to come to see you anywhere."

"Oh, that sounds just like Papa," Stephen said, looking at him with delight.

"What do you refer to? what sounds like your papa?"

"When you said, 'Sonny.' Papa used to call me that."

They walked four blocks, then arrived at an alley, and Stephen said apologetically, "We have to walk through the alley, 'cause I have no front entrance."

When they arrived at the shack, Stephen timidly opened the door and asked them to walk in.

"I haven't enough chairs to go 'round but Mary and Raymond and I can sit on the bed."

Immediately Stephen went to the desk, got the book mother, and turned its pages to the picture of the sweet-faced lady. "There, Mrs. Sylvester, isn't she nice?" he said.

Mrs. Sylvester put her arm around Stephen and kissed his forehead, saying, as with great effort she choked back the tears, "She certainly is nice, Stephen, and I am not at all surprised that you love her."

Stephen turned to the different pictures, making some favorable remark about each one. Mrs. Sylvester, reading a few sentences here and there, realized what a heroic effort the little orphan boy had made to follow the good teaching of his dear adopted mother.

"Do you live here all alone, Stephen?" asked Mr. Sylvester.

"Yes, since Papa got killed I'm all alone."

"You did not live in this place before your papa died, did you?" Mrs. Sylvester asked, noticing that what furniture he had had at one time been quite expensive.

"Oh, no, we lived in that big house at the front and we had nice furniture and lots of nice things, but an automobile ran over Papa and he died in a little while. He said before he died that I should go to grandfather's house and live with them, but I don't know where grandfather lives and so I can't go. I was feeling awful bad after Papa died, but since I have adopted the rice lady in the book for my mamma I don't feel quite so bad any more."

"Do you have any idea at all, Stephen, where your grandfather lives? Does he live here in Chicago?" Mrs. Sylvester asked, her eyes filling with tears.

"I don't know where he lives. Papa didn't tell me, but he said that we were going to take the train and go to their house and then grandma would love me and be my mamma, and then he said until we could go there I should adopt the nice lady in the book as my mamma. Then the next day the auto ran over him and we didn't get to go."

"Did your papa ever get letters from your grandparents?"

"No, I don't think so."

"Have you any aunts or uncles that you know of?"

"No, only Aunt Elizabeth. Papa said she lives with grandfather."

Mr. and Mrs. Sylvester inquired at the neighbors in regard to Stephen. Most of them were utterly indifferent, saying they knew nothing about the child. Going from house to house, they found only one family who had been living there at the time of Mr. Ludlow's death; these corroborated all that Stephen had told them in regard to the death of his father, but they said that there used to be an old man with the boy and they thought that he was living with his grandfather.

"This certainly is a pathetic as well as a mysterious case," said Mr. Sylvester to his wife as they walked back to the shack. "We must not let the child stay here alone any longer, but take him home with us and tomorrow look more fully into the matter."

They asked Stephen to go home with them but he refused, saying that someone might steal his things since he could not lock his door. All their arguments were of no avail, he would not be persuaded. They bade him good night and went home; however, after they retired they were not able to rest. Their thought continually wandered back to the old shack where lived the little orphan boy, alone and with no one to love him. About midnight they heard sobbing in Raymond's room; Mr. and Mrs. Sylvester hastened to his bedside to see if he were ill.

"No, I'm all right," he answered, "but I don't want Stephen to have to stay there alone in that old shack."

"It is no use for me to try to sleep either," said Mr. Sylvester, "I'm going over to stay all night with him."

Mrs. Sylvester began to weep, saying, "I wish you would, dear. I feel like a criminal living in a comfortable home and leaving the child there alone."

She folded a blanket and took a pillow and placed both in a suitcase, saying as she handed it to him, "The bed isn't any too clean."

Soon Mr. Sylvester arrived at the shack; all was dark and quiet. He gently opened the door, awakened Stephen by calling his name, then told him that he had come to stay all night with him.

"Are you going to sleep with me?" he asked.

"Yes, I shall sleep with you," he replied; and, putting the blanket and pillow into the bed, he lay down by his side.

"O Mr. Sylvester," he said, putting his arms around the strong man's neck, "that seems so much like Papa," and soon he was asleep again.

When the alarm rang the next morning, immediately Stephen was wide-awake. They both arose and soon Stephen was beginning to make preparations to get breakfast. But Mr. Sylvester insisted that he go home with him and eat breakfast there. To this Stephen reluctantly consented.

The next day Mr. Sylvester consulted the city authorities; they also became much interested and made every effort to find some of the child's relatives, but all to no avail. They searched the shack for some papers that might give them some clues as to where his grandparents lived, but failed in this also.

"No, there is no objection to your taking the boy home; it is certain that he must not be allowed to live here alone in this shack," said those in authority, in answer to Mr. Sylvester's question whether they might take Stephen to their home.

That evening after Stephen had come home from his work, Mr. and Mrs. Sylvester again called on him in order to make arrangements to have him come to their home and live with them. They did not know just what attitude he would take regarding this plan.

"Stephen," said Mr. Sylvester, "the sweet-faced lady in your book has no doubt been a wonderful mother to you, but how would you like to have a real mother and father?"

"O Mr. Sylvester, I would like that ever so much, but my papa is dead and I never had no mamma."

"Mrs. Sylvester and I have come over to tell you of a plan we have, and to ask you what you think about it. We would like to adopt you as our own son. Then we would be your real mamma and papa and you could come and live with us in our home, and we would love you just as we love Raymond and Mary and we would love you just as your papa loved you. Then you would also have a brother and sister, for Raymond and Mary would like to have you for their own dear brother."

For a moment Stephen looked at Mr. Sylvester in silence as if something too deep for his understanding had been propounded to him, then quickly jumped to his feet, and, throwing his arms around Mr. Sylvester's neck and laying his head on his shoulders, sobbed aloud.

"What is it, Stephen?" Mr. Sylvester said tenderly as he stroked his head gently. "Do you not wish to come?"

"Oh, yes, I do. I want to come and live with you all the time and call you Mamma and Papa; then everybody won't always laugh because I tell them that I have no mamma."

Mr. Sylvester immediately ordered the drayman to come and in a little while they were loading what furniture they wished to take. Stephen expressed a desire to take the desk because it was his father's and the rocking chair, for he said he could remember when his father used to hold him in his lap and rock him to sleep in it. He took the book mother under his arm and clung to it as if afraid that he might have to separate from it.

"The furniture is good," said Mrs. Sylvester. "Your father must have paid quite a price for it. Even the rug is good yet; all that it needs is to be sent to the cleaners. The bedding we will not take, but you may take anything else that you wish, and you may certainly take the book that has taught you so many good things."

Stephen's joy was unbounded; he was now to live in a big house with real windows and was to have a real father and mother.

They had Stephen's furniture and rug carefully cleaned and taken to a room adjoining Raymond's. Then they bought a new suit, hat, and shoes for him, and had his hair cut. He was indeed a beautiful child, and the very image of his father.

Stephen insisted on continuing to sell papers in order to help pay for his new suit and the other clothing they had purchased for him. They permitted him to do this until school started, fearing that with nothing but play to occupy his mind he might get homesick for his father.

Mr. and Mrs. Sylvester were not people of wealth, but lived in a modest home. By strict economy and careful management they had been able to pay for it and were now out of debt. Mr. Sylvester was a plumber by trade, and when kept busy was earning good wages, but was occasionally out of employment. They felt that the greatest heritage they could leave to their children was, not wealth, but the godly influence of Christian parents and a good Christian training.

Mr. and Mrs. Sylvester had united with the church many years before, immediately after their conversion in childhood, and had always been active in Christian work. Their earnest desire was to live such godly lives before their children that they too might choose to give their hearts to God while young. They were very happy to be able to share the blessings of their Christian home with Stephen, the little homeless orphan boy, even though it added to their financial burdens. They remembered the words of their Master, "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these . . . ye have done it unto me."

It was a happy day for Stephen when Sunday morning arrived and they all went to church. As they drew near the building he slipped over to the side of Mr. Sylvester, saying, "Take my hand, Papa, when we go in there. Then I won't feel so bad because my other papa died."

The good minister had chosen for his subject "The Broad and Narrow Way." He spoke of the beautiful, narrow way on which Christians travel to the City of God and then, in contrast, of the broad way on which sinners travel and that leads to destruction. At the conclusion of the sermon the minister asked the choir to sing an invitation hymn and penitent souls were invited to come to Christ. They sang softly:

Come to Jesus, come to Jesus,
Come to Jesus just now;
He will save you, He will save you,
He will save you just now.

Mrs. Sylvester, noticing that Stephen was weeping, put her arms around him, wiped his tears away, and asked, "What is the matter, dear?"

"Papa said that I should give my heart to Jesus as he did and be a Christian and meet him in heaven."

"Do you want to go forward and pray now?"

"If you will go with me."

She led him to the altar of prayer, knelt down by his side at the same place where Stephen's father had knelt in deep contrition and had found peace and forgiveness through faith in Jesus' blood. The Christian people knelt by Stephen's side and prayed for him. They urged him also to pray, and suddenly he lifted his face toward heaven, saying, "O dear Jesus, I give my life to You. I want to be a Christian like Papa. Do forgive all my sins."

They began to sing softly,

I can, I will, I do believe
That Jesus saves me now.

"Mamma, I do believe that Jesus takes me just now! Oh, I am so happy!" Stephen exclaimed as he rose to his feet. Another name was recorded in heaven; Stephen Ludlow was born into the Kingdom.

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Chapter 9 FRECKLES AND HIS FATHER

With a heavy heart Freckles climbed into the truck loaded with broken furniture such as is usually seen in a drunkard's home. His mother had passed away after a short illness and it was now the day after the funeral. It was while his father was lying across the bed in a drunken Stupor that Freckles had slipped away to the old shack to tell his only true friend good-bye.

Freckles and his father were now moving to a distant part of the city into one small room, in a cold, dark, and dingy basement. To Freckles, with his naturally sunny disposition, it was like going to prison. He was deeply grieved over the loss of his mother and, having formed a strong attachment for Stephen, the separation was painful; his heart was near breaking. He was now moving into a neighborhood where he had no friends. His father never gave him a kind word and at the least provocation beat him cruelly. No wonder that again and again he lifted his arm and with the sleeve of his ragged sweater wiped the tears away.

To Freckles' amazement, when the furniture was unloaded, his father drew from his pocket a roll of bills, paid the drayman six dollars, and put four dollars back into his pocket. Freckles watched him with much suspicion. He did not remember ever having seen his father have so much money. The first opportunity he had, when his father was out in the yard, he looked for the box that contained his "Millionaire Fund," the money he had saved by laying aside nickels and dimes, placing them in a little tin box which he had hidden away in an old shoe where he thought his father would not be able to find it. He had hoped that someday this would grow to the extent that his ambition of becoming a millionaire might be realized. With delight he had seen this fund grow until at the last time of counting he rejoiced that it amounted to ten dollars.

Hurriedly and excitedly, Freckles thrust his hand into the old shoe and to his horror his money was gone. He had always considered it a sign of weakness to shed tears; but now when his young heart was already near breaking over his other sorrows, and finding the money around which circled all of his high ambitions gone, he forgot his resolution not to weep, but leaned on an old dresser, buried his face in his folded arms, and wept bitterly. He knew that his father had taken the money and that what he had not paid the drayman he would spend for drink.

While Freckles was thus weeping loudly, his father entered the room and roughly jerking his arm said with an oath, "Whatcha cryin' fer?"

"My money is gone," he sobbed.

The drunken father took the boy roughly by the shoulders, threw him down on an old mattress that was lying on the floor, then picking up an old shoe cruelly beat him, saying, "I'll teach yer not to hide any money from yer father; if you ever do it again I'll kill yer!"

For a moment Freckles forgot his sorrow, leaped to his feet, and in anger faced his father, saying, "You're not a gonna do no sich a thing, fer some uv these days I'm a gonna run away, en then you can't steal my money no more!"

This so enraged the father that he hit the boy in the temple with the heel of the heavy shoe. Freckles staggered, and then fell backward on the floor. For a moment he was lying there motionless, and the father, fearing that he had made good his threat to kill the boy, and that the law would lay hold of him, bathed Freckles' face with cold water, and soon he regained consciousness. As soon as he was able to walk his father ordered him roughly to hasten and get the evening meal.

Freckles tried hard to clean the room and set things in order, but after he had done his best it still remained a dark, untidy, cheerless room.

Time slowly dragged away for the boy who had not a friend in the world. His father took all the money he earned and bought hardly enough food to keep them from starvation; the rest he spent for liquor, tobacco, and at the gambling table. Often when there was not enough money to get all the liquor he wanted he would cruelly beat Freckles for not earning more.

Stephen Ludlow, while Freckles lived near him, had a strong influence for good over him. However, now that this restraint was removed, and the ambition of saving money crushed under the cruel heel of a drunken father, he for a time plunged recklessly into sin and formed all manner of evil habits.

After bringing all his money home to his father for several months, and frequently being beaten for not earning more, Freckles finally reasoned thus, "If I'm a gonna git a lickin' anyway about every day er two fer not bringin more money home, then I kin jest as well begin savin' agin fer my millionaire fund."

While his father was out gambling Freckles went into an old coal shed on the back of the lot in search of a place to hide his nickels and dimes.

"Here," he said, "is a crack in the floor. I'll jest throw my money in there, en Dad he'll never look fer it there. En then when I git a lot throwed in I kin break a plank loose en git it out."

After this on payday he always came home by way of the alley and dropped his nickels and dimes through the crack under the floor of the old shed.

Some months passed and there arose a deep longing in his heart to see Stephen. While eating lunch he soliloquized: "I have made 'most as much money this morning as I usually make in a whole day, en I'm a gonna have a half holiday, en Dad he'll never know it. Seems ter me that I haven't seen that kid Steve fer ages en I'm a gonna git ter see him this very afternoon if I kin find him."

He boarded a streetcar and after an hour's ride he arrived at the corner where Stephen usually had his place selling papers.

It was four days after Mr. and Mrs. Sylvester had taken Stephen to their home, and the day before his conversion, while he was busily engaged selling papers. Suddenly a hand was brought down heavily on Stephen's shoulder and a familiar voice shouted into his ear, "Hello, kid!"

"O Freckles, where did you come from?" Stephen exclaimed excitedly. "Did you move back to this part of the city?"

"No, I'm a-livin' miles en miles away from here, but I jest wanted ter see you so bad, en I made lots uv money this mornin', so I jest thought I'd take a half holiday so as I could come ter see you once agin."

The two friends sat down under a large shade tree in the park and Stephen said excitedly: "O Freckles, I have something good to tell you about myself! But then I want to know first how you are getting along. Do you like the place where you live now, and does your father still beat you like he used to?"

"Ah, kid, we're jest a-livin' in the awfulest place, en I don't like it at all, en my dad he found my money that I had saved fer my millionaire fund en spent it, en he don't work at all, en he beats me all ther time 'cause I don't bring more money home, en then when he's drunk he won't let me sleep in ther bed, en I have ter lie on ther cold, cement floor, en I guess I'm a-gitten rumertism or sumpin', 'cause sometimes I'm a-hurtin' all over, en I don't git hardly nuthin' ter eat, 'cause Dad he uses 'most all ther money fer drink en gamblin'."

"I wish that I could do something for you, Freckles."

"Nothin' yer kin do fer me; nobody kin do nothin' fer me as long as my dad drinks en smokes en gambles -- but say, kid, I'm not a gonna give up yet. I've started a millionaire fund agin, en I don't think my dad'll find my money this time 'cause I'm puttin' it under the floor in the shed, en then I take ther rest ter Dad en tell him that's all I made. I don't s'pose that it's jest exactly right ter tell a story; I s'pose you'd call it tellin' a lie -- but what kin a feller do?"

"But, Freckles, you shouldn't tell a lie."

"I know it, but I jest figgered I couldn't git around it -- but now, kid, tell me how you're a-gittin' along. What's the good news you were a gonna tell me 'bout?"

"You remember, Freckles, that after my papa died I lived alone in the old shack on the alley, and when I could not play with you any more 'cause you moved away, I went to the park to play with the boys. One day a lady who saw me pass their house asked me to come into their yard and play with her children, and I did -- and, O Freckles, they are the nicest people I ever saw -- except my other papa. They invited me to eat dinner with them last Sunday, and then Monday they came to see me and asked me to go home with them and always live with them, and they said that I

should be one of their children and that they would be my mamma and papa, and now I'm livin' with them in their nice, big house."

"You sure are a lucky feller, en I hope they'll allus be good to you," Freckles said with some misgivings, as if thinking that a condition like that was too good to last long.

"Say, Freckles, you wait here a minute and I'll run home and get something for you," Stephen said as he hastily arose and ran away. He soon returned with two packages.

"Whatch'er got there?" Freckles asked.

"This is a book that my other papa gave me before he died -- and look here," he said excitedly, as he turned to the pictures, "isn't that a sweet-faced lady? I had no mamma, same as you haven't any now, and I adopted this lady as my mamma. Now I've got a real mamma and I want you to have this book and you can adopt the sweet-faced lady for your mamma same as I did; and, Freckles, if you'll do what she tells you in that book you'll be a good boy; she helped me to be good."

"Say, kid, I sure like the looks uv her nice face, en I'll sure do my best ter mind her orders. I miss my mom awful much -- but whatch'er got in that there other package?"

"Oh, yes, I almost forgot -- when I went home to get the book I told my new mamma that I was going to give it to another newsboy who had no mamma. She gave me this sack full of cookies and apples and other nice things and she said I should give it to you."

"Say, kid, that's more'n I've seen ter eat fer more'n a week en I sure thank yer -- but I must be a-goin now er Dad he'll find out that I've been over here en he'll 'most kill me."

The two little friends parted, Freckles to get on the streetcar, and with a heavy heart go back to his cheerless basement room and to his drunken father, and Stephen to his new and happy home to be loved and cared for by kind Christian friends.

* * * * *

Chapter 10

THE DAWN OF A NEW DAY FOR FRECKLES

Three months after Freckles had visited Stephen on the street corner he again boarded the car to make an effort to find him. To his great disappointment Stephen was not there. Another had taken his place. He tried to find him but failed.

Freckles had been reading the book mother which Stephen had given him and he also loved the sweet-faced lady and was making a heroic effort to profit by her teachings. However, with Freckles the battle was harder. He had been surrounded by sins of every description from his earliest recollection, and was now daily associating with sinful boys and living with a father who was a drunkard and a gambler.

Weary and disappointed, he stepped from the streetcar a few blocks from his home. He walked along slowly, and in deep meditation. He did not care to go home but had no other place to go. He thought of his mother, but she was gone; and now he had failed to find Stephen, the only friend he had left who had been showing any real interest in him. Suddenly he stopped -- before him on the corner stood a beautiful new church. He saw a large sign which particularly arrested his attention.

"I've seen that there name before," he said to himself. "Yes, sir, that there is the same name as ther other church close by where I used to live, en Steve he tole me that there's where his dad he got all his meanness fergiven en was made happy en then went ter heaven."

Freckles sat down on the curbing for a while to think it all over and soliloquized, "I've been a-readin' that there book that that kid gave me and that there lady in it is sure a good mom to her kids, en I've been a-tryin' ter do as she tells me, and -- lem'me see, I don't think that I swear quite as much as I used to do, en -- well, I 'member she says a feller arta go ter church if he's a gonna be good en go to heven when he dies -- well, sir, I'm agoin' the very first chance I git."

With this determination he arose to go home. Just then the janitor came down the front steps of the church.

"Say, Mister, when kin a feller git in here?" Freckles asked.

"Do you mean into the church?" the kind janitor asked.

"Yes, when kin a feller git in?"

"You may come in right now, my boy, if you wish."

Freckles walked in, cast a hurried glance around, and, noticing that all the seats were vacant, turned to the janitor saying, "why, Mister, there's nothin' doin' here."

"No, we have no service here today; this is Saturday. But we have Sunday school and preaching service here tomorrow morning and again preaching service at night; we would be glad to have you attend."

"I couldn't come in ther mornin' 'cause I sell papers, but I kin at night."

"All right, Sonny," the kind man said as he took Freckles' dirty hand in his and laid his other hand on his head, "you come tomorrow night. Be here at seven-thirty and I will be standing right here on the steps waiting for you, and I will see that you get a good seat."

"It's a bargain, Mister, I'm a-comin'," Freckles said in his frank, straightforward manner.

"That there feller sure is nice," he said to himself as he left the church to go home. "I've never had anyone talk so nice to me in all my life -- 'cept Steve, he's allus nice -- I'm sure a-goin' "

termorrow night. I wouldn' mind goin' jest ter see that there feller agin. I think he'll probbly be right there on the steps a-waitin' fer me."

The following evening the janitor took his place on the steps of the church a little while before seven-thirty, as his custom was each Sunday evening, to greet any stranger who might come. Soon Freckles appeared; when he saw the kind janitor a bright smile lit up his face.

"Good evening, Sonny, I'm so glad to see you back," the janitor said with a smile.

"I told yer I was a-comin'," and the two walked up the steps together.

"Say, feller, but there's a crowd in there!" Freckles said excitedly when he saw the church already well filled.

The janitor beckoned for one of the ushers to come; then turning to Freckles he said, "Son, this man will find a good seat for you."

"Whatcha gonna charge a feller fer this here thing?" Freckles asked.

"Nothing at all; the services are free," the usher answered, "and now where do you wish to be seated? Do you wish to go to the front, in the balcony, or where do you prefer a seat?"

"Well, Mister, I've never been to a church in all my life en I wanter sit where I kin see the whole show."

"All right, we will give you a front seat. All we ask is that you be quiet during the service -- now take your hat off and carry it in your hand and I will show you a seat, and I am sure you will enjoy the service.

Freckles occupied a seat directly in front of the minister. The choir loft was already filled. A number of young men were taking their places on the platform to play wind instruments. It all seemed very wonderful to Freckles. When the choir began to sing and the pianist and the young men to play, Freckles was certain that he had never heard such beautiful music in all his life, and he noticed that everyone seemed very happy. More than once he wished that he could speak to someone in order that he might give expression to his delight, but he had been told to be quiet and he tried to obey.

After several hymns had been sung the minister called the congregation to prayer. He himself knelt down by the pulpit, lifted his face heavenward and prayed fervently. It all puzzled Freckles and he turned to a man near him, saying in a whisper, "Say, Mister, what's that there feller on the stage a-lookin' up fer, en a-talkin'? It looks like he's a-talkin' ter nobody."

"That is our pastor, Rev. Venice, and he is praying to Jesus," was the kind reply.

After the singing of another hymn the minister opened his Bible and read the following text: "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men." He spoke of the beauty and blessing of the

Christian life -- the joy it brings to the soul to have the assurance of sins forgiven -- of the blessing of winning others, leading them to the Lord -- and of the final reward in heaven. Freckles listened very attentively but nothing in the whole sermon impressed him so much as one of the last sentences when the minister said, "I would rather know Jesus in the forgiveness of my sins, and then become a fisher of men -- a soul winner, leading sinners to Christ -- than to become a millionaire."

When the sermon was concluded the congregation sang another hymn and the pastor pronounced the benediction.

"Is it over?" Freckles inquired excitedly, speaking to the man by his side.

"Yes, the service is over. Come again, Sonny."

But Freckles did not stop to answer. He walked toward the platform and met the minister just as he was coming down the steps.

"Say, Mister, that's jest me," he said with strong emphasis as he stood directly in front of the minister with both hands thrust deep into the pockets of his ragged trousers.

"What do you mean, my boy?" asked the minister with a kind smile, laying his hand on the boy's head.

"I mean what you wuz a-sayin' when you wuz up there on the stage."

"Just what part of my sermon do you refer to, Sonny?"

"Well, you see, Mister, I've allus wanted to be a millionaire, en I've got 'most ten dollars saved up now fer my millionaire fund. But if I could do what you was a-sayin' when you was a-talkin' up there -- if I could have all my lyin' en stealin' en all the rest uv my sinnin' fergiven, en then if I could be a fisher of men, or sumpin' like that what you was sayin' -- if I could help other kids ter have their meanness fergiven, I sure would like that better than even to be a millionaire."

Rev. Venice had always taken much interest in the spiritual welfare of the children in his church and when Freckles, the little stranger, addressed him he immediately became much interested in him, asking him a number of questions. He said, "Do you come to church here often, Sonny?"

"No, sir, I haven't been a-goin' ter church nowhere. This is ther first time that I ever wuz in a church, but I've been a-readin' a book that a good kid give me, en the lady in that there book says that a feller arta go to church if he wants to be good, so I says, I'm goin', en this is the first time, but I'm comin' agin."

"Where do you live, my boy?"

"Oh, jest four blocks down the street by the laundry."

"Do your parents attend the services here?"

"No, sir. My mom she's dead en my dad he's drunk 'most all the time, en if he knowed that I wuz here he'd lick me, en I hain't a gonna tell him, neither."

The kind minister, realizing that beneath the dirty face before him there was a bright mind and beneath the ragged and untidy clothing there was a soul, became much interested. "Now, Sonny," he said, as he drew from his pocket a notebook, "I want your name and address, and may I come to see you sometime this week? Anyway, we will look for you again at the service next Sunday."

"I can't come in ther mornin' 'cause I sell papers, but I'm sure comin' back at night."

"We shall be delighted to see you," the minister said and with a smile bade him good night.

The service made a deep impression on Freckles' young mind. When he arrived at home his father, who had been intoxicated all day, was lying on the floor in a drunken stupor. Freckles covered him up with an old blanket and put a pillow under his head and then retired for the night.

The following week things occurred about as usual, except that Freckles tried to be more careful about his general conduct and was more kind and tender toward his father.

Freckles arrived at the church again at seven-thirty the following Sunday. He was happy to again find the kind janitor on the steps to welcome him. Entering the church he said to the usher, "Say, Mister, may I sit in that there front seat agin?"

"You may," was the kind reply as the usher led the way to the front and to the seat that Freckles had occupied the previous Sunday.

For the evening message Rev. Venice had chosen the scripture text, "Be sure your sin will find you out." He spoke of the fearfulness of sin and its consequences. Freckles again was very alert and listened attentively to every word that fell from the minister's lips, but one sentence especially made a deep impression on the mind of Freckles, "Through faith in Christ every penitent soul may have all his sins forgiven, but if a sinner fails to repent, if he refuses to confess and forsake his sins, then all of his wrongdoings will meet him at the judgment." At the conclusion of the sermon the minister invited those who wished to seek Christ to come forward and kneel at the altar of prayer. Freckles saw a little girl and two men go forward in response to the minister's invitation. Christian men and women and the pastor knelt by their side and prayed for them; soon one of the men arose and, with a happy heart and smiling face, gave testimony that the Lord had forgiven his sins. Then all knelt again and earnestly prayed for the other man and the little girl.

Freckles was watching every move that was made. Suddenly he stepped across the altar rail to where the minister was kneeling and said with trembling voice, "Say, Mister, kin a feller who has been an awful sinner git his sins fergiven?"

"Yes, indeed, my boy," he answered. "Jesus shed His blood on the cross to save you from all your sins, no matter how many you have committed. Would you like to become a Christian?"

"I sure would," he answered very seriously. "From what Steve tole me his dad at one time must have been 'most as mean as me, en he had all his sin fergiven, en that nice lady in that there book says that Jesus will fergive jest everyone that comes en repents. Now if you help a feller like me who's an awful sinner, en tell me what ter do, en then if you pray fer me, do you s'pose I kin make it?"

"Yes, Sonny, kneel down right here by my side, and we will pray," the minister said as he laid his hand on the boy's shoulder, and they knelt down together.

"Now, my boy," he said, "I will pray for you, and if you repent of your sins -- that is, if you are sorry for your sins, and will forsake them -- then Jesus will save you."

He laid his hand on the boy's bowed head and prayed very earnestly for his salvation and then said to him, "Now, Sonny, you pray; tell the Lord in your own words that you are sorry for your sins and ask Him to forgive you and He will do it."

Freckles had never before made an attempt to pray but he lifted his head and began: "Dear God, You're 'way up there in heaven, but I guess You kin hear me; You have heard these other fellers en forgave all their meanness, en You fergave Steve's dad, en I'm jes as sorry as I kin be that I wasn't allus good, en I ask You ter fergive all my lyin' en swearin' en stealin' en all the bad things that I ever did, like You forgave these here other fellers. Amen."

Again the kind minister gave him a few words of instruction; he told him to have faith in the Lord and to believe that Jesus would accept him and forgive his sins. Then they began to sing softly:

Only trust Him, only trust Him,
Only trust Him now;
He will save you,
He will save you,
He will save you now.

Freckles looked up and smiled through his tears saying, "I do trust Jesus jest now en He does fergive me all my sins, en He makes me so happy."

Before leaving the church Freckles took the minister's hand, saying, "Say, Mister, you don't suppose that a feller who has been drinkin' en gamblin' en swearin' en stealin' fer years en years like my dad could have all his meanness fergiven, do you?"

"Oh, yes, Sonny. Jesus died to save the vilest sinner. Is your father a drinking man and a gambler?"

"He sure is, but I do wish that Jesus would fergive him en make him happy like He did me.

"My boy," the kind minister said, "be true to Jesus and be kind to your father and pray for him and I believe that he will also get saved."

When Freckles arrived at home that night his father had not yet come home. He came home after midnight and, as usual, was intoxicated. The following morning before Freckles went to work he made a special effort to get a good breakfast for his father and while they were eating he told him of his conversion and that he was now a happy Christian. Then he showed him the book mother, saying, "Dad, a feller that used ter sell papers with me gave me this 'ere book en it's sure a good book, en I wish you would read it terday. I believe yer would like it."

With disheveled hair, red eyes, and bloated face the drunkard looked across the table at his son, and with fearful oaths that made Freckles Shudder he told him that he should never again mention the subject of religion in his presence. "And as for that book," he said as he took it and threw it with violence into the farthest corner of the room, "it is not fit to be in this house."

"But, Dad," Freckles said with tears in his eyes, "it looks ter me that yer would be glad if yer only kid would try ter be good, en instead uv cussin' me when I want ter be a Christian en meet my mom in heaven, it looks ter me that yer would help a feller." With these words he took his cap and sweater and left, to go to his work without finishing his breakfast.

The words of Freckles touched a tender spot in the poor drunkard's heart.

"So the kid's got religion," he said as he sat with bowed head after Freckles had gone. "Well, after all, that is what all of us need -- my dear wife had religion when I married her, en she sure was a jewel, but I went to drinkin' en dragged her down with me. But she sure got it agin 'fore she died, en I'm mighty glad uv that, en it was because the kid reproved her when she wuz cussin' that made her pray en git back to God. Oh, how she pleaded with me before she died ter quit drinkin' en gamblin' en give my heart to God en get saved and then raise the kid right, en meet her in heaven! But no hope for me any more. I'm doomed, I kin never quit now -- but anyhow, I'm not gonna hinder the kid any more, en maybe I kin even help him a little -- I sure don't want him to live like I'm a-livin'."

He slowly raised his head and wiped the tears away with his dirty coat sleeve, then picked up Freckles' book that he had so ruthlessly thrown into the corner of the room and began to read. Every word that he read, that the sweet-faced lady said, went like an arrow of conviction to his poor, sinful heart.

Freckles was agreeably surprised when he returned from his work in the evening to find his father at home, also that he had prepared the evening meal, which he had not done for months. However, the poor, enslaved man was, as many others, trying to reform in his own strength, and like others he soon discovered that he was fighting a losing battle, and the rest of the week he was again intoxicated.

The following Sunday, while they were eating their noonday meal, Freckles said to his father, "Dad, please don't drink this afternoon, fer I do want yer to go ter church tonight. Jest go once en if yer don't like it you don't have ter go agin."

When his father did not answer, but stared blankly out of the little window, Freckles took courage and continued, "Tell yer what I'll do, Dad. I got some fruit en some sausage en some buns, en I'll fix up a lunch, en we'll git on ther streetcar en go to the big park, en then we kin come home jest in time fer the service at ther church."

Freckles was almost beside himself for joy when his father did not protest but reluctantly consented to go. He grabbed an old basket and hastily put up a lunch, taking all the good things he could find in the house. He feared that if they did not get away soon some of his father's sinful companions might arrive and persuade him to drink with them.

I wonder if I kin keep Dad out there all afternoon, Freckles thought. But he had a knack of being resourceful when occasion demanded, and suddenly grabbed a pillow and a blanket, rolled them tightly and tied a string around the bundle, put it under one arm and, carrying the basket in the other, said, "All right, Dad, all's ready now."

"Whatcha want with that blanket?"

"I thought maybe yer would want'a take a nap this afternoon."

Soon they arrived at the park, and for some time Freckles kept his father really interested in looking at the animals and other interesting things. When at last he feared that his father might crave a drink of liquor, he unfolded the blanket and threw it and the pillow down on the grass under a nice shade tree saying, "There, Dad, lie down en take a nap while I go en look at ther animals agin."

The father lay down and was soon sound asleep. About six o'clock Freckles went to a nearby lunch stand and purchased . a quart of good, hot coffee, then got the lunch out and awakened his father. At first he was cross and irritable, declaring that he simply had to have a drink of whiskey. But Freckles told him that he had some good, hot coffee, and succeeded in getting him to drink it and to eat the lunch, after which he felt much better. While fixing up the lunch basket Freckles said, "Now it is time to go to church."

"I can't go this way; my suit is too shabby," his father answered determinedly.

"Oh, yes, Dad, you kin; your suit don't look so worse," Freckles said pleadingly. "I brought some soap en a towel en a comb -- we'll fix up a little en we'll look all right."

Almost to Freckles' surprise, his father consented to go. Contrary to all his past actions, he seemed to follow out Freckles' every suggestion.

"Dad he never acted like this in all his life," Freckles said to himself. "I jest know that God He is answerin' my prayers, fer I asked Him this mornin' ter make Dad willin' ter go to church."

"This is my dad, Mr. Janitor," said Freckles when he and his father arrived at the church that evening.

"I have been much interested in your son since the first time I met him," said the kind janitor.

The usher came to show them a seat -- "I've brought my dad ternight, en if yer don't mind we would like ter sit in that there nice front seat agin where I allus sit."

"I'll sit in a back seat," Freckles' father said with determination.

"Just as you choose," the usher said, "but there is a big crowd and perhaps you would be able to hear better if you were nearer to the front."

Freckles wished to go to the front and he again won out. The fervent prayers and the beautiful hymns brought tears to the poor drunkard's eyes. He also wept during the sermon while the minister preached from the text, He was "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance."

At the conclusion of the sermon the minister said, "If anyone present is weary of wandering in sin's dark path, if he will now come and kneel at the altar of prayer while we sing a hymn, I am sure the Lord will pardon all his sins.

The choir sang softly,

Come, ye sinners, poor and needy,
Weak and wounded, sick and sore;
Jesus ready stands to save you,
Full of pity, love, and power.

"Now's yer chance, Dad! Right there's where Jesus fergived my sins," Freckles said, pointing to the place at the altar where the previous Sunday he had knelt in prayer.

"Come, my friend, give your heart to the Lord," said the minister as he reached across the altar rail, taking the hand of the poor drunkard.

"No, this is not for me, I am too wicked; but I am glad that Freckles got saved, en I just came to church to encourage him. I don't want my boy to live like I am living," and the strong man sank down into his seat sobbing.

The good minister urged him to kneel down and pray, but he shook his head, saying: "No, it's too late for me, but do all you can for my boy. His mother is in heaven and begged me to meet her but it's too late for me; but perhaps the boy can make it yet, he isn't so old in sin. There can't be any hope for me."

"My dear brother," said the minister, "Jesus did not die for the righteous but He died for sinners, "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow."

"Do you really think that there could be any hope for me, the way I have lived?" the poor drunkard said, wiping the tears from his eyes, a little ray of hope springing up in his heart.

"Most assuredly, my friend, there is hope for you in Jesus. He said, 'Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.' That promise is for you."

After some persuasion by Freckles and the pastor the poor gambler and drunkard knelt before the mercy seat. The minister, with his arm around him, knelt on one side and Freckles, weeping, knelt on the other side and both prayed for him. After prayer and confession by the seeker, God in mercy and for Christ's sake pardoned his sins.

Freckles and his father went home very happy that night. Early the next morning, while they were yet at the breakfast table, there was a knock at the door.

"I am one of the men who helped pray for you at the church last night," said the man at the door, "and someone informed me that you are at present out of employment. I am in the lumber business and am needing a man. Would you like to get a job?"

"Yes, I should very much like to get work; my boy has made the living now for a long time. If you think that you can use me, broken down as I am, I shall appreciate it and do my best."

"I shall give you light work until you get accustomed to it," the man said kindly.

For the first time in seven years Freckles' father held a job and was earning wages. The men's Bible class, of the church where he was converted, found a more desirable place for them to live, and advanced the first month's rent, and helped them in every way possible to get away from former companions.

Freckles and his father now became regular attendants at the church and Sunday school and both lived happy, consistent Christian lives.

* * * * *

Chapter 11 STEPHEN'S HAPPY HOME

Stephen was very happy in his new home and loved his new mother and father very dearly, and they loved him as they did their own children.

By the aid of the police authorities Mr. and Mrs. Sylvester tried in vain to get some information regarding Stephen's grandparents. They advertised in the daily papers, having Stephen's picture put on the front page, and again and again searched all of his belongings but found nothing that would give any clue as to where his people lived.

Stephen was very ambitious and Studied hard. When he had finished the grades he expressed a desire to work for a while before entering high school, so that he might be able to help pay expenses. Mr. and Mrs. Sylvester, however, insisted that he at least finish high school first.

At the age of seventeen he graduated from high school with high honors, and by strict economy and hard work during the summer months he was delighted that he was able to enter college with but little help from Mr. and Mrs. Sylvester.

"Stephen, dear, you look so much like the picture of your father," said Mrs. Sylvester one evening when the family were gathered in the living room. Mary was playing the piano and Stephen, with his beautiful baritone voice, was singing. He stood there erect, broad-shouldered, six feet and almost one inch tall; large brown eyes and beautiful, chestnut brown hair combed back in pompadour style. He was indeed a very handsome young man.

"Mother, I too think that Stephen looks very much like his father," said Mary, as she turned on the piano bench facing her mother. Then turning to Stephen she said, "Brother, won't you please get that old suitcase down? I would like to look at those pictures again."

Stephen brought the suitcase down and set it on the floor in the middle of the room. "These things are precious to me," he said as he took out the articles one by one which his father had placed there. "It is such a mystery why my father never told me anything about any of his people.

"Here are a pair of slippers, a fountain pen, and a pair of gloves," he said as he laid them down on the floor. "I am certain that there were some sacred memories connected with these things, for I remember on several occasions I saw tears in father's eyes when he looked at them. Here are some pictures; this one I am quite certain is the picture of my grandfather and grandmother, and this one is father's sister, my Aunt Elizabeth; and that one is my own dear father. I remember him well."

Before putting the articles back into the suitcase, Stephen spread a paper on the floor, turned the suitcase upside down to shake the dust out.

"What is that?" Raymond said excitedly, as he picked up a sealed, stamped, and addressed envelope yellowed with age that had fallen to the floor. He handed it to Stephen, who, with trembling voice, read the address,

Mr. and Mrs. Stephen Ludlow,
1906 Huegely Street,
Elm Point, Illinois

and in the upper left hand corner he read the return address,

Charles Ludlow
7177 Moweaqua Avenue,
Chicago, Illinois

Stephen's face turned pale and he sank back into a chair, saying, "A letter written by my father to his parents -- at last I may be able to find my people."

The family gathered around Stephen's chair. "Elm Point," said Mr. Sylvester, "that is not more than three hundred miles from here."

The lining of the suitcase was torn and the letter had been slipped between the lining and the outer leather of the old suitcase and had been hidden there for those many years. The letter proved to be the one that Charles had written to his parents the evening before his death, informing them that in a few days he and Stephen were expecting to come home. He had put it into the suitcase, not wishing to mail it until within a few days before they started on their journey.

With trembling hand Stephen opened the letter and began to read,

My Dear Father and Mother,

After a long silence I will attempt to write to you once more. First of all, my dear parents, I wish to beg that you forgive where I have so grievously wronged you. I know that I have not only deeply grieved you, but that by my actions I have almost broken your hearts.

I know that I am not worthy -- but unworthy as I am, I beg that, as Christ has forgiven and blotted out all my past sins, you will, for His sake, also forgive. The last and only time that I have written to you was when I wrote to you while on the train to Chicago a few hours after I left home. In that letter I informed you that I would never come back home until I was a Christian. Now, I am happy to say, that last Sunday night God saved me, and the following day, while all alone in prayer, He sweetly sanctified me. No tongue can tell of the joy that I have felt since that glad hour.

Stephen stopped for a moment to wipe the tears away as he said, "I remember well when that took place; father knelt at the same place where I later found Christ, and he was truly happy after that."

He continued reading:

My dear parents, if you will bear with me I desire to make some confessions to you as I have to my Lord. I left home because I felt that I was not worthy, any longer, to live in your beautiful Christian home, and I knew that, because of my sins, I was breaking your hearts.

When first I came to Chicago I made a strong effort to break away from my sins and evil habits; I was, however, trying to do it in my own strength and therefore failed. To some extent I succeeded for a time, but soon again yielded to the tempter and went back to all of my old ways.

It is needless to tell you that I was homesick, but I had resolved that I would not return home until I was not only living a clean life but until I was a true Christian. When I arrived in Chicago, after a few days of fruitless effort in seeking employment, I finally succeeded in getting

work in a small grocery store of which I am manager at the present time. After shunning evil associates for a time, in my loneliness I at last made the acquaintance of a young man who was rooming in the same building with me, and he persuaded me to again indulge in sinful amusements.

At a dance I met a young woman, Judith Delver, who was very beautiful but whose whole heart and life were set on worldly and sinful pleasure. After a very short acquaintance we were married. A dear little boy was born to us on my twenty-first birthday, whom I named Stephen. I gave him this name because I wished to name him after you, my dear father, and also because I always loved, so well, the Bible story about Stephen when you, dear mother, used to read it to me.

My wife never loved our dear baby -- it is a sad, sad story, but my dear little Stephen never had the care of a loving mother. I cared for him to the best of my ability when at home from work and she insisted that, during the day, I take him to a nursery so that she might be able to spend her time with her society friends.

When dear little Stephen was two and one-half years old, Judith died -- the story is such a sad one that I have never had the courage to tell Stephen about it. One evening she became suddenly seriously ill; the doctor informed her that there was no chance for recovery, then for a few moments she seemed to regret her wasted life. For the first time, and the only time, in her life she kissed the baby and called him by his name; before she always referred to him as "the kid." Just as we were carrying her to the ambulance to take her to the hospital she wailed out: "O my precious baby, my dear little Stephen, you never had a mother! You will condemn me at the judgment for the way I have dealt with you." As soon as the operation was over she thought she would get well, and never again consented to see the baby. In a few days she passed away.

A few days ago when little Stephen saw two loving mothers playing with their children, he said, "Papa, haven't I got any mother? I wish I had a mother." My heart failed me. I did not have the courage to tell him the sad story and, not knowing what to answer the poor child, I said to him, "No, my dear Sonny, you never had a mother, meaning, of course, that he never had the tender care of a mother. It has, however, troubled me that I gave him that answer, and I am resolved that tomorrow evening I shall tell him all about my past life and also about his mother. He is now seven years old and I feel that he should know the truth; I think it will help him to shun the paths of sin.

My dear precious mother and father, I am writing you this long letter so that you may be informed in regard to my life since I left home, and now I want to say that Stephen and I are planning to come home. I shall not even wait for an answer to this letter; unworthy as I am, yet I know that you will permit me to see your face and that you will forgive the past.

I am sure that you wonder why I have not written or come home sooner. I, too, am often made to wonder why I have done as I did -- only those, however, who are ensnared by sin know how strong the chains of evil are that bind the sinner.

When our baby came, then for his sake I broke away from most of my evil habits; I quit drinking and smoking, and when I saw that my wife so loved worldly pleasures, the novels, the dance, the show, and the card table, that they were wrecking our home and blasting every fond

hope of my life, then for my baby's sake I turned from all those things also. However, I never became a Christian until last Sunday night, when the Lord in mercy saved me.

I can hardly await the time when I shall see you face to face and receive from you the kiss of pardon for causing you so much grief. If it please the Lord, then Stephen and I shall see you before another week passes by. We expect to be there on Stephen's and my birthday.

Your unworthy but loving son,
Redeemed through Jesus' blood,
Charles Ludlow

Stephen's eyes again and again filled with tears while he was reading. When he had finished the letter, the family sat in silence for a few moments. No one knew just what to say. Mr. Sylvester spoke first

"That is a sad letter, Stephen, yet there is a bright side -- at least some mysteries that have been hanging heavily over your life have been solved. You now know something about your mother and you may be able to find your grandparents if they are yet living."

"Yes, this letter is worth everything to me," Stephen answered. "No one knows how it grieved me that there seemed to be such a mystery about my family. This letter clears up so many things. Father, no doubt, left home because at that time he had gone into sin, and would not return until he was saved. I remember well when he said, as he mentions in the letter, 'Sonny, you never had a mother,' and I was never able to understand why he should make such a statement. Another thing is clear to me now. Just before father died and in his weakened condition he could not form sentences any more, he said in broken words, 'The letter -- the old suitcase.' The doctors and others standing near told me that he was delirious, but I know now that he was trying to tell me about this letter. He also mentioned Elm Point when he was speaking in broken sentences telling me to go to grandfather's house. Those standing by told me that in his delirium he was speaking about the place not far from our home where three streets meet by a large elm tree which is sometimes called Elm Point. Young as I was, I believed what they said, but it is all clear to me now he was not delirious but was making an effort to tell me where grandfather lives. I also remember well the evening father wrote this letter. That evening he gave me the book mother, and told me to adopt the sweet-faced lady as my mother until we would go to grandmother's house; then, he said, grandmother would be my mother and love me. That was the night he told me to retire early because he had an important letter to write and wished to be alone, and then said that the next evening we would once more go to the lake shore, where he wished to tell me something that he said he should have told me long ago. This letter reveals that he had reserved that evening to tell me about his past life and about my mother."

"Now, Son," said Mr. Sylvester as he laid his hand on Stephen's head, "Elm Point is only about three hundred miles from here and we shall immediately make plans for you to go to see your grandparents."

"Yes," said Mrs. Sylvester, "I was thinking how your dear grandmother must be grieving over the loss of her boy. You are now twenty years old and, judging from the contents of that letter,

your father must have left home about two years before you were born -- twenty-two years is a long time for a mother and father to grieve over a boy who has left home under such circumstances.

"Oh, I do want to see them!" said Stephen, and for a few moments gave way to sobs and tears.

"While we are all here we must make immediate plans for your going."

"But, father," remonstrated Stephen, "I have had so much expense in school lately, I haven't a cent of money. You have done so much for me already that I feel it would be an imposition to ask you to give me money for the trip, even though it will not take a large sum. Would it not be better if I should work for a while and earn my own money?"

"Stephen," said Mrs. Sylvester very seriously, "if your grandparents are yet alive, then they have been looking and longing for some tidings from their lost boy now for twenty-two years and, should we postpone your going for even a week, during that time they might pass away. No, I think that we, as a family, agree that you must make all haste to go, even though it may mean some sacrifice for us."

Turning to her husband Mrs. Sylvester said, "My dear, have we any money in the bank at present?"

"Only a few dollars; you know I just recently paid off the last we yet owed for hospital and doctor bills for my operation; but we will manage for the trip, even though we must borrow a few dollars."

While they were engaged in conversation in regard to making arrangements for Stephen's trip, Raymond and Mary were conversing in a whisper. Suddenly Raymond left the room and ran upstairs three steps at a time and soon returned with the same speed.

"Father," he said, "you will not need to borrow money. Mary and I have been saving nickels and dimes and quarters for the last year to get a nice, comfortable rocking chair each for you and mother for wedding anniversary gifts; it now amounts to twenty dollars. If you and mother are willing to wait until we can save again and get your chair later, then we want Stephen to take this money so that he may go immediately."

Soon all were busily engaged making preparations for Stephen's unexpected journey. At midnight he waved farewell, from the rear platform of the fast train, to a happy little group standing on the depot platform as the train bore him away.

* * * * *

Chapter 12
A GLAD SURPRISE

It was a beautiful evening in spring, the first day of June. The sun was casting its last golden rays over the western horizon. Birds were sweetly singing their vesper song in the large maple trees. A few flowers were appearing in the front yard. All nature was beautiful and all seemed so peaceful. On the front porch at the Ludlow home in Elm Point, Mr. and Mrs. Ludlow, grandparents of young Stephen, were comfortably seated in large porch chairs. Mr. Ludlow was reading a book to his wife.

They were now past middle life, but truly they were growing old beautifully. They were children of God and had been serving Him faithfully for many years. The Lord had blessed them financially so that on this line they did not have a care. They gave liberally to God's cause and He was blessing them bountifully. As a businessman Mr. Ludlow was yet quite active, but he had trustworthy men to whom he could safely turn the business over for weeks at a time, that he might devote more of his time to his Master's service along other lines.

Elizabeth, their only daughter, was very happily married to Theodore Harvey. Her husband was now president of a holiness college in the West. They had a very accomplished young daughter, Grace, who brought much joy to the hearts of her parents and grandparents. Once each year Elizabeth and her family came home to spend a few weeks with her parents.

"What is on your mind, dear?" said Mr. Ludlow to his wife as he laid his hand gently on her shoulder. "You do not seem to hear what I am reading. What is troubling you?"

"I confess that for some moments I have not been listening to your reading. Have you thought of what date is day after tomorrow?"

"Yes, dear, it is Charles's birthday," he answered slowly and thoughtfully.

"For twenty-two years," said Mrs. Ludlow, "I have baked a cake and prepared a birthday dinner on the third of June, with the hope that dear Charles would return. Each year you have taken the cake and part of the dinner to the crippled man across the street, whose birthday is on the same day, because Charles failed to come. I have, for some time, turned all my cooking and baking over to Lottie, our faithful cook; but as before, on the third of June I shall bake the cake and prepare the dinner with my own hands."

"Do not build your hopes too high, my dear, so that your disappointment will not be too great if he does not come."

"No, I have committed it all into the hands of a loving Heavenly Father. He gave me the assurance a few years ago, after fasting and praying for several days, that I shall meet Charles in heaven if not on this earth. If he does not come, then I shall not rebel but bow in submission to my father's will."

"There is the taxicab! It is coming this way and someone is leaning out of the window waving at us," said Mr. Ludlow leaning forward in his chair. "They are driving up to the curbing in front of the house -- Oh, there is Elizabeth and her family! That was Grace waving."

"Yes, we are here, and we surprised you, didn't we?" said Grace as she came running up the steps, almost before her mother and father had time to get out of the cab. She threw her arms around her grandparents and kissed them both, saying, "You see, father, got away from his work a week sooner than he expected and so we thought we would surprise you, and here we are!"

It was a happy meeting indeed. The happy group sat on the beautiful, spacious, vine-covered porch for a time and then retired for the night. When the rest of the family arose the following morning, Grace was already out in the yard among the flowers and birds. Attired in a beautiful morning frock of delicate green, she was seated on a rustic bench near the little murmuring brook under a weeping willow, with its branches hanging low. A mockingbird was perched on the topmost bough of a nearby birch tree singing his morning carol. Two squirrels, that had been saucily barking at her, had gradually ventured nearer and were now eating from her hand. To see her seated in the deep shade of the tree, with the dew yet glistening on the grass at her feet, a bush of lilacs forming a background, her eyes sparkling with gladness and her beautiful face radiant with joy, the observer would at once be reminded of youth, beauty, health, and happiness.

Grace bore a very marked resemblance to her Uncle Charles. An abundance of lovely, soft, chestnut brown hair was adorning her head and, like her uncle, she had beautiful, deep brown eyes. She walked erect and had a very striking personality; was rather reserved in her demeanor and yet, because of her joyous and happy disposition, was much loved by her companions and friends. She had a very brilliant mind and therefore always held first rank in her classes. Almost from her infancy Grace had been a reader. When only four years of age she gave quite lengthy readings before large audiences. At the age of sixteen she won first prize at a national high school contest at Washington, D.C., where many noted persons, including the President and his wife from the white House, were in the audience. She was so brilliant, spoke with such ease and beauty, and was so charming on the platform, on this occasion, that before she left Washington a company of moving picture producers offered her a large sum of money if she would choose the screen.

Grace met the committee of nationally renowned men, who presented their proposition and offered her a fabulous sum of money, like a heroine of the Cross. With her face aglow and radiant with the love of Christ she spoke: "Gentlemen, I thank you for the expression of your confidence in my ability, but I decline your offer on the ground that I cannot glorify my Lord in that vocation. I am a Christian and have fully consecrated all my talents and time to Jesus Christ, who purchased my salvation on Calvary's cross."

The spokesman of the committee of worldly minded men sneered and answered: "Pardon me, Miss Harvey, but, as a man of wide experience in the world and older in years than you, I would advise you not to lightly and thoughtlessly permit an offer like this one to slip from your grasp. If you accept, it will doubtless mean national fame and a large purse for you, such as you can never hope to possess in choosing any other vocation. You speak to me of Christ and the Cross. I am offering to you something real, something tangible. You are pursuing a phantom, a myth; I trust that you will reconsider, and accept our munificent offer."

"A phantom! -- a phantom -- a myth! No, no! do not speak thus of my Christ and the cross He bore." Grace spoke in soft, clear tones as she leaned forward in her chair; and then as if touched by a divine hand, her face aglow with holy emotion, and with the love of her Master as a

compelling force within, she arose, and with her natural gift of oratory and with as much deep feeling as if speaking before a large audience, the burning words of Bennard's beautiful hymn fell from her lips:

"On a hill far away stood an old rugged cross,
The emblem of suffering and shame;
And I love that old cross where the dearest and best
For a world of lost sinners was slain.

"Oh, that old rugged cross, so despised by the world,
Has a wondrous attraction for me;
For the dear Lamb of God left His glory above,
To bear it to dark Calvary.

"To the old rugged cross I will ever be true,
Its shame and reproach gladly bear;
Then He'll call me someday to my home far away,
Where His glory forever I'll share.

"So I'll cherish the old rugged cross,
Till my trophies at last I lay down;
I will cling to the old rugged cross,
And exchange it someday for a crown."

The men sat in breathless silence while Grace was speaking. Tears were moistening the eyes of every member of the committee. After the last words, "I will cling to the old rugged cross, and exchange it someday for a crown," had fallen from her lips, for a moment all were deathly silent; Grace stood there motionless. At last the spokesman of the committee arose, took Grace's hand, and with deep emotion said, "Pardon me -- please pardon me, Miss Harvey. Perhaps you and my Christian mother have what is real and tangible -- perhaps I am the one who is pursuing a phantom, a myth." With one hand holding Grace's right hand and with the other wiping a tear away he added, "Young woman, cling to the cross and someday you will exchange it for a golden crown worth more than earth's millions."

Before Grace could answer, the committee had disappeared through the open door.

Almost two years had passed since Grace returned from her trip to Washington. She had faithfully kept her consecration vow. Her talents had been used only in the service of her Master. While she was seated there, listening to the song of the birds and the squirrels eating from her hand, the breakfast bell rang and a happy company surrounded the table.

Having finished their breakfast, the family gathered in the large parlor for family worship. After praying and singing a hymn they stood in a group before the beautiful picture of Charles. It was an enlarged picture taken when Charles was nineteen years of age.

"Grandmother, Uncle Charles must have been a very handsome young man; I trust that he shall come home soon," said Grace as she stood with one arm around her grandmother's shoulders.

"Charles was a dear boy and if he is yet alive I believe he will come home someday. If not, I am sure that I shall know him when I meet him in heaven."

"The doorbell," said Mr. Ludlow and started toward the front door.

"I'll go, grandfather," said Grace and hastened to open the door.

"Is this where Mr. and Mrs. Stephen Ludlow live?"

A young man with suitcase in hand stepped inside. All eyes were immediately fixed on the stranger -- all for a moment held their breath -- there stood Charles -- but, no -- it could not be Charles, for he would not be a young man twenty years of age at this time. However, Mrs. Ludlow did not take time to think that time must of necessity have left its footprints on the face of her boy. To her Charles would be just as he had left her, and as he looked in the picture on the wall.

Before the young man could speak again she was by his side, and embracing him said, "My precious boy! My dear Charles, you have come home to mother at last!"

Stephen embraced his grandmother, and for a time was not able to speak, for tears were flowing freely. Then with much effort he said, "Grandmother, I am your grandson Stephen. Charles was my father."

"Mother, this is Charles's son," Mr. Ludlow said tenderly to his wife.

"Charles's son! my grandson -- yes, Charles is an older man by this time. But, oh, you look so much like my boy!" and she again embraced him.

Stephen embraced his grandfather, who then introduced him to Elizabeth and to her husband, Theodore Harvey, and to Grace, their daughter. After the first few moments of excitement of the unexpected meeting were over, Mrs. Ludlow drew a chair close to her own low rocking chair on which she was seated, saying, "Now, Son, sit down here and tell us about your father. Is he yet alive?"

Stephen sat down close to his grandmother's side. Leaning forward, and taking her hand in both of his, he said very tenderly, "Grandmother, my dear father is in heaven with Jesus."

"Son, did he get saved? and did he tell you that he was going to heaven?" she said anxiously, in a low tone.

"Yes, grandmother, he was converted one Sunday night at the church, and Monday while alone in prayer the Lord sanctified him. I was by his side when, a few days later, the Lord took him home. He was very happy and said before passing away, 'Tell my father and mother that the Lord has forgiven all my sins and I am going home to be with Jesus.'"

"Thank the Lord," she said softly, "then I shall meet him in heaven. Now, Son, I must ask you another question -- Are you a Christian, do you love Jesus?"

"Oh, yes, grandmother. Before father died he prayed very earnestly that I might also give my heart to the Lord, and some time later I did and I am now a Christian."

"Did you say your name is Stephen?"

"Yes, grandmother, father said he gave me that name because it was his father's name and also because he always enjoyed so much the story about Stephen when you used to read it to him from the Bible."

"God bless the dear boy -- yes, I remember well how much he always enjoyed that story."

"Now, Stephen," said Mr. Ludlow, "will you please pardon us if we ask many, many questions in regard to your father -- we are so anxious to learn all we can about him."

"Feel free, grandfather, to ask any question, and as many as you desire. If you wish, I will in short tell you what took place from the time my father left your home until he went to heaven. I shall leave the minor details until some future time. While I am speaking you may interrupt me with questions any time you wish.

"In order that you may better understand some of the things that I am about to tell you, I wish to say that yesterday I found a letter under the lining of an old suitcase which father had written to you the evening before he died. From this letter I got the information as to where you live, and from its contents I gather that father must have left home when he was about nineteen years of age. He went to Chicago and after a few days got employment in a small grocery store of which he was manager when he died. About a year after he left home he met my mother and after a very short courtship they were married. On father's twenty-first birthday I was born."

"O Stephen, then tomorrow is your birthday; that is also Grace's birthday," said Elizabeth.

Stephen did not seem to note the interruption but continued with the story: "When I was seven years old father was happily converted and immediately began to make plans to come home to see you. He wrote the letter, to which I referred, just a few evenings before he died. I take from the contents of the letter that he did not wish to grieve me by telling me of his past wayward life and therefore had never told me anything about his family; that is why I did not know where you lived until I found the letter yesterday. He had, however, planned to tell me all about it the evening after he wrote the letter. He wished that I should know all about it before we came home. While we were on our way to the lake shore for a quiet evening together and when he expected to tell me these things, a large car ran over him and a few moments later he slipped away to be with Jesus."

All in the group were shedding tears. Mrs. Ludlow especially was sobbing.

"Grandmother," Stephen continued, and again took her hand in his, "I was by his side when Jesus took him, and he was so happy; we must not wish him back."

"No, no, Son, I do not. Thank God, he is safe in heaven with Jesus," she whispered. "Now tell us how you got along in the big, wicked city without a mother's and father's tender care -- but then I know, God has promised to be a Father to the orphans."

"Yes, it was indeed God's tender hand that led me safely; for after about a year and a half of loneliness and being homesick continually for my father, a dear Christian family by the name of Sylvester, whose home I frequently passed, became interested in me. When they learned that I was an orphan they took me to their home and have been a real father and mother to me. They are not wealthy but they have helped me to get an education.

"As soon as I went to live with Mr. and Mrs. Sylvester they took me to a nearby church, of which they were members, which proved to be the same church where my father had found the Lord. The first Sunday I attended with Mr. and Mrs. Sylvester I knelt down at the altar where I had seen my dear father get saved and there, with Mrs. Sylvester kneeling by my side and with her arm around me as she prayed for me, I was happily converted. A few months later the Lord sanctified me, and at the age of fourteen I had a definite call to preach the gospel. Mr. and Mrs. Sylvester, whom I call father and mother, have sacrificed much to help me get an education so that I might fully prepare myself for that work. I expect to be graduated from college next year."

They conversed about the past for some time; at times all were rejoicing and praising the Lord and at other times all were weeping together. Soon the dinner bell rang and they gathered around the table, where there had been a vacant chair for twenty-two years, but now occupied by the noble young son of him by whose departure the place had been made vacant.

When dinner was over Stephen asked to be excused for a little while, for he wished to go to the telegraph office to send a message to Mr. and Mrs. Sylvester. "For I know," he said, "they will be anxiously waiting to learn whether I have found you or not. They have sacrificed very, very much for me, and I shall never be able to repay them for their kindness. I wished to quit school for a time and work in order to help pay expenses, but they would not consent, so that I might finish my education. They as well as their children, Raymond and Mary, economized, often making great sacrifices, to make it possible for me to remain in school. Yesterday when we found father's letter, and learned where you live, they immediately forgot all about their own needs and made it possible for me to come on the first train. Mr. Sylvester is at present out of employment but he offered to borrow money for my trip. Then Raymond and Mary, who had for a year saved nickels and dimes until it amounted to twenty dollars to purchase a rocking chair for each of their parents for their wedding anniversary, which is tomorrow, gladly gave this money for my trip."

"Mother," said Mr. Ludlow, after Stephen had left the house, "I feel that we owe a debt to Mr. and Mrs. Sylvester that we shall never be able to fully pay, but we must do our best to remunerate them for their kindness as far as possible. Stephen tells us that they are not wealthy, that Mr. Sylvester is at present out of employment. Tomorrow is Charles's birthday and also Stephen's and Grace's, and tomorrow is Mr. and Mrs. Sylvester's wedding anniversary. If you think it a good plan, then I believe that we should have the bank wire them about fifty dollars and ask

them to take the midnight train and come to visit us and surprise Stephen on his birthday, and tomorrow have a birthday and anniversary dinner together."

Mrs. Ludlow's eyes filled with tears of joy, and Grace clapped her hands, saying, "O grandfather, how beautiful! You are always thinking of the dearest things to give people pleasure."

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Chapter 13 A DAY OF REWARDS

"A messenger boy!" said Mr. Sylvester as he saw the boy in uniform dismount his bicycle. He signed his name, tore open the yellow envelope, and read,

Mr. and Mrs. Sylvester:

I found my grandparents and Aunt Elizabeth and we are all happy. I will write soon.

Stephen

All were glad for the good news and rejoiced that they had been counted worthy to make some sacrifice to rear the little orphan boy in a Christian home and that now he was restored to his own people and loved ones. About thirty minutes later Mary looked out of the window and exclaimed excitedly, "Another messenger boy!"

Again a yellow envelope was handed to Mr. Sylvester.

"What can this mean? -- a long telegram," he read:

Mr. Sylvester and Family:

I am sending you fifty dollars. If at all possible, take the midnight train and come to Elm Point. We wish to celebrate Stephen's and our granddaughter's birthdays, and your wedding anniversary tomorrow. Please do not disappoint us. I shall meet you at the depot at nine-thirty in the morning.

Stephen Ludlow, Senior

"From Stephen's grandfather -- Mother, do you think we can go?" Mr. Sylvester said thoughtfully.

"Yes, dear, we must go; we must not disappoint them. If they were not very anxious for us to come they would not send the money for the trip."

"O mother, mother, mother! I am so happy!" said Mary gleefully, as she put her arms around her mother and whirled around in the room several times. "I am so happy I don't know what

to do next! Just think, this will be the first trip we have ever taken. In fact, Raymond and I have never had a ride on a train -- we have never been outside of the city of Chicago. Go? We surely will if I have anything to say!"

"Mother," said Raymond very seriously, "you and father have always said that you would never regret that you sacrificed to give a little orphan boy a home, and right now you are beginning to realize some compensation."

They were all very happy and immediately began to make preparation for the journey. Mrs. Sylvester and Mary were busy the rest of the afternoon packing their suitcases, pressing some of their garments, and putting a stitch here and there. Mrs. Sylvester was known to be a good homemaker. Although they could not afford to buy expensive clothing or house furnishings, what they had was always kept tidy and clean. Theirs was a real home. While the garments they wore were inexpensive yet they always looked well attired.

At twelve o'clock the happy family was comfortably seated in the train and with great anticipation were looking forward to meeting their new friends.

"Now is my time to do some wondering, Sister," said Raymond. "I am wondering what Stephen's grandparents look like -- in what kind of a house they live -- whether they are rich or poor and how old they are -- what business Mr. Ludlow is in and -- yes -- and whether they have a car -- well, just lots of other things I'm wondering about."

Then taking his watch from his pocket he said, "Only an hour and a half longer and we will know some of these things; I suppose Stephen will be at the depot with his grandfather to meet us."

However, Stephen was not at the depot. A very distinguished looking gentleman met them when they stepped from the train. He approached Mr. Sylvester, lifted his hat, saying with a pleasant smile, "Is this Mr. Sylvester?"

"Yes -- Mr. Ludlow, I suppose," and the two men clasped hands. After greeting and extending a hearty welcome to the rest of the family, Mr. Ludlow led the way to the automobile. Soon they arrived at the house. Mrs. Ludlow and Stephen were seated in the living room engaged in pleasant conversation, when suddenly the front door was thrown wide open and Mr. Ludlow ushered the Sylvester family into the room. Stephen thought at first that surely his eyes must be deceiving him, or that it was some pleasant dream. They were introduced to Mrs. Ludlow, Elizabeth, Theodore, and Grace. All seemed to love one another from the first time they met.

After a few hours of pleasant conversation, dinner was announced. Seldom such a happy group gathers around a dinner table as was this company of Christian people who sat down at the bountifully laden table. There were beautiful birthday cakes for Stephen and Grace, and a large anniversary cake for Mr. and Mrs. Sylvester.

Dinner being over, Mr. Ludlow asked that the happy company excuse Stephen and himself for a little while.

"Stephen," said Mr. Ludlow, when they were seated in the automobile, "I am going to take you to a furniture store and I want you to select two nice chairs for those dear people. Your grandmother and I have decided that you should give Mr. and Mrs. Sylvester each a nice, comfortable rocking chair for their wedding anniversary and we will pay for them."

"O grandfather, they do not expect anything like that."

"I know, Child, but you say they really need some chairs. God has blessed us abundantly financially and we would indeed be ungrateful if we did not show our appreciation for what they have done for you, our own dear grandson."

They selected some very beautiful chairs, which were delivered immediately at the side door. As soon as they were placed in the room Stephen took Mr. and Mrs. Sylvester by their arms and led them to the chairs, saying, "mother and father -- a wedding anniversary gift from your grateful boy Stephen," and then added, "made possible by the kindness of my dear grandparents."

For a moment Mr. and Mrs. Sylvester stood in silence; they could not find words to express their gratitude, it was all such a surprise. Then with tears of joy Mrs. Sylvester simply said, "Oh, how beautiful! we thank you a thousand times, but we are not worthy of all this."

Grace whispered to Raymond and Mary, "This is another one of grandfather's delightful surprises; he can think of more things to make people happy than anyone I have ever seen."

Yes, they had some very delightful surprises. However, there were some more awaiting them, for Mr. Ludlow had been busily engaged in making plans regarding Mr. and Mrs. Sylvester's and their family's welfare 'from the time that Stephen had told about their kindness in his behalf.

At the hour of three Mr. Ludlow informed the happy company that he and Mrs. Ludlow had planned a ride for the company; just at that time a new automobile was delivered at the Ludlow home. When all expressed surprise Mr. Ludlow said in his unassuming way, "You see, our old car is not very dependable any more and we have been planning to get a new one for some time. So mother and I decided last evening that we would purchase it now while you are all here. We cannot all ride in one car but the two will easily carry us all."

All were delighted, especially Raymond and Mary, who had seldom had a ride in an automobile. Mr. and Mrs. Ludlow and Mr. and Mrs. Sylvester took one car while the rest occupied the other. First, they drove all around the city of Elm Point. "I desire that you see our city first," said Mr. Ludlow. "We think it a very beautiful little city; the population is now about ten thousand. Our streets are wide, we have good water and a very excellent lighting system. We also have some beautiful little parks and good schools and churches."

Then they took a drive in the country, after which they returned home.

"Father," said Elizabeth, "now we want our friends to see your beautiful yard and garden with its lovely flowers, birds, and beautiful little stream. You see," she said to the guests as they were walking among the flowers and shrubbery, "this is where Stephen's father and I spent our

happy childhood days. Father and mother bought this whole block when Charles and I were small children. No one seemed to care to purchase it, thinking that it was not of much value because of the little stream flowing through the corner. But father, seeing that that was the beauty of it, purchased it and built our happy home. Since father beautified the place with flowers and shrubbery, the children of the neighborhood have always called this the Ludlow Park. When we were married and Theodore was teaching here in the high school, then father built this other house and we lived there until Theodore was elected president of the school in the West; then we moved out there."

The house that had been built for Elizabeth and Theodore was of beautiful Spanish design with all modern conveniences, and the interior was very beautifully decorated. It was now unoccupied. Mr. Ludlow insisted that they look at it from basement to garret.

"Mr. and Mrs. Sylvester," said Mr. Ludlow after they were all comfortably seated under a large shade tree between the two houses, "do you like to live in a large city like Chicago?"

"No, Mr. Ludlow, we do not like city life," Mr. Sylvester answered. "Mrs. Sylvester and I were both reared on farms but moved to the city soon after we were married because I got employment there. We had always hoped, however, that sometime we might be able to move back, at least to a smaller place, especially for the sake of the children, for I have always contended that children miss a great deal of what is really worthwhile in life if they always live in a large city. But we have about given up all hope now of ever being able to make the change."

"You are a plumber, Mr. Sylvester, Stephen tells me."

"Yes, I have worked at that trade for many years."

"And you are out of employment at the present time?"

"Yes, I worked for one man for six years -- in fact, for the last three years I had full charge of his whole business. Because of ill health he was compelled to go to a milder climate, but a few weeks ago he died and his son took over the business and he brought one of his friends from Denver to take charge. This, of course, threw me out, but the Lord will provide some way, I am sure."

"Mr. Sylvester, I have purposely taken you around today that you might see our city and the surrounding community because I wish to present a proposition to you while you are here with us; it is this -- the leading plumber in our city has made quite a little fortune and is at present looking for a reliable man to take charge of his business. I should like to take you over to see this man, that you might interview him and, if it would be agreeable with both parties, that you take the position now open. And if you and Mrs. Sylvester and family would care to live in this city, then Mrs. Ludlow and I would be delighted to present to you and Mrs. Sylvester this house standing nearby our own, as a wedding anniversary gift. God has abundantly blessed us financially, and we wish in a small measure, at least, to show our appreciation for the sacrifice you made, and the kindness you have shown to a dear little orphan boy who happened to be our grandson."

Everyone was deeply moved and a few were shedding tears. As soon as Mr. Sylvester was able to speak he said: "Mr. Ludlow, that is indeed kind of you and Mrs. Ludlow, but that is too great a gift for us to accept. Remember, Mr. Ludlow, that we were only performing our Christian duty when we took dear, little, homeless Stephen into our Christian home. Our reward has already been far greater than the sacrifice we made. The Lord is blessing our souls abundantly, and just to see Stephen developing into a clean, strong, Christian young man, who will soon go forth to preach the gospel, is a great reward for what little it has cost us to help him."

By this time Mrs. Ludlow was on her feet and stood directly in front of Mr. and Mrs. Sylvester, took their hands in hers, and said pleadingly, "My dear Brother and Sister Sylvester, will you please do us this kind favor to accept for your home this house close by our own, as a wedding anniversary gift?"

With deep emotion and eyes overflowing with tears of gratitude they answered: "Yes, thank you, Mr. and Mrs. Ludlow; if that is the way you feel about it, then we will most gladly accept it and we thank you more than we shall ever be able to tell you."

Mr. Ludlow and Mr. Sylvester immediately got into the automobile and drove downtown to see Mr. Otto, the plumber. They had a long talk with him and all was satisfactorily arranged for Mr. Sylvester to begin his work within a few days. The deed to the house was also immediately made out and Mr. Ludlow brought it home.

"Mr. Sylvester, Mrs. Sylvester, Raymond and Mary, may God richly bless you, and may you spend many happy hours in your new home; it is now yours," Mr. Ludlow said and handed to them the deed and the key.

Again, with great rejoicing they expressed their gratitude.

"Mr. Ludlow, is the house open?" said Mary timidly. "Yes, Child, and besides, I gave your father the key." "May we go over and look at it again?" she said excitedly.

"Go, dear child, you need not ask me for permission to look at your own property," Mr. Ludlow said with a smile. "Go, take possession; it is yours, not mine."

"Thank you! thank you!" she answered. Then turning to Grace, Stephen, and Raymond she said, "Come, let us go exploring."

They ascended the steps and almost quick as a flash Mary went through the whole house, exclaiming, "Oh, how beautiful! Oh, how beautiful! -- and to think it is our own! -- and this lovely yard, I feel as if I am being released from prison, leaving the crowded city and taking possession of this -- "Suddenly she stopped. "What is the matter, Brother?" she said when she saw Raymond standing in one corner of the room pinching his arm.

"O Sister," he said with pretended seriousness, "I am pinching myself to make sure that I am awake. I fear that all this might only be a pleasant dream."

"A dream! I assure you that I'm not dreaming. I am wide-awake and am enjoying something that is a precious reality," Mary answered.

In a few days Mr. Sylvester took up his work as head man of Otto Plumbing Company. A few days later Raymond also got employment as a helper with his father and labored there until school opened. Stephen and Mrs. Sylvester went to Chicago for a few days to pack and ship their household furnishings and to list their little home for sale. Soon they were comfortably settled in their beautiful new home. After a few weeks Elizabeth, Theodore, and Grace departed for their home in the West. Stephen was now making his home with his grandparents but continued to call Mr. and Mrs. Sylvester father and mother.

* * * * *

Chapter 14

TWO MORE HAPPY EVENTS

"Father, you may turn out the light in the front hall," said Mrs. Ludlow the evening after Stephen had arrived at their home. "Charles is now safe in heaven with Jesus in the city where they will never more need the light of a candle nor the light of the sun, for the Lord God is the light of that city; and our dear Stephen is, by God's good providence, safely sheltered under our own roof. There is no need now of the light in the front window."

For the first time in twenty-two years the light in the front hall was turned out in the Ludlow home. It had been burning there continuously, shedding its little rays out into each dark night as a beacon for the prodigal's return.

Stephen was now occupying the room which his father, many years before, had occupied. Many of the old friends of the Ludlow family, when they met Stephen, remarked that he was the very image of his father.

Hanging on the wall in Stephen's room was the enlarged picture of Charles and Viana Harvey, taken by Elizabeth at Shady Brook twenty-two years before when Charles was placing a wreath of flowers on Viana's head.

"Grandmother, who is the young lady who played the piano and sang the solo this morning? She strikingly resembles the young lady in the picture with father," said Stephen after they had returned home from the service the first Sunday morning after he had come to live in Elm Point. "That is the daughter of our pastor, Rev. Williams; her name is Joy Louisa. Since you have asked that question, Son," she said, "I shall tell you another, somewhat sad, story. We shall not keep anything from you in regard to your father. The young lady you see in the picture is Joy Louisa's mother. Her name was Viana Harvey, your Uncle Theodore Harvey's sister. Your father and Viana were engaged to be married. Viana being a lovely Christian girl, we were all looking forward with great anticipation to the happy event when they would be married, but Charles, the dear boy -- well, you know -- he failed to get saved in the revival when Elizabeth and Viana gave their hearts to the Lord and, not having the grace of God in his heart, he began to yield to one temptation after another and began to drift. Well, we couldn't blame Viana, but one evening, before she went West

to visit her aunt, she broke the engagement. That night poor, brokenhearted Charles left home about midnight But God has in mercy saved him and he is now safe in heaven with Jesus, where there will be no more broken hearts. The following year Viana went to college and there she met Albert Williams, who is now our pastor. They are very happy and the Lord is wonderfully using them in His service. Joy Louisa is their daughter and looks just like her mother did when the picture you refer to was taken. She has beautiful, deep blue eyes and lovely, blond hair, and, like her mother, treasures it as a gift of God and therefore has never bobbed it.

"Like her mother, Joy Louisa is also an accomplished musician, and is known as the best piano player in the state. She is also a beautiful soprano singer. But best of all, Joy Louisa loves Jesus with all her heart and is using her wonderful talent in her Master's service."

The pastor and people of Elm Point were soon aware of the fact that one had come into their midst who not only possessed rare gifts but who likewise was deeply spiritual, and thus Stephen Ludlow was soon filling important places in the church.

Before many months passed Joy Louisa and Stephen were keeping company, and more than once when they were seen together by persons who twenty-two years before were acquainted with Joy's mother and Stephen's father the remark was made how strikingly they resembled Viana and Charles.

The following year Mary and Raymond Sylvester, Joy Louisa and Stephen were enrolled as students of a holiness college where Joy Louisa and Stephen were expecting to be graduated in the spring. Grace Harvey, Elizabeth's daughter, was attending a holiness college in the West where her father, Theodore Harvey, was president She also was looking forward to the day of her graduation in May.

The holiday season brought the Elm Point students, who were attending college, home. On Christmas morning Stephen told his grandparents of his engagement to Joy Louisa, and that they were expecting to be married in the spring, soon after commencement.

The same day, on Christmas morning, Mr. and Mrs. Ludlow received an announcement of Grace Harvey's engagement. The young man to whom she was engaged was attending the same school in the West where she was now finishing her college course. They, also, were expecting to be married immediately after the close of the school in spring.

"Mother," said Mr. Ludlow a few days after the news of the near approaching marriages of their two grandchildren, "I am wondering if Grace and Stephen would consent to both be married here in our home. The parsonage here where Joy Louisa's father lives is small. Grace's father and mother live in a small apartment which is not their permanent home, while our house is large and roomy. Elizabeth has written that David, the young man to whom Grace will be married, has no relatives except his father. If you think best, mother, then we will consult all concerned and we will offer to pay the railroad fare for all, David's father included; and if they have no other plans that will interfere, then I would suggest that on the third of June, which is Stephen's and Grace's birthday, we will have a double wedding here at our home."

"From the contents of their letters," said Mrs. Ludlow, "I gather that both parties have planned to be married the first week in June, so I presume that they will be delighted to follow out your suggestion."

That evening Mr. Ludlow wrote letters regarding his plan to all concerned and in a few days received favorable answers. All were delighted and looked forward with happy anticipation to the great event.

After the holidays Stephen was very busy with his schoolwork. Not only was he busy with his books but, as opportunity afforded, he preached the gospel. For several weeks he conducted a revival meeting in a nearby neglected town and many were converted and a church was organized.

Joy Louisa was very much in demand to sing at public gatherings and had many tempting offers from Chautauqua and opera companies which, had she accepted, would have made her very popular and would have brought large financial remuneration. But she refused, saying, "What beauty and sweetness there is in my voice is a gift of God and I shall always, and only, use it in His service and to His glory."

Grace, in the far West, was also a great blessing to those with whom she associated. She gave readings at religious gatherings and had calls and filled many appointments in many distant cities and in churches of many denominations. David proved to be a very capable young man and was a great blessing in the school he attended. All were so busy that the weeks and months were rapidly passing away and commencement was drawing near.

Mr. and Mrs. Ludlow also were making much preparation for the great and interesting event -- when their only two grandchildren would be married in their home.

The two young couples had agreed that, in response to an invitation, they would spend a few weeks in the hospitable home of their grandparents instead of taking a wedding tour. Therefore all arrangements were made with that in view.

At last the time for commencement exercises was drawing near. The distance was too great for Mr. and Mrs. Ludlow to be present at the exercises in the school where Grace and David were graduated in the far West. They, however, with Mr. and Mrs. Sylvester and their pastor, Rev. Williams, and family, were present at the graduation of Joy Louisa and Stephen.

Joy Louisa's part in the exercises of the evening was to sing. She had chosen the beautiful song, "Come unto Me." Mary Sylvester took her place at the piano; softly the tones began to sound forth, and Joy Louisa stepped to the center of the large platform. All eyes were fixed on her; all loved her. She wore a beautiful gown of spotless white, made with her own hands. At her belt was fastened a delicate pink rose, a gift from Stephen. Her sweet, clear voice began to ring forth until it filled every part of the large auditorium. All hearts were moved; everyone in the large audience was almost breathless, as if afraid of missing a single strain. "Come unto Me and I will give you rest." Her voice sounded forth pleadingly as she lifted her hands, extending them to the audience. There was a heavenly smile on her face and a glistening tear stole over her cheek and fell on the lovely pink rose.

All in the audience felt that truly she was an ambassador of Him who, over nineteen hundred years ago, had first spoken the words that were now the theme of her song. The eyes of Stephen were fixed on her every moment; he watched her with adoration. When she took her seat there were few eyes that were not moistened with tears. The eyes of God's people were overflowing with tears of joy while the unsaved were moved to penitent tears.

The following morning a large automobile was driven in front of the home where Joy Louisa was rooming. An elegantly attired woman rang the doorbell and asked for Miss Williams, the beautiful singer. Joy Louisa met her in the parlor. The lady was the wife of the president of a large bank in a nearby city.

"Miss Williams," she said, "I am a Christian woman and have prayed for my husband for many years, but his heart was hardened and no sermon nor song has ever touched him until last night, when he heard you sing, his heart became tender. After we arrived at home he sat down by my side and leaning on my shoulder asked me to pray for him. He was beautifully converted at midnight. He had some very important business at the bank this forenoon and therefore could not come in person to express his appreciation of your beautiful singing, but he asked me to come and thank you for that song which has been the means of his salvation." She then added: "Miss Williams, we were informed that you and the noble young man, Mr. Ludlow, who was also graduated, are expecting to be married in the near future. Will you kindly accept this gift as a token of love from my husband, Mr. Philips, and myself?"

Saying this she handed Joy Louisa a lovely case of silverware, "Bird of Paradise" design. Joy Louisa was overjoyed and could hardly find words to express her gratitude; most of all, however, she rejoiced that, as a result of her singing, another soul was born into the Kingdom.

Stephen also was graduated with high honors and was valedictorian of his class. His oration showed much care in preparation and was well delivered. He was gifted and a natural orator and many worldly-minded people expressed pity that he should "waste his talents" by entering the ministry. Stephen, however, never wavered in his decision. At the age of fourteen he had received a very definite call from the Lord to preach the gospel, and already, before he had entered the active ministry, many souls had been led to seek the Saviour as a result of his labors.

After a few days the happy company started on their journey home and soon the three cars arrived safely at Elm Point. The following morning Mr. and Mrs. Ludlow noticed Stephen sitting at the window with a faraway, troubled look, and in deep meditation. Mrs. Ludlow laid her hand gently on his head saying, "Stephen, dear, is anything troubling you?"

It rather startled Stephen when his grandmother spoke. His thoughts had carried him so far away and at the sound of her voice he had been brought home so suddenly.

"No, grandmother," he answered, "I cannot say that anything is really troubling me, and yet there is one wish, could I see it realized, I am sure would add greatly to my happiness. I was thinking about Freckles, the newsboy of whom I have spoken to you so often. He was the only friend I had in the saddest and loneliest hours of my life. God has been very good to me. He gave

me a true father and mother in Mr. and Mrs. Sylvester when they took me into their Christian home and into their hearts. I have now found you, my dear grandparents, and I am soon to be married to a beautiful Christian young woman who has consented to become my wife. However, I am wondering where Freckles is. His mother was dead and his father was a drunkard. They never went to church; Freckles told me that he had never been inside of a church building. There was something noble about that boy and yet I fear sometimes that perhaps with such sinful surroundings he may have yielded to the allurements of wicked men and that now perhaps he is a drunkard like his father. How I long to see him and tell him the story of Jesus, the sinner's Friend and Saviour!

"The last time I saw him was the day before I was converted. That day I gave him, what I treasured more than anything I possessed, the book mother, the last gift from my own father. I have prayed for him every day since that time and I hope that God has, before this, thrown His arms of love and mercy about him and saved him. If Freckles could be here on my wedding day, my happiness would be more than complete."

"Stephen," said Mr. Ludlow, "let us make one more effort to find him. We will advertise in all the leading Chicago papers and in some of the other large cities and perhaps we may yet be able to locate him."

"Grandfather," Stephen answered thoughtfully, "it would indeed be a miracle if we should be able to find him now. He was then about ten years of age and would now be about twenty. I do not even know his name, everyone called him Freckles. I know his initials, but that would not help us much. I remember the initials because one day he told me that they were the same as J. D. Rockefeller, and that he wished his mother would call him by that name because his highest ambition was to become a millionaire. If we only knew his name, then there might be some chance to find him."

The following day the Chicago papers and some other leading papers published a notice trying to locate "Freckles" or "J. D. R." But to Stephen's sore disappointment they did not receive even a single letter in response and he gave up in despair.

It was now Thursday morning -- only two weeks until the wedding day. Joy Louisa and her mother were very busy. Joy insisted on making her own wedding dress. She agreed with her mother that no matter how talented a young woman is, or what her calling or station in life may be, in order to be worthy of the name wife and mother she should know how to be a homemaker, and know how to do the things common to homemaking.

While Joy Louisa was busy and happy with her preparations for the great event, Grace in the far West was engaged in the same delightful task of preparing her trousseau.

"A letter from Elizabeth," said Mrs. Ludlow, holding the already opened envelope in her hand when Mr. Ludlow came home for lunch. "Elizabeth, Theodore, and Grace expect to arrive here next Saturday. That is almost a week before the wedding day. David and his father will not arrive until Wednesday morning. I am glad that Elizabeth and family will be here to help plan the decorations."

At the hour of nine on Saturday morning the shrill whistle of the approaching train sounded loud and clear. Slowly the great locomotive pulled its heavy burden of twelve coaches to the depot. Theodore, Elizabeth, and Grace alighted. Soon Mr. Ludlow's car brought them safely to the Ludlow home.

The next few days all were busy and soon all plans for the happy event were perfected. For decorations they had chosen the colors white and pink. The flowers had been ordered and all were happy and waiting for the train on Wednesday to bring David.

At the hour of nine on Wednesday morning, Mr. Ludlow's big car again halted at the depot platform awaiting the arrival of the train from the West. To the great disappointment of all, they were informed that there had been a cloudburst in the mountains, and that a washout would prevent trains from coming through for some time.

Thirty minutes later they received a telegram from David, stating that he and his father had taken a bus and were planning, if possible, to make connection with another eastbound train, hoping yet to arrive at Elm Point in time for the wedding ceremony to take place at high noon on Thursday.

There were some very anxious moments, but just two hours before noon a train pulled into the depot and, to the joy of all, David and his father arrived. There was only time for a hasty informal introduction to Grace's relatives whom David had never met. At twelve o'clock the guests were all assembled in the large and beautifully decorated double parlors. Mary Sylvester was seated at the piano playing the wedding march.

It was indeed beautiful when the two young bridal couples stood under the double arch of lovely pink and white roses.

Grace and Joy Louisa were gowned alike. Both wore spotless white and carried large bouquets of white and pink roses. Stephen and David were about the same height, a little over six feet tall. They wore carefully tailored suits. The ceremony was very simple but beautiful. All present felt that the Lord drew very near when these four Christian young people took the sacred vows of holy matrimony and pledged their love for each other for life.

A wedding dinner was served to a large number of guests, after which the bridal pairs, with relatives and friends, were seated in the parlors engaged in pleasant conversation.

Mrs. Ludlow, who had walked in very close fellowship with her Lord for many years and who was always deeply interested in everyone's personal religious experience, drew near to David and sat down by his side, saying: "David, you are now our grandson, but we have met for the first time only a few hours ago and have not yet had much opportunity to get acquainted. I know that you love the Lord with all your heart, but would you mind telling us how long you have been a Christian, and how your conversion came about? Were you reared in a Christian home? Did you get saved as a child or when a young man? I think we would all like to know."

"Yes, grandmother, I am always delighted to tell what the Lord has done for me. It may be somewhat out of the ordinary to convert a wedding day into a testimony meeting. However, I shall be glad to tell you of my Christian experience."

"It is quite appropriate in this case," said Mr. Ludlow; "all the guests are Christian people and you are a stranger in our midst Elizabeth has just informed me that your conversion and likewise your father's was very remarkable and I am certain that all present would be delighted to hear about it."

"You asked me, grandmother, whether I was reared in a Christian home," said David, beginning his story. "No, I am sorry to say that I was not My mother died when I was eight years of age, and my dear father, who is here today, and who has now been a devoted Christian for a number of years, was then a drunkard. As he will tell you he did not draw a sober breath for seven years. Father tells me that when he and mother were married Mother was a Christian and he a church member, but without vital salvation. He soon yielded to the inducements of wicked men and became a heavy drinker and a gambler. Not having any help from my father, and no Christian friends to fellowship, and being a member of a cold, formal, pleasure-loving church, my mother soon gave up the fight and became almost as sinful as my father, although I do not think that she ever drank intoxicating liquor or gambled.

"As a family, we were eking out a miserable existence. From the time that I was seven years old I almost altogether supported the family by selling papers. Young as I was, I had become very sinful, following in the footsteps of my mother and father, but through the influence of another newsboy I gave up the use of cigarettes and profanity. One day I rebuked my mother for using profane language, saying that I was trying to quit the habit and that she as my mother ought to be a help to me instead of hindering me. This deeply convicted her of her sins and she immediately went to prayer, and was soon reclaimed and again found peace with God. A few weeks later, however, my precious mother became ill and the Lord took her home to heaven.

"For a time after my mother's death my dear, heartbroken father went deeper and deeper into sin. We now moved to a new locality, into one small, dark basement room. The burden of earning a livelihood and seeing my father intoxicated continually, and often beating me cruelly, caused me to be discouraged at times. In my loneliness I longed once more to see the boy through whose influence I had quit the use of profanity and cigarettes. I remembered that he had told me that his father, who had been killed in an automobile accident shortly before this time, was happily converted a week before his death and that after his conversion he was very happy and when dying he told his little boy that he was going to heaven."

By this time Stephen was leaning forward, gripping tightly the arms of the chair in which he was seated. His face was pale and he was staring at David.

"Stephen, dear, what is the matter?" asked Joy Louisa in a whisper, "are you ill? You look so strange."

Stephen relaxed and leaned back in his chair, saying in a low whisper, as he took Joy Louisa's hand in both of his, "No, dear, I am not ill; I will explain later. I must not interrupt him now."

David was so interested in telling what the Lord had done for him that he failed to notice the peculiar actions of Stephen. He continued: "I saw my dear little friend, the newsboy, only once after we moved. One day after a vain attempt to again find him, whose full name I never knew, but who was the only true friend I had in the world, I came home sad and discouraged. I saw a church on the corner. I was attracted to it because I recognized the name on the sign, above the door, to be the same as that of the church in which, as the little' newsboy had told me, his father had been converted. I made the acquaintance of the kind janitor, who invited me to the service. The second time I attended I was converted and, O grandmother, what a happy day that was! I now had found a Friend in Jesus and He comforted my lonely heart. I asked the minister, Rev. Venice, and some of the Christian people to help me pray for my father that he too might become a Christian. A few weeks later God, in mercy, saved him also. A few years later I had a divine call to preach the gospel. Immediately after his conversion my father got employment and I began to attend the public school. We later moved West so that I might attend a holiness college to prepare myself for the ministry. There I met your granddaughter, my dear Grace, who is now my precious wife.

"There is one thing, however, that always brings a tinge of regret and sadness to my heart, and that is, although I have tried again and again, I have never been able to find the newsboy through whose influence I started on my way to heaven. The last time I saw him he gave me a book entitled Mother, which I now have in my suitcase. I tried to follow the commands and advice of the sweet-faced lady and it helped me to defeat the enemy when the battle was hard. This book was the most precious treasure the little newsboy had, for it was the last gift from his father. But because some kind Christian people had given him a home he gave me the book, telling me to adopt the sweet-faced lady for my mother, saying that it would help me to be good. If I ever meet him again in this life I want to restore to him this treasure, the book that helped to shape my life for good and helped me to steer my bark toward the golden shore."

"Freckles! O Freckles! is this you?" Stephen leaped to his feet and in an instant enfolded David in his arms.

"David!" he said, "I am Stephen, the newsboy -- I have tried to find you for these many, many years. You were the only true friend I had during the darkest and loneliest days of my life; now, to add to my already great happiness, the Lord has sent you to me on my wedding day. So you are J. D. R., John David Rockford; to me, however, you will always be kindhearted Freckles."

Then turning to the guests Stephen said, as he stood with one hand resting on the shoulder of David, and the other on the shoulder of his beautiful bride: "My happiness is now more than complete -- Freckles always had a desire to become a millionaire, but now we both possess what millions cannot buy. We have been restored to each other on our wedding day, and have many friends and loved ones; we both have Jesus Christ, who is our precious Saviour, and are now ready to go forth, with Joy Louisa and Grace by our sides, to tell the sweet story of Jesus and His love."

* * * * *

"THE END," did you say, dear reader, as you close the book and lay it aside? If the reading of the story, though you may think it interesting, is "the end," then the author has utterly failed in her purpose; then the many prayers that ascended to the throne, while writing, are all unanswered.

Reading the book should be only the beginning of its mission.

If the reader is now in childhood's morning, and is being reared in a Christian home, and has not yet been converted, then let him take heed that he follow not in the footsteps of Charles Ludlow, who broke his parents' hearts, blighted all the fond hopes of his own life, and wrecked his own home -- all because he failed to embrace the opportunities, that were his, to get saved while young.

Or if my reader is, perchance, a youth or maiden indulging in questionable amusements such as the card table, the dance, or the theater, then I beg that he remember Judith Delver -- yes, she was beautiful, she was popular -- but she was worldly and without Christ. She had passing pleasure, but she broke her husband's heart and wrecked their home. Her only child was worse than an orphan while she yet lived, and, saddest of all, she died without hope of heaven.

Or perhaps the reader is but a child, and unfortunate like Stephen, an orphan, deprived of the love and care of both father and mother. Then let him remember that God has promised to be a Father to the orphan. Stephen alone in his shack on the alley, day by day, prayed earnestly for the care and protecting hand of God to direct his life. In answer, God raised up a true father and mother in Mr. and Mrs. Sylvester, who trained him in the fear and admonition of the Lord. He was enabled to get an education, was called to a high and holy calling, that of preaching the gospel, and God provided for him a beautiful, talented, and consecrated young woman who became his wife. He will come with rejoicing to the end of the way, bearing precious sheaves with him, all because he made Christ his choice while young.

Let any reader who may be enslaved by sinful habits remember that the Christ of Calvary who broke the shackles that were binding Freckles' father has the same power to deliver all who come unto Him.

May parents who have no call to any specific Christian work, but who live in comfortable homes, emulate Mr. and Mrs. Sylvester, who opened wide the door of their humble Christian home to a friendless orphan boy, and let them remember that even the giving of a cup of cold water in the Master's name shall not be left unrewarded.

Every character in the book has a background of a real life and portrays some person that has come under the author's own observation.

The design of this volume and the prayer of the author are that the influence of the book may live long after the reader has come to "the end" of the story; that it may help him to steer clear of the rocks and shoals upon which some of the characters portrayed wrecked their frail barks; and

that he may take Christ as the Captain of his salvation and, with chart and compass, safely enter the harbor by and by.

* * * * *

THE END