

STORIES

by L. S. Boardman

BIG MIKE

WHEN MR. SNOWMAN MELTED

MISUNDERSTOOD

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BIG MIKE

This story is the first of a series of three. It is the story of conversion — what it means to be saved from sin — born again.

“Jesus loves you Mike; and so do I.”

Hateful words with cursing which responded to the above, brought forth a fresh volley of hot tears from the eyes of Little Joe who had just spoken. He gathered up the remains of his precious New Testament his mother had sent him from the humble, weather beaten cottage in the hills of Tennessee.

Would he ever be able to read it again? Salty tears had stained its pages many times. The powerful hands of Big Mike had seized the precious volume and in a fit of rage, had wrenched it in pieces and hurled it at the head of Little Joe whose only provoking crime was that of kneeling by his bunk in prayer and weeping. Little Joe was a retiring person of twenty summers when the conscription caught him. Corporal Mike was a bold contrast in every way to Little Joe. Six foot, seven inches; two hundred and ninety pounds, not an ounce of pury; solid brawn and muscle; hard as nails — that was Mike! His face was hardened by sin; his eyes as cold as steel. He could hate, and hate he did. More curses followed. Little Joe continued for some time kneeling by his bunk in prayer; the precious volume clutched tightly; his face buried.

It had scarcely been a week since his mother’s picture had been torn to pieces and hurled at his feet in a fit of rage by Big Mike who went berserk again and again at the sound of Little Joe weeping on his knees in prayer. Oddly enough, his mother’s face was not damaged in the tantrum which destroyed the picture but was on a section by itself torn almost exactly in the shape of the State of Tennessee. Little Joe had a strange presentiment that he would never see his mother again or those green-carpeted hills on the old home place, but with his sins all under the “blood” and the Holy

Spirit dwelling in his heart he would meet her on the other shore when the storms of war were spent — on that shore where all tears are wiped away.

There was another tormenting emotion gnawing at the vitals of Big Mike: It was fear. He feared Little Joe more than all the shrapnel that flew over his head when he was flattened out on the muddy dugout of a foxhole. Three times he had tried to kill Little Joe and make it look accidental but the lad's life seemed to be charmed by an unearthly power which Big Mike feared but could not understand. It did not bother him to see men die; especially men he hated. The first one he recalled was in a brawl over a poker game in the Bronx where Mike had lived since he was a lad of nine. Mike himself was merely an eyewitness to the brutal murder but in silence he had covered up for the guilty and no one was brought to justice. Another was a Sergeant who had been caught by an enemy sniper (so everybody thought; that is, everybody but Big Mike, who had for weeks determined to get revenge on his superior.) Sure enough, the wheels of chance finally rolled around and Mike, well concealed, drew the bead, squeezed the heartless trigger and the stern man of cold discipline never again gave him trouble. Such a little matter as eliminating a troublesome sergeant didn't bother Big Mike, that is, it didn't bother him until one day Little Joe was overheard to remark to one of his buddies "Sergeant Weatherly wasn't cut down by enemy fire. He was murdered from within our own ranks." The news spread like wild fire throughout the camp and Little Joe was summoned for questioning. All he seemed to know was that he had seen Sergeant Weatherly expose himself; he had heard the crack of a rifle and had seen Weatherly crumple to the ground; but the fire had not come from the enemy pillbox as everyone had supposed; it had come from their own ambushment.

Big Mike was both infuriated and troubled. Just how much Little Joe actually knew, Mike was not sure. The uncertainty tormented him. He would be court-martialed if the facts ever came to light. It would scarcely be safe for Little Joe to live. Big Mike had this disturbing obsession on his troubled mind for many days. The wheels of fate, he thought, would be slowly turning and they would stop at the right spot one day and Little Joe's number would be up. Mike was a firm believer in blind fate and he was certain of his conclusions. However, he did not know that the wheels of Divine Providence were turning also and that God would lay a hand on

him one day. He did not know that Christ had His eye on the whole matter and that angels were standing guard. He did not know that Little Joe, like all of God's dear Children, whether quietly at home or on the battlefield, would be immortal until his work was done.

Time rocked on; Days turned into weeks. Mike often awakened in the night to hear the persistent sound that tormented him. Oh, no, the sound of the other men snoring didn't bother him. It was that muffled sound of Little Joe on his knees in prayer! The break of a certain dawn finally brought on the scene which ended in the destruction of the picture Little Joe's mother had given him, and a few days later the treasured little volume of the New Testament. Mike was sure the wheels of fate would put the little man he so much feared and hated, into his hand. He waited his chance and finally it came.

Little Joe was the last one in the mess hall that morning. Duties had brought about the unusual arrangement. He sat eating alone. Big Mike watched his chances, slipped in undetected, planted a time bomb which he had smuggled, and eased out. Suddenly Little Joe was alerted by the pressure of a hand on his shoulder, yet nobody was there. A strange unexplainable feeling overwhelmed him. He knew it was God but did not understand its meaning. However, something induced him to rise in haste and leave the building through the nearest exit. Scarcely had he crossed the threshold when the bomb exploded and the building burst into flames. The fire squad fought desperately to extinguish the blaze and was able to rescue the workers in the kitchen who were trapped for a time in the far end of the building; but the building itself was destroyed.

A point had now been reached when the war was not looking good at all. Arrangements for sleeping were moved from the bunk house to foxholes, and enemy fire swept the fields during timed-intervals night after night in dogged determination to wipe out the unit.

Mike would have called it fate but Little Joe knew it to be the hand of Providence that put the two men together in the foxhole on that never-to-be-forgotten night. A lull had come in the crossfire as the enemy guns had been mowing down everything above ground. Little Joe was praying as usual — Mike burning with rage. The hour had come. Mike felt

the friendly handle of the brass-trimmed Colt at his side. His thumb fumbled at the safety lock and his forefinger was on the trigger. He waited for another volley from the enemy so that the report from his own weapon would not be noticed. Just another unfortunate soldier would be found in the morning. Nobody would give it a second thought. Flares lighted the interior of the foxhole again and again. There would never be a better chance to balance the books with Little Joe, who had nettled him so long. Mike waited. The deafening noise of enemy fire was all he needed to make it seem that another soldier had fallen in battle.

Suddenly it happened! A bomb fell nearby and rolled down the side of the foxhole and lay, fuse burning, between the two men. Seconds tripped off in rapid fire toward zero; eight, seven, six, five, four, three — Little Joe, gathering his composure, leaped to the bomb, flattened his body over it and cried out “Mike, you are not ready to die. You don’t know Jesus. Repent pray!” and a muffled sound as of an explosion that couldn’t get free silenced him forever. And the first rays of dawn found Mike spattered from head to foot with mud from the dugout and blood from little Joe’s mangled body.

But long before dawn the guns had become still. The stillness added its lonely touch to the darkness and Big Mike for the first time in his unhappy life broke with conviction and began to pray. The sins of many year loomed before him. Godly sorrow gripped his heart. Not a soul — not even Little Joe — had dreamed that for weeks Big Mike had been breaking. The bold, daring and determined exterior was but the reaction to the unbearable conviction which he was fighting and which he had intended to fight to the bitter end and extinguish at any price. Blow after blow from the relentless hammer of God’s holy conviction had staggered him; but each time he had managed to emerge from the struggle more bitter than ever, until this never-to-be-forgotten night when the Sweet Holy breath of God broke through his case-hardened shell to uncover the long-hidden, big soul of Mike that had always slumbered there.

Godly sorrow — repentance — torrents of hot tears — and Big Mike prayed through to forgiveness and mercy for all his sins. He had not cried since he was a little boy; and then only in anger; but all the time there was a soft, tender Mike hidden inside and God finally broke through and got to

him. Mike had not dreamed that he would ever be sorry for the awful sins he had committed but suddenly he was sorry for them all. And there on his knees in the stillness of the pre-dawn darkness, Mike promised God he would make every wrong right insofar as he should be able. And before the light of the coming day had allowed Mike to steal out of the foxhole, he had passed from death unto life. Mike was a new creature in Christ Jesus. Old things had passed away and all things had become new.

A few months passed and the awful war was over and Big Mike was back with his wife and two little girls in their modest apartment in Louisville. His wife, Alice, had been invited by a girl friend to a holiness revival meeting while Mike had been away and she had been soundly converted and had later been gloriously sanctified. Mike reached home to find the family altar already erected.

Scarcely a week had passed when at family prayer Mike stopped abruptly at the end of this portion of Scripture: "Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift." Mike sat for a long pause, in silence. There was a strange faraway look on his face. Presently he broke the mysterious stillness: "Alice, dear," he said slowly, "we must take a journey down to a lonely spot in Tennessee. There is a little mother in that community to whom I must make amend and I cannot delay the visit any longer," and he told Alice the story. Soon they were ready and were on their way to Smithville.

While on the journey, Big Mike rehearsed to Alice the memorable scene when he had confessed the slaying of Sergeant Weatherly. He had expected the worst but God melted the hearts of the hardened army officers as Big Mike gave his testimony and revealed the entire story, climaxing with Little Joe's death, and his own conversion. Every man in the big office sat weeping when he had finished. Their decision: since Weatherly had no living kin, except for one very distant cousin, and since Big Mike was headed straight, the offense was forgiven and no record of the matter was made.

The sky was autumn-red and the sun was settling into the smoggy haze when a strange car pulled up in front of a humble, unpainted farm house in Smithville. An unfamiliar step on the porch and a rap on the broken screen door brought a smiling lady of scarce fifty from the kitchen.

Introductions and warm greetings were soon over and the group sat in the spotlessly clean front room which was personalized by poverty. Mike told of his associations with Little Joe, reaching backward and forward unchronologically through the war months as if reluctantly working his way to a point.

When it seemed that everything that needed to be said was finished and forgiveness for all the ill-treatment of Little Joe was granted, Mike slowly, as though about to drive a dagger into the woman's breast and yet a move which must only lead to another, drew from his pocket a ragged little New Testament, scarce recognizable from its last ordeal, drenched in blood from that awful explosion in the fox-hole. Both mother and soldier felt the piercing pain as he slowly opened the volume and displayed the only remaining piece of the picture that had happened, as if by stealth, to have been torn in the shape of the state of Tennessee.

Tears were flowing from every eye in the room. "Mrs. Winters," Mike finally managed to articulate when he had partially gained his composure, "I overheard Little Joe tell a buddy one day how his mother had dedicated him to God before he was born, and that he was going home when the war was over to prepare for the Christian ministry. It falls my lot to come here to your home and tell you that your prayers have been, in the most unexpected manner, answered, I am to answer that call. Little Joe preached by a radiant life and an unfailing testimony while he lived. He gained a convert in his death and will be preaching by the after-glow of his radiant life as long as I am in the world. I could not rest, Mrs. Winters, until I told you that I am picking up the mantle that Little Joe laid down I am answering the call."

The two children, weary from the long journey, lay on a braided rug, asleep in the center of the room. The three adults sat for a time weeping in silence.

Presently Mike arose and stepping to the mantle, He took down a picture of a little snaggle-tooth boy of about eight summers and stared at it for a long time in silence. The picture had rested there for years beside that of Little Joe. "Memaw," he said tenderly, and stopped. The woman turned ashen white. The word "Memaw" rang a bell.

"She's fainting," Alice screamed as she rushed to the woman's chair to keep her from falling. Mike stumbled to the little kitchen for a glass of cold water and the two revived her.

"Michael!" she gasped, "Michael Ellsworth!"

"Yes," said Big Mike, "I'm Michael the little boy you and Papaw took from the orphanage when he was seven. I had hated my drunken father for bringing my mother to an untimely end by ill-treatment, until she died of a broken heart; I hated the orphanage and everyone who lived there; I hated you because Little Joe was your own and I was not; I hated Papaw because he tried to make me obey and whipped me when I was disobedient. I was born, it seemed, to hate; and I lived up to my birthmark until the moment that bomb rolled into the foxhole. Instantly I was frozen with terror. I saw hell open before me. I could neither scream nor move. Then Little Joe threw his body over the deadly hell, screamed a few words about Jesus and something snapped within me as the bomb exploded. All the sins of my childhood and youth came before me there in the semi-darkness. I remembered how much I had hated you and Papaw and Little Joe. I saw my hands kindle the fire which burned your barn to the ground with all the cattle and horses, reducing you to poverty, as you had no insurance. Then I ran away from home. That was twenty-two years ago. I knew the authorities would be looking for me. I stayed in hiding for weeks stealing food to keep body and soul together. I assumed the name of Mike Sams, a name which I falsely bear to this day with my wife and children."

The woman tried to rise but settled back in her chair, too weak from shock to stand. Finally, — "Did Little Joe know the secret?" she whispered feebly.

“No, Memaw,” Mike answered slowly, “Little Joe never knew. All he knew about me was that I was a big, brutal sergeant who hated him, because of his religion.”

The woman sat a long time in silence, too stunned to weep. “Michael.” she breathed finally, “I have prayed for you from the day we took you from the orphanage; prayed that you would be a real son to us, love us as our very own and finally answer the call to preach the gospel.” Then she hesitated for a moment, breathed heavily, and continued, “Since the day you ran away I have prayed that God would bring you back. My prayers of these many years have been answered. I’m satisfied with the way God has worked it out. ‘He doeth all things well.’ I feel very, very happy. Papaw has long since gone to be with Jesus. Little Joe too, has finished his course nobly and has kept the faith. My prayers that have tracked you down across the years shall always be with you. My reward is that you have found the Savior and are answering the call.”

“Memaw,” and Big Mike swallowed, “I shall always be indebted. You shall never want again. As long as we both are in this world I shall do everything in my power to make all wrong right.”

With that the three slipped onto their knees for a time of prayer and tears together. Angels filled the humble room and the Sweet Comforter reached down with His healing hand and touched every heart. Suddenly the evening bells from the great steeple yonder began softly to chime. The clear notes floated melodiously down the valley, invaded the cottage where the three were kneeling, and brought a fresh volley of warm tears. The bells all but voiced the words of the hymn: “Tell mother I’ll be there; in answer to her prayer — Yes, tell my darling mother I’ll be there.”

WHEN MR. SNOWMAN MELTED

By Rev. L. S. Boardman

This story is the second in a series of three. It is a story explaining what it means to be sanctified “holy” and “wholly”. It illustrates the scriptural way to obtain a pure heart and be rid of carnality. It is called in the Bible, the baptism of the Holy Ghost and fire.

A heavy snow had been falling for hours but now the blue sky had taken over and the sun was bright. The six-year-old twins, Augustus and Augusta, had rolled a huge snow ball as far as they possibly could, and yet it was much too small to make so large a snow man as they desired. What should they do?

“Butch! Butch!” they called as their big eighteen-year-old brother was just coming from the wood lot on his big snowshoes. Soon the powerful arms of the youth had the first snowball to the desired size. A second ball was rolled for Mr. Snowman’s mid-section and laid in place, then a third for his head. Three dark stones for eyes and nose, a bent stick for his mouth, and an old felt hat, two pieces of a broken limb for his arms, and Mr. Snowman was the talk of the little farm section for several days. The children laughed and romped about in the fresh snow as they tried to come up with a suitable name for Mr. Snowman. Several suggestions were made but it was finally agreed to name him “Butch” after big brother who had helped them so willingly. Then, “Snowbutch” was invented and in unison they heartily agreed. However, the annual mid-winter thaw was just around the corner and Mr. Snowman was destined to a very short stay in this world.

By late March the backbone of the long winter was broken and before one could scarcely imagine the July sun was bearing down. Snowbutch, like many of the deceased country folk in yonder cemetery, was virtually forgotten except for pictures in the family album; for mother had taken several snaps of the beautiful snowman.

Traditionally, each season held its peculiar romance for the children; toboggan-slides and ice-skating in mid-winter; kite-flying and maple “wax-on-snow” in the early springtime, and camp meeting in summer.

Now summer had come. The big brown tent with its crude benches and improvised pulpit appeared upon the scene in Sister Christian’s meadow and excitement was in the air. Farm wagons, surreys, and buckboards dotted the country roadway and the horses were hitched to every fence post and tree within reach, and the meeting was on. The evangelist preached Second Blessing Holiness mixed with good measures of judgment and hell fire, night after night; and poor Butch, who had been called to preach, but who was always up and down in his experience, hit the mourner’s bench several nights in succession, seeking the “Second Blessing,” but actually getting nowhere in his seeking.

“Die out!” “Go to the bottom!” “Keep on digging!” and other similar expressions came from the evangelist, the pastor and the seasoned saints; but poor Butch could not seem to understand. He prayed on and struggled with the “Old Man” that St. Paul dubbed the carnal nature, but to no avail.

Butch had always tried to do right. He had his private devotions, reading his Bible and praying, every morning and night. He tithed his meager earnings and was faithful in church attendance. No one had tried harder to be an exemplary Christian than he. But this “Second Blessing” — he simply couldn’t grasp its reality at all. The last night of the tent meeting came and went and after a long struggle Butch left the altar, discouraged and crestfallen. It seemed he would never get the wonderful, “pure heart” experience, of which they had talked and preached so much. Butch had made all of his restitutions, and was clear in his regeneration, but this “Perfect Love” experience called Holiness and Sanctification, seemed always beyond his grasp.

Monday night had arrived; the long day’s work on the farm was over; the shadows were lengthening. Frogs were croaking in the pasture; millions of fireflies were turning their little phosphorus lamps on and off in the meadow and the Whip-poor-will added his lonely notes to the concert of the crickets and the frogs.

Butch lay aside the book he had been reading on THE FULLNESS OF THE BLESSING. His heart was hungry, lonely and perplexed. He stumbled from the porch. Hot tears were streaming. Would he ever find this wonderful “Soul Rest?” As his custom was on such summer evenings, he headed for the pinehill-pasture up behind the barn, to pray, before retiring for the night. Suddenly he stumbled and fell. What was it there in the semi-darkness? A pile of debris! A pale moon was just breaking over the mountain. Butch looked closer. Sure enough, it was the pile of trash they had rolled up in the snowman last winter. Old bent nails, old tin cans, broken bottles, a couple of horse shoes, old dry bones, dirty rags, an old leather boot and various other items with sticks and stones were in the heap where old Mr. Snowman had melted. At once the light of heart-cleansing broke through to the lad’s troubled mind. The Spirit of God was working. “That is just like my heart,” thought Butch, “I’m just like old Snowbutch — white and clean and impressive on the outside but inwardly full of corruption.” “I see it,” he continued almost out loud and hurried up the hill to his favorite prayer spot in the pasture. There on a soft bed of pine needles Butch fell on his face before God. He was another “Snowbutch,” filled with a crooked nature like the rusty nails; as dry at times as the old chicken bones; as filthy in the sight of God with his carnal heart as the old rags; as hard and cold as the stones; as dead inside as the broken sticks and as worthless as the old leather boot. The faithful Holy Spirit hovered over the prostrate form of the lad. Heaven was all around him. He saw his heart as it really was, his carnal ambitions to be a great, famous preacher, and make a big mark in the world, and get a lot of applause, and perhaps some leading position in the conference. He struggled on — dying to carnal self. He saw his unwillingness to be crushed — broken — lied on — mistreated. His carnal feelings paraded before him in panoramic view — the silent rising of bitter resentment when father had made him hoe the corn during the heat of the day while his buddies from up the road went fishing in Lake Silver; the dislike he had had for Pauline ever since she had been voted in as president of the Young People’s Society. She had won out over him by only two votes and some had hinted that it was because she was sanctified and was much more settled in her experience than he. He saw the carnal feelings he had had toward her and toward certain ones in the church he knew had voted against him. He kept digging deeper and deeper into his selfish ambitions,

carnal motives, and hateful reactions, and kept on dying out to everything that came to his attention; putting everything — past, present and future — on the altar of consecration, including himself — all he was or ever would be. He saw himself in a hard-scrabble pastorate with the members of his congregation all turned against him and condemning him for things for which he was not at fault. “Yes, Lord,” he cried, “anything — just anything; if only I can have the blessing of a sanctified heart.”

Now, that unholy temper — he saw it as he had never seen it before in all of its hideousness. He thought of the time he was milking old Betsy and she had kicked the half-full pail of milk against the side of the barn and him with it. Usually he was able to control his temper, but this was too much. He had landed on poor, old, ignorant Betsy with the three-legged stool ‘till it was broken beyond use over her sorry ribs. His anger subsided and he was grief-stricken, and it was several weeks before he was able to pray clear through again and be sure of his justified state, and have a sky-blue testimony.

Yes, he was just like old Snowbutch — he seemed like a wonderful Christian young man, on the surface, but when the searching, hot sun of death-to-carnal-self preaching came, he would go “under” as the carnal traits would reappear and take over.

His face was now buried in his hands. His groans were the groans of one dying. For months he had had no hankering for sinful, worldly pleasures or sinful habits; but that old self — old carnal self — surely that is what the evangelist meant when he had cried out again and again, “Let him die, Lord, let him die.”

At last Butch was dying. The Son of Righteousness was bearing down on him with intense heat. The Holy Ghost was probing deeper and deeper. Subtle hidden deceit, pride and ambitions — out they came in a deluge of confession before God. “Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die...”. The words had taken on new meaning. “Oh, God,” he cried out in anguish, “Let me die.” Again he saw those bent, rusty nails. One time they had been new and shiny and straight. His experience and testimony had been just like those nails many times — first like the new ones and then like the old ones. He was now close to the end. The great miracle was soon

to take place. He had prayed to the end of old self. He felt utterly emptied of all inward pollution.

Suddenly “He” came! that Holy Person! that hallowed presence! Butch was wholly sanctified at last. He was filled with a fullness of God he had never known before. The “Comforter” had come. Billows of indescribable joy flowed over his spirit. He had never known such peace as he now possessed. He did not know when he arose, but presently he was on his feet, reeling like one intoxicated, as torrents of holy joy flowed from his purged lips and heart.

But wait! what was that yellow spark coming so slowly up the rise behind the barn and toward him? In a moment he knew. That was the unmistakable yellow glow from their old family lantern. His mother was troubled. The hour was getting late. She was searching for him. He cried out, stumbled toward the flickering light and fell into his mother’s arms. Her intercessory prayers and groans before God had been answered. Butch would not now be what she had so long dreaded, and feared: — a carnal preacher with a liberal, compromising message and false holiness.

Angels, it seemed, in multitudes were everywhere. The night air was impregnated with a holy Presence that evades description. Mother and son in each other’s embrace, wept and shouted together. The lantern had fallen to the ground and lay on its side. Its light had gone out but another light was burning. And another young man, called of God to preach the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ, was now baptized with the Holy Ghost, and was possessed of the priceless anointing of love, tears, and fire, and would soon go out to lead his people into the experience which he himself had found, the “Rest of Faith;” the “Baptism with the Holy Ghost and fire.”

MISUNDERSTOOD

By Rev. L. S. Boardman

This the third in a series of three stories. It shows the disaster which can result when born again Christians fail to go on and get a sanctified heart.

Anna Fields was hurrying by the dark alley in a drizzling rain when she heard a faint moan, paused, and saw an old drunk sprawled out, face down on the muddy concrete. Pity brought her to the stranger's side but she felt she could not spare the time to aid him. Her proposed visit at Leo's "Little Brown Jug" must not be delayed. Had she not heard that her beloved Jim spends a lot of time at Leo's? What else but her desperate search for her long lost husband could have brought her out on such a night as this? Pity for this stranger was strong within her, but love for her husband, mingled with loneliness and remorse over the way she had hurt him, were stronger. She must hurry on.

Presently, the lights of a car making a U-turn lighted the dismal alley for a moment and Jim's face came into full view.

Anna screamed! and losing all awareness of the filth of the alley, the putrid odors and the rain, she fell upon him. She pressed her soft cheek against his unshaven face, screamed into his ear as if he were a mile away, showered him with kisses, not even realizing her lips were becoming mingled with dirt and vomit.

Jim rallied for a moment. "Anna! Anna!" he blubbered in response to that familiar voice; then blacked out. Five long wretched years ago he last heard that voice. Anna tried, but could not further arouse him. Five years of dissipation and debauchery had brought Jim Fields to this regrettable state. For hours he'd lain in that filthy alley between high walls, amid beer cans, whiskey bottles and garbage. His ragged clothes were soiled and rain soaked. The stench was sickening. His life was ebbing away. The end seemed near.

Anna finally came to her senses and ran screaming from the alley. Help came running.

Only a few years back Jim and Anna were as happily married as any young couple could hope to be. Jim, a hard-working and frugal man in those days, scrimped, and paid for the mortgage on their little, two -room home. They were intensely happy with each other and with what scant possessions they had.

Jim and Anna were quite different in their makeup but what one lacked the other seemed to provide. Anna, the stronger personality of the two, was the leader and usually made the important decisions. Jim, more quiet and retiring would rather leave things up to Anna than to bother with them himself. Jim worked hard, turned every paycheck over to Anna and she did most of the planning.

Both husband and wife were wonderfully converted in the little community church nearby, but they did not go on to holiness. Naturally, both of them were carnal; Anna in her way; Jim in his. Anna was inclined to suspicion and jealousy even though her husband, up until this time, had never given her the slightest reason to mistrust his love or faithfulness. Jim on the other hand, leaned so explicitly upon his wife that were she ever to be taken away, his stabilizer and balance -wheel would be gone. Before their marriage he was given to excessive drinking, but when Anna complained, Jim dropped the habit. Both of them worshipped their little home, their garden plot, and each other. Anna especially, under rugged preaching at the little church, fell under deep conviction for a pure heart, came to grips with her carnal nature and her life full of worldly idols, but she would not die out and pay the price for heart-cleansing through the establishing grace of holiness. Naturally, Jim didn't either. And time rocked on.

Little by little they lost interest in the church and finally dropped out altogether. All efforts on the part of the devoted pastor and his faithful wife to recover them failed. They desired only to wrap their little self-centered world around themselves and be content. They did not dream that such sad days lay ahead as they soon would encounter. They forgot that the Bible says, "The way of the transgressor is hard." They were so

deeply in love and so intensely happy that their life seemed full without God.

Suddenly the unexpected happened! A letter from a lawyer in a distant city brought startling news. Jim had inherited a modest fortune. Concealing the exciting development from Anna, Jim struck up a correspondence with the attorney; while at the same time planned for his beloved wife the greatest surprise that could possibly have entered his mind. This was the time when it seemed that their wildest dreams would come true!

Never before, however, had Jim taken a solitary initiative like this. Never before had he concealed from Anna a thing that was on his mind. Never for a moment did he imagine anything could go wrong in his plans.

Stealthily he purchased a few choice acres under towering maples, near a restful stream; a spot which Anna had admired as they occasionally drove by. Its being overpriced did not matter. Jim had plenty now and he would have only that which would bring the greatest joy to his beloved.

An architect soon had the plans for their lovely dream-home drawn. Jim aided in capturing the style and general layout which he knew would best suit Anna's taste. A contractor was engaged and week by week the beautiful home was taking shape. No touch of extravagance was neglected. The oriental carpets, pleated drapes, elaborately carved furniture and well-chosen paintings were exquisitely blended by the best decorator Jim could locate. Night after night on his way home Jim would oversee the progress of construction. He dare not terminate his regular job for that would give away his secret. He came home as usual every evening with his soiled clothes and his old model car. But he was habitually late to supper — sometimes very late, until Anna knew that something was wrong. When she interrogated her husband he made excuses and seemed strangely evasive as though he were hiding something from her. Anna buried her fears and suspicions in a silence which never before had existed between them. Jim read her mind and was uneasy. But the work was progressing nicely. The exterior was complete and the new grass was nearly tall enough to mow. The interior lacked only a few finishing touches.

Apprehensions, tensions and silence, Jim realized, had created a barrier between them. "Surely," he reasoned, "only a few more days of the

hovering of that dark, mysterious cloud and the sun of their former devotion to each other would shine again.” Anna remained cold and sullen; Jim preoccupied!

Finally the long-dreamed-of hour arrived. Jim told his boss, “Don’t expect me tomorrow. Wife and I are launching on a second honeymoon.” He then related the whole exciting adventure. That evening the contractor handed Jim the keys and Jim made the final payment and the deal was closed. A more excited man never headed his car toward home!

Upon pulling into the driveway the house seemed strangely deserted. The sun had long since set but the lights were not burning. The door was locked. He entered and a note in that very familiar hand greeted him as he approached the table. It read:

“Jim, I’ve left. I could not bear this strain any longer. I have known for some time that you were seeing someone. You never hurry home as you used to do and it is apparent that you have lost interest in everything here at home, including me. Even the smallest repair jobs which you started weeks ago, are unfinished. Several times I tried to get to your heart but struck only a wall of evasiveness and weak excuses. One time you loved me so dearly I never dreamed you could look at another, or become so evasive. I fear my mind will snap. You will never see me again. I won’t stand in your way. I hope you will be happy. Good-bye forever. Anna.”

Jim turned white, staggered, and fell unconscious to the floor. Hours later a neighbor found the man lying where he had fallen, the note crumpled in his clenched fist. At the hospital he slowly mended in body, but not in spirit. For days he lay in shock. Once on his feet again Jim recklessly auctioned the new home to the highest bidder and headed for old haunts on the Bowery of New York City’s slums. The next five tragic years were spent on the Bowery in drunkenness and dissipation — in and out of cheap rooming houses — in and out of jail. Anna was the chief motivation in Jim’s life and when he lost her he went to pieces.

Anna, meantime, had withdrawn to a distant city, leaving no trace of her whereabouts. Clerking in a department store and severing all connections with the sickening past, she meant to let time heal the wound as best it could. For five long, lonely years her life was no more interesting than a

matter of shuttling back and forth between the store and her lonely apartment.

Providentially, a companion clerk invited her to a holiness revival meeting and that night under pungent conviction she repented of willful wandering from God, was genuinely reclaimed and was joyfully reinstated in Christ and salvation. This marvelous transformation added zest to her stalemated existence. She became a faithful attender at the modest, little church on Green Street. The continued revival spirit in the church soon brought Anna face to face again with her old carnal nature and she prayed and died out to old self for days and nights, until that never-to-be-forgotten night when she prayed all day and all night, coming to the end of carnal Anna, and was sanctified wholly.

From that time on Anna's life became meaningful again. She and Hilda, the clerk who had befriended her, had long vigils in prayer together. Days turned into weeks. More and more (Anna did not know why) she found herself wondering about Jim and the new love which apparently had stolen his heart from her. She wondered if he were as happy as he had been with her in the early years of their marriage. Then unexpectedly it happened!

It was a beautiful morning in early spring. The air was at its balmy best and the customers seemed unusually cheerful. Anna and Hilda were in prayer together for an hour before coming to work that morning and Anna's heart was bubbling with the joy of the Lord. Suddenly she heard her name literally screamed from across the store. "Anna! Anna!" and a sweet-faced lady came rushing to greet her. Her old pastor's wife! Like an avalanche came a flood of memories from the past. There was the happy associations, the deserted little cottage, the church they had forsaken, and last of all — Jim. In each other's arms, amid tears, the story of Jim quickly unfolded. Anna stood pale and stunned. But where was Jim now? The lady did not know, except that it was reported he was somewhere on the Bowery in New York. Within moments Anna walked to the main office and gave her notice. Two weeks later she boarded a plane for New York. It would be like searching for a needle in a haystack but she meant at any cost, by the help of God, to find him.

For days Anna walked the Bowery and prayed, visiting saloons, taverns and cheap rooming houses, inquiring for anyone who might know Jim Fields, ever disappointed, yet never despairing. Were he yet alive, she must find him. Two drunks assured her they knew a man by that name and they seemed to think he frequented Leo's on the east side. This clue led to the rainy-night-episode in the dismal alley which first we mentioned in this account. There she found him.

During the weeks following, Anna sat reassuringly by his hospital bedside day after day and night after night to the point of near exhaustion, reading to him from the Bible, and faithfully praying with her husband until he, too, had passed from death unto life and became a new creature in Christ Jesus. Only when her strength was spent would she take food and rest. She then led him also into the experience of perfect love.

A phone call to the parsonage revealed that their little cottage -home, much more dilapidated now, was to be sold for delinquent taxes. Anna promptly took steps to redeem it, for she had accumulated considerable savings. Upon instructions and the supervision of old friends, the little house was neatly redecorated. It was soon ready with used furniture, curtains at the windows and Scripture mottoes on the walls. Bushes and tall weeds which had sprung up around the place were destroyed and a few outside repairs were completed.

In a honeymoon atmosphere Jim and Anna walked arm-in-arm down the long corridor to the elevator and stepped into a new world which proved to be the happiest they had ever known.

"Jim, dear," and she was brushing away tears of rapturous joy, "at last we are going home." Sadness stole over the man's countenance. "But Anna," he objected, "we have no home to go to."

"That's where you are mistaken my dear," she smilingly assured him. "I have a little surprise awaiting you." With that she hailed a cab which hurried them to the airport.

When comfortably seated on the plane she assured him, "I'll tell you all about it. I have made plans. Hope you will not be disappointed. And I propose to spend the rest of my life as best I can to make amends for all

the suffering you have endured because I mistrusted you. The suspicious and insanely jealous nature within me has been crucified with Christ. My heart is cleansed in the blood of Jesus and the precious Holy Spirit abides. The great financial loss does not matter now. We are far better off without it. Love and perfect trust have been restored. From now on, as the Bible enjoins us, we will be content with such things as we have.”

“Yes, dear,” the man spoke slowly and with profound feeling. “From now on we will be content with such things as we have. We will barter the luxurious house for a happy home; the stupid misunderstanding and shattered dreams for perfect faith and enduring hope. We will praise God for our little cottage, our beloved Christ and our mended love. Christ will ever be ‘the unseen Guest at every meal; the silent Listener to every conversation.’”

Smoothly the plane groaned on through perfect weather, helping two very happy people in putting together the broken pieces of the past.

