

Dan E. L. Patch

Behind the Veil



LutheranLibrary.org ● 566

Behind the Veil

Also Available from LutheranLibrary.org

By Dan E. L. Patch

- *Aamon Always*
- *Past Finding Out*
- *Moon Over Willow Run*
- *The Hour Struck*
- *Ashes of Yesterday*

About The Lutheran Library



The Lutheran Library is a non-profit publisher of good Christian books. All are available in a variety of formats for use by anyone for free or at very little cost. There are never any licensing fees.

We are Bible believing Christians who subscribe wholeheartedly to the Augsburg Confession as an accurate summary of Scripture, the chief article of which is Justification by Faith. Our purpose is to make available solid and encouraging material to strengthen believers in Christ.

Prayers are requested for the next generation, that the Lord will plant in them a love of the truth, such that the hard-learned lessons of the past will not be forgotten.

Please let others know of these books and this completely volunteer endeavor. May God bless you and keep you, help you, defend you, and lead you to know the depths of His kindness and love.

Behind the Veil

By Dan E. L. Patch
CHIEF OF POLICE, YSILANTI, MICHIGAN

Grand Rapids, Michigan
ZONDERVAN PUBLISHING HOUSE
© 1947 / 2019
(CC BY 4.0)

LutheranLibrary.org

Dedication

Dedicated
to
Faithful and Fearless
CHRISTIANS
Called According
to
His Purpose

Because of Answered Prayer

Because your soul is precious in His sight,
I dared to voice a prayer, to brave the night
You faced in dark despair.
I dared to be a friend you met who cared
Enough to pray that trouble might be shared,
And you might know His care.

Because your soul is precious in His sight,
I dared to pray that you should find the light
And leave your burden there.
I dared to seek His grace in your behalf,
That you might smile again, and choose to laugh
Because of answered prayer.

Because your soul is precious in His sight,
I dared to pray that you should choose the right
And be consoled.
No quarter asked, no favor, no reward,
Save that you love and serve my Lord;
Your heart refined as gold?

THE AUTHOR

“And moreover I saw under the sun, in the place of justice, that wickedness was there;
and in the place of righteousness, that wickedness was there.” — Ecclesiastes 3:16 (R. V.).

Contents

Also Available from LutheranLibrary.org

About The Lutheran Library

Dedication

Because of Answered Prayer

Contents

Preface by Lutheran Librarian

1. The Beginning Of Trouble
2. A Sinister Indictment
3. The Harvest Of Sin
4. An Evil Mind
5. The Test Of Character
6. Callouses Of Indifference
7. Walking Into A Trap
8. Unseen Enemies
9. The Invisible Hand
10. Termites Of Gossip
11. A Sudden Change Of Heart
12. More Precious Than Gold
13. A Cast Off Branch
14. The Dust Of Criticism
15. An Important Meeting
16. Hidden Fear
17. Victory
18. The Man Of Mystery
19. Redeeming The Time
20. A Broken Link
21. Ghosts Of The Past
22. A False Shadow
23. Running The Gauntlet
24. Furious Living

25. The Court Drama

26. Without A Pilot

27. An Unforgettable Meeting

28. Harvest Time

Copyright Notice

How Can You Find Peace With God?

Benediction

Encouraging Christian Books for You to Download and Enjoy

Preface by Lutheran Librarian

In republishing this book, we seek to introduce this author to a new generation of those seeking spiritual truth.

DAN E. L. PATCH began his public service as a patrolman in the Police Department of the City of Highland Park. Within fifteen years, personal qualifications brought him through the various ranks to the position of Chief of Police. A quarter of a century of faithful service gave a feeling of joy and explicit confidence to all citizens who respected the law and who liked to see it administered without fear or favor. Professional competence was attested by the honor conferred by the Michigan Association of Chiefs of Police when he was made their President for the years 1941-42. In later years he served as Chief of Police of Ypsilanti, Michigan.

By J. McGill Reynar, *Secretary of The Christian Business Men's Committee of Detroit.*

The Lutheran Library Publishing Ministry finds, restores and republishes good, readable books from Lutheran authors and those of other sound Christian traditions. All titles are available at little to no cost in proofread and freshly typeset editions. Many free e-books are available at our website LutheranLibrary.org. Please enjoy this book and let others know about this completely volunteer service to God's people. May the Lord bless you and bring you peace.

1. The Beginning Of Trouble

A QUESTION MARK FURROWED THE BROW of Reverend Stephen Winthrop. He had returned home, pledged to accept the assistant pastorate at First Community Church; he had returned expecting to find peace, harmony and contentment, but where he had expected peace, he had found turmoil. Where harmony should have existed he faced opposition. Where he had hoped to find contentment, an atmosphere of discontent opposed him. He was tired of fighting for love—the attribute which had prompted his every act of defense.

Love. What was it? One question invited another.

His shoulders stiffened with resentment. He was a soldier again motivated by love for an ideal. That was it. Friend and foe alike were motivated by the atomic force of love for an ideal, a principle, in which existed ultimate right. Love was like atomic energy. It must be controlled for good. Otherwise it became a devastating force. His thoughts became clearer. Like the soldier on the battlefield, he must fight for the love of that ideal in which he believed. Again he became confused. It was a mystery beyond comprehension. Love had a hundred applications to his own personal physical existence, yet it did not touch the depths of human affection. He was not in love.

The thought did not satisfy. One had to be in love with humanity to serve God. He loved people; but there was no one person whom he loved in a singular sense. His mind was vague. What was love?

Suddenly Steve's face brightened, and his thoughts were clear as he meditated upon the Source in which true love originates. He was interested in no other objective. He loved his Lord with that love' which of necessity he must share with others. He must expect to face complications. He must endure the hardship of being misunderstood.

He analyzed the problems confronting him. He was misunderstood. Jewell Lombard, encouraged by his stepmother, misunderstood his attentions. His stepmother misunderstood his devotion to Christian duty. His interest in

Shirley Mason's spiritual welfare was challenged because he resented having her dubbed a religious fanatic. In his stepmother's and Jewell's eyes, Virginia Thyme was a publican and a sinner, an outcast who should be banned from polite society. His heart went out to Virginia Thyme who needed a friend and the saving knowledge of God's love. Her soul was precious in the sight of the Lord and because of the interest he had shown in her welfare the church board and the deacons had taken him to task. His Christian philosophy and his convictions concerning the intricate meaning of sin were misunderstood. He had been told that he must "progress" with the world and "take a broader view of life" if he hoped to succeed as assistant pastor of First Community Church.

Such were the problems that challenged his love for humanity, problems which were rolling like rocks into his road, problems that originated on the part of those who failed in their conception of the full meaning of God's love. His cry in the wilderness of present-day sin was not heard. His services as a messenger carrying the good tidings of God's grace were not wanted. In their Laodicean sufficiency, the elite membership of First Community Church were increased with goods and therefore had no desire for the gold tried in the fire of repentance.

A sigh of despair escaped his lips. Hope appeared to be beyond his reach. He believed that all things were possible with God, but doubts were discouraging him. He had returned to find an appalling condition in the church of his boyhood memories, a church that had lost her first love, a church that observed the fact of God in holding fast His Name, yet cast a stumbling block before her children.

His thoughts turned to those who made his problems so difficult, to Jewell Lombard with her talents and musical ability. She would be a capable wife for a pastor. A natural leader, she displayed this talent in her work as a Sunday school teacher. Jewell was his stepmother's ideal.

Steve prized Jewell's friendship. She had been more than faithful while he was in the service, and each week had written all the news from home. He respected her as a friend, as a young woman of sterling character. Their one difference was a question of theology.

Shirley Mason was more understanding and tolerant than Jewell. Steve and Shirley agreed perfectly, and shared their faith and ideals.

The young pastor was not in love with either girl, yet he sought the comfort of Shirley's understanding. Her smile lingered in his memory. Her un-

derstanding of his likes and dislikes; their common belief in the truths of God; their oneness of purpose in serving the needs of a sin-sick and dying world—such love could not be described. Love for humanity, as he and Shirley saw it, had to be lived.

Why couldn't the world see it?—a world dying for lack of love, a world seething in hatred after years of struggling to meet and agree upon terms of peace following a second World War. The battlefields were still red with the blood of those who had given the supreme sacrifice for love of country, the love of an ideal, the love of might, of power, of purpose, of supremacy. Steve had seen it all as a chaplain with General Alexander Patch in Europe. He had seen it in the Orient with General Douglas MacArthur. He had remained in the Army while the nations were gathered at the conference table trying to establish a just and lasting peace.

Now he had returned home with the world-wide cry still ringing in his ears. "Peace! Peace!" And there was no peace.

"Have faith in God." He repeated the parting phrase of cheer that Shirley Mason had left with him as she stepped aboard the night express. He was proud of her, proud of her resolution to dedicate her life to the cause of Christ, proud of her desire to equip herself by a course of Bible study.

"Have faith in God." He wondered if he was equal to the challenge. How was God going to work out his problem? How was He going to meet the problems of the world, the problems of hate and jealousy and greed?

It was impossible to fulfill all his obligations. He stood at the crossroads undecided which way to turn. He knew what he wanted to do, what he should do, what he felt the Lord wanted him to do. He faced a triple purpose in the challenge that confronted him, but there were only two ways to decide. Was he to serve God or mammon?

His *career*. The term hung over him like a shroud. Throughout his college days the word had motivated his every thought. It had been the goal which his determined stepmother would not allow him to escape. He reflected upon the past and his obligations. He had been willing to make the sacrifice then, but now the situation had changed. Then it had been his moral duty to observe the wishes of the one whom he had always known and respected as his mother. She was his mother, and he her son, as far as the public was concerned. Few knew different. But he chafed against the ties that bound him to ideals with which he did not agree. There was no hope of salvation in the cold, sophisticated social gospel that she advocated.

No, he had made a discovery. Things looked different. He lived in a sinful and dying world, and the fact haunted him. He wanted to preach, to unburden his soul, to proclaim the unsearchable riches of Christ. He wanted to preach the Gospel that his father had always longed to preach. People were unsaved. They needed a Saviour, and someone to tell them of God's love and to relate the heart-searching story of His sacrificial death upon the Cross.

His *career*. He fought the term that his stepmother cherished. He was pursued continually by her admonitions intended to safeguard his future, but he was not ready to marry and assume the duties of maintaining a home.

Suddenly Steve discovered that he was standing alone on the depot platform. The last evening train had disappeared in the distance. Only a faint trace of smoke remained between the hills a mile distant where the railroad tracks seemed to merge with the countryside.

The light above the safe cast its shadows about the dimly lighted office as the agent turned the key in the lock and closed the station for the night. If Reverend Winthrop heard the door close, he failed to let the fact disturb him. The lone call of a whippoorwill re-echoed through the night air, but Steve did not hear it. He was facing the challenge of choosing a career.

The station agent shuffled down the boardwalk to the main highway, where he encountered a charming blue-eyed girl of twenty. He pointed over his shoulder in response to her question, then stood watching her.

"Queer how these girls pursue a fellow these days!" he muttered under his breath, turning to mingle with the crowd of late shoppers. "Poor judgment chasing a penniless preacher like young Winthrop, just out of the Army, who took all he had saved in the service to clear his debts contracted for an education before he enlisted, poor as Job's turkey."

The cry of the whippoorwill came back across the vale.

"Why, Steve." A sweet feminine voice startled the lone figure on the platform. "I've been looking all over town for you. Your mother is waiting. She wants you to keep an appointment at the Literary Guild that she arranged for you.

"Mother wants me to jump through a hoop at her beck and call. I am not going to the Guild—"

"Steve! You surely aren't going to disappoint us. Your mother insisted that I wear my new dress. Now you don't appreciate it. You don't want to go?" Jewell Lombard pouted.

“Why should I?” He was searching for an excuse that would not offend.

“The elite of the town will be there. It’s important that you meet them,” she said sweetly. “You can’t afford to ignore such influential contacts.”

“The cream of society I suppose—”

“You have your career, your whole future, to consider.”

“Career, bah! I detest the term. I want to be a soul-winner. A minister of the Gospel doesn’t have a career; he is a servant.” There was pathos in Steve’s voice.

Jewell stood an inch taller and eyed him.

“Steve!” she exclaimed, “a tramp preacher, a mission worker—combing the slums for outcasts and burns and alley rats. How—how can you? How can you associate with such people? Dr. Smythe—”

“Yes, Dr. Smythe. I’m fully aware that Dr. Smythe would not be seen in a rescue mission. A doctor of divinity, a writer, a world-traveler, a man of letters, a preacher who has no interest in sin-sick souls. The kind of career that Mother has chosen for me. I—I can’t forget God that way,” he replied.

“Steve! Your mother!”

“Yes, I know, Mother has it all planned. God has nothing to say whatsoever. I’m sorry,” he lamented, “but I just can’t do it.”

“Your mother knows best.” Jewell smiled up at him.

“Mother—” He caught himself and started to whistle.

“You have a right to feel proud of your mother’s ability to manage church affairs. Your father—”

“—wanted to preach—and is dying of a broken heart.” He finished the sentence absently.

“Stephen Winthrop?” There was doubt in her eyes.

He turned and walked away. He had already said too much, although he did not mean to criticize. His father was facing the grave. This was no time to complain. He faced a duty thrust upon him through circumstances beyond his control. He had accepted the call as assistant pastor of First Community Church as a moral obligation to his father, whose last stroke had rendered him virtually helpless. There was little hope for his recovery, and Stephen faced the duty of carrying on as pastor in his father’s absence.

2. A Sinister Indictment

STEPHEN WINTHROP groped his way to his father's study. The room had been closed since he was stricken two months previous. The circumstances surrounding his sudden illness had been puzzling. A time-worn Bible and the scattered notes of his last sermon lay where he had left them when he had suffered a stroke of apoplexy, a stroke which indicted his protean wife. The detested blue pencil that she had wielded so cleverly as a weapon against his efforts to preach the unsearchable riches of Christ lay as it had fallen on the floor during their last controversy. She had won the argument as usual. The sermon had not been preached, but the Christ-exalting challenge in the message had won a strange victory. Doctor Judson Winthrop lay stricken in his home, a testimony of faithfulness to his Lord. He could not talk, walk nor move, but he continued to praise: the Saviour whom he worshiped in spirit and in truth but had not dared to preach. Steve surveyed the room. His heart was heavy, but it was his duty to carry on, to take up his father's cross and the Cross of his Lord and bear the burden without complaint. He tried to make himself believe that it had been ordained of the Lord that he was to accept this challenge, but there was no convincing proof. He had received the call and been thrust into the position of assistant pastor through his stepmother's efforts. He had not been consulted concerning doctrinal belief or theology. She had met with the board, the deacons and other key members of the church and settled the question without consulting him. He was a pastor without portfolio, a pastor who was to wear the pretentious garments of outward spirituality, but was denied the liberty of preaching the message of salvation to lost souls.

It was a challenging opportunity for a young minister, and Stephen Winthrop realized the possibilities. The work was already established. There would be no financial worries. His support would come from a generous congregation, liberal in pocketbook and spirit as long as he courted their favor, but there was an obstacle: he was shackled to a church policy of

formalism that permitted no liberties. His stepmother tried desperately to favor those in financial control, regardless of their spiritual need.

Steve knew the terms by which success was measured and the part his stepmother would play in the achievement of that success. She was the power behind the throne. The blue pencil with which she shaped his father's sermons to suit the fancy of the congregation had won many financial victories.

But it was possible to have victory without success. God challenged the price: the cost of souls. How was he to give an account of his stewardship if he condoned the shame of indifference to the truths of God?

Steve's nature revolted against preaching merely for a salary. He could not sell himself to popularity and the appeal of public opinion. Money could not buy the success he sought. Salvation was not measured in dollars and cents. His first concern was to sow the seed of salvation. God would provide the increase. He could not remember when the church had witnessed a conversion. But Christ was still knocking at the door. As pastor, Steve wanted to admit Him, to present Him in a campaign that would bring the congregation to their knees in prayer, in heart-searching conviction. He viewed the facts with misgivings. How was he going to break the barriers at the First Community Church where his stepmother's every wish was law? She knew the likes and dislikes of every member, and was ready to block every effort that conflicted with her liberal views. Her first objective was to assure a bountiful collection each Sunday. This implied catering to popular opinion. Steve's success as the next pastor of First Community Church was certain if he would please the majority. He raised his head and sighed. Why had God called him to such a task? He reflected upon the hopelessness of the future. There was no light anywhere to lend encouragement. Then Steve's eyes were drawn to his father's Bible which was open at the fifth chapter of Galatians. The penciled notes indicated that his father had used portions of Scripture from this chapter in preparing his last sermon. The title stood out: "God's Way of Life." That was the kind of sermon that Steve wanted to preach! He wanted to emphasize God's way of life. His father's last sermon was unpreached. Did he dare to preach it? The underlined verses challenged him:

“Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made as free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage... For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another... If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.”

This was God’s way of life. This was the way of life for the First Community Church. This was the way of life that God had chosen for him as their pastor.

The underlined verses emphasized his father’s spiritual experience. He was a soul in bondage to formalism, crying for freedom of thought and expression. His father’s light had been under a bushel for years, and much of his zeal had been spent in an attempt to live at peace with his contentious second wife.

Steve reread the verses. His father’s sermon “God’s Way of Life” was a challenge, a call from God.

The Scripture reference that his father had emphasized burned within his soul: This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the last of the flesh. For the flesh lasteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would.

He bowed again in heart-searching prayer. He was close to his Heavenly Father’s heart. Steve pitied his earthly father because he had been forced to live his Christian life under a bushel.

“O God”—his lips moved in prayer—“help me to live life openly Thy way of life. Grant, Lord, that I shall never deny Thee.”

“Stephen!” Mrs. Winthrop’s voice trailed from the hall. “Come now. It’s time to leave for the Guild meeting.”

“I’m not going tonight, Mother,” he replied graciously. “I just left Jewell. She knows that I decided not to go.”

“Decided—”

“Yes, Mother.”

She came in and placed her hands on his shoulders. “But you must go, Stephen,” she pleaded.

“Please, Mother, don’t urge me—”

“You are the new minister. You are expected to attend such functions. I promised Jewell.”

“Jewell understands.”

Mrs. Winthrop's brows arched. "I don't suppose there would be any thrill taking Jewell and me." She could not hide the note of jealousy in her reply. "It was much more convenient to see that Shirley did not miss her train."

Steve did not answer.

"Son"—determination emphasized her appeal—"I'm not going without you. You are on the program for a few informal remarks."

"That's interesting. No one consulted me."

"Your father—I always arranged his meetings. Come on. Here are a few penciled notes which I thought you might use." She handed him a folded piece of paper.

The psychological effect was what she expected. He accepted the note with the same whipped-dog expression that his father always wore when he desired to avoid further argument.

She waited impatiently. "Come, we only have about twenty minutes. I want to—"

"Let's have an understanding, Mother," he said firmly. "Here's the point. I don't care to go to any meeting that you haven't even told me about. You and Jewell run along. I'm not going tonight."

"Well!"

"I'm sorry to inconvenience you, Mother; but under the circumstances it's best for me not to go."

She cleared her throat.

"We'll discuss schedules and arrange our appointments in the future," he continued meekly. "I know we should not have such misunderstandings; it will work out to much better advantage if we know in advance how our dates are arranged."

"I suppose if Shirley Mason—"

He bit his lip and looked at his mother's picture hanging above his father's desk. "Please leave Shirley out of the discussion," he said absently. "She has severed her connections with the community; probably she'll never return."

"I'm glad she has gone."

"God has great work for her on the mission field. We need to pray for her."

"Humph!"

The expression on Steve's face softened Mrs. Winthrop. "Perhaps you'll discover what a fine girl Jewell is." She tried to appear indifferent. "She's the type for a pastor's wife. Her rare gift for music is a real asset."

"Jewell Lombard has a lot of fine qualities." He stopped short and smiled broadly. "She'll make some man a fine housewife."

Mrs. Winthrop was perplexed.

"I agree with you. Jewell is a fine girl. I like her as a friend, but I'm not interested in a wife. Marriage is out of the question." He searched her eyes mischievously.

Being forced to take the negative side of any question irritated Mrs. Winthrop. She studied her stepson and wondered how to master the situation. He had never been so obstinate. Her desire had always been law. Why this sudden challenge of her authority? What were the hidden motives behind this determined attitude?

Steve read the thoughts that were troubling her mind. "Never mind, Mother," he said. "We'll discuss our plans in the future, but let's understand that I'm not in the party tonight."

She wanted to ask why but could not humiliate herself to the point of framing the question. She would not give him that much satisfaction. She would find a way to bring him under her subjection. He could not be successful without her, that was definite. His entire future lay in her hands.

His entire future. She would have to mold him as she had molded his father. In time he would see things in the right light. He had never been egotistical, but perhaps the fact that the call to take his father's place had come so easy had made him overconfident. She would handle that! He could not go elsewhere and hope to receive four thousand a year. She still held the whiphand.

"I think you should reconsider," Mrs. Winthrop said firmly.

"Shall we pray about it, Mother?" he asked.

"It's time to go now." A challenging fear gripped her. To concede to his wishes would be an expression of weakness. The situation was grave. She would have to depend upon him as much as he would her. His father needed him. His support was necessary for their material needs as a family.

Her fears redoubled. She could not afford to antagonize him. She would swallow her pride until she found the means to curb this independence, this headstrong attitude that had suddenly asserted itself.

“You don’t think that you want to go tonight?” She wavered, trying to appear indifferent. “You’ll find that you’ve made a mistake when you consider what it means.”

“We’ll pray about that, Mother—” .

“It’s time. I’ll have to go.”

“Then we’ll leave it with the Lord. I’m convinced that it is better to be in His will than to cater to public opinion,” he replied meekly. “In the future we’ll settle such matters by prayer.”

Mrs. Winthrop turned suddenly and left to attend the Literary Guild alone. She had been defeated in her attempt to control her stepson as she had controlled her stricken husband.

3. The Harvest Of Sin

REVEREND STEPHEN WINTHROP'S TROUBLED THOUGHTS were interrupted by the sudden ringing of the telephone. He acknowledged the call and discovered that the duty of interviewing Captain Vanderjack awaited him at police headquarters.

Twenty minutes later, Lieutenant Nelson ushered him into the captain's office.

"Come right in. I'm glad you found it convenient to drop around so soon. Hardly expected to locate you this time of night. It's about this Virginia Thyme case," said the captain. "We've discovered new evidence which I think will bear out your contention that this fellow Dick Overmire is as unreliable as you seem to think he is. It's too bad we can't send him to jail in her place."

"I never did believe that she was guilty of the charges placed against her," Reverend Winthrop replied gravely.

"Yes, I know; you've insisted all along that she's innocent." Captain Vanderjack smiled. "I thought that you were being carried away by Christian sympathy, but I'm happy to inform you that the facts prove your faith to have been well founded."

"The damage has been done. It's hard to overcome the curse of vicious gossip," Steve commented solemnly. "I feel sorry for him."

"I thought your sympathy was with the girl."

"It is. She is a victim of circumstances." This young minister was thoughtful. "It's too bad that there isn't some way to prevent innocent girls from falling into the clutches of men like Overmire."

"It's part of the game of life."

"But there are too many who find it difficult to compete with the obstacles confronting them without getting into trouble," said the pastor. "I am interested in some means of prevention."

"The responsibility in this case lies at the doors of the churches of the community." Captain Vanderjack studied his companion gravely. "It's un-

fortunate, but I fail to see how you can place the blame elsewhere.”

“What are the facts?”

“The policewoman is coming in with the victim. We’ll talk the matter over when they arrive,” said the captain. “From what Miss Dunn tells me, it’s a very interesting story.”

“You are fortunate to have a gifted policewoman like Miss Dunn.”

“We’ll have to give her the credit for uncovering the evidence,” the veteran in law enforcement replied. “Miss. Thyme has a right to feel grateful for her refusal to accept Overmire at face value.”

“From what I’ve been able to learn, I think all of us should feel grateful,” Steve added. “And Overmire’s following included my stepmother.”

“I’m surprised. I doubt if he’d rate very high with your father,” Captain Vanderjack interrupted. “By the way, how is your father? I think he enjoyed slipping over here and sharing his troubles with us. I always appreciated his humble philosophy. We miss him.”

“Father learned a great many lessons in life from his contacts here——”

“——to which your stepmother always objected, so I’m told.”

There was a knowing twinkle in Captain Vanderjack’s eye.

“And this one in particular—Miss Thyme—is out as far as she is concerned,” said Steve, “yet divine guidance is her most important need.”

“You are absolutely right; that’s why I called you tonight.

We policemen have no cure,” Captain Vanderjack explained. “I mentioned a while ago that the responsibility lies with the churches. This case is certainly right in point with the idea. Your father understood where the fault lay, yet for some reason didn’t dare to do anything about it. I have heard him lament a good many times that we were letting the young people of the community go to hell because of the failure of the church to act.”

There was a moment of tense silence while he studied the effect of his remarks upon the young minister.

“Look at the records,” he said, turning to a file on his desk. “Five cases this month. What are you ministers going to do about it? It isn’t a police problem; I just told you that we have no cure. Something must be done.”

“I quite agree with you——”

“I tell you, Winthrop,” he continued, “something has to be done. This young generation is drifting—getting away from God—on their way to hell—and there’s no one to blame for it but their parents and the church people.”

“Incredible. I’m deeply interested—”

“—interested in talking about it, yes,” he interrupted fervently. “Everybody is interested in talking about it. That’s just the point. Everybody talks but no one wants to take the responsibility of doing anything else. I tell you, the Christian people of this generation are asleep. Why don’t you get busy and wake up and act?”

“I—” Steve was at a loss for words. Captain Vanderjack was preaching the same kind of sermon that he wanted to preach in his church.

“Look here,” the captain continued, pulling a card from the file, “this is just one out of a hundred and forty-three this past year who traveled the road to ruin. There were a lot of promises here for God, but the devil got the bargain. Why did they leave church and Sunday school and go to the playgrounds of sin? Certainly somebody has the answer, but it isn’t the policeman.”

“Do you think Christianity has failed mankind?” Steve was eager to have him continue.

“No, Christianity hasn’t failed mankind, but mankind has failed Christ. Look at this group. Ages run from thirteen to thirty. Everyone of them used to be in Sunday school. Everyone of them in trouble. One hundred and forty-three lost opportunities for God. Why? There’s just one answer according to our records.” The captain’s tone became milder as he paused for breath. “Reverend Winthrop,” he said, his voice tender with feeling, “nobody cared but the devil and the police until it was too late. That’s why they were here.”

“I know what you are driving at: no Sunday evening service or prayer meeting—”

“Listen, Winthrop, I didn’t call you down here to preach to you. You can do a much better job of preaching than I can.” Captain Vanderjack was emphatic. “You know what is wrong; no young people’s service in church, no evening service; no prayer meeting; nobody praying for the youth of the community. It’s usually too late to hold a prayer meeting after these kids are in jail.”

“You paint a dark picture, Captain,” the young minister said.; “And what’s the cause of crime? Sin. One involves the other. There’s no way that you can get away from it,” said the captain, rising to admit the policewoman.

Steve arose to acknowledge the introduction.

“This is Reverend Winthrop, Miss Dunn. I asked him to come down and talk the Thyme case over with you,” he said informally. “Reverend Winthrop is particularly interested in the background that led to her trouble.”

“Yes, indeed, I’m glad to know you,” she said, extending her hand. “Your father and I were great friends before he was stricken. He was deeply interested in the cause and effect of crime. I am sure our mutual understanding will be the same.”

“Sergeant Dunn is in charge of our woman’s division,” the captain explained. “She deals with a good many subjects in need of divine guidance.”

“That is true of all of them, isn’t it, Miss Dunn? Captain Vanderjack has been telling me about some of your police problems. I imagine you find your work here in the department rather depressing.” He admired the businesslike manner in which she accepted her responsibility.

“We meet all the complications of life in police work, it seems; but, frankly, I enjoy it,” she replied. “I suppose the captain has told you that our main difficulty is the lack of a cure.”

Captain Vanderjack reached for a card that lay face down on his desk. Turning to the policewoman, he asked suddenly, “How is Miss Thyme responding to our hospitality? Would you consider it wise to interview her in the office tonight?”

“I think so. The poor girl is in the depths of despair,” Sergeant Dunn replied. “A little sympathetic understanding will do her a world of good. She doesn’t know what it is all about or who to trust.”

Captain Vanderjack watched her leave to arrange details. “Just one of the many. I’m at a loss to know what to do to stem the tide,” he said sadly.

“Miss Thyme is twenty, isn’t she?”

Captain Vanderjack turned to the record. “Tomorrow is her twentieth birthday, and this fellow Overmire insists that we throw her in jail, but I’m not going to do it if I can help it—not on the evidence he presents, anyway.”

“God help us!”

“That’s the only answer, Winthrop. We must get back to God individually and as a nation, to the simple rules of divine love and respect for morality. The door of hell stands wide Open while you church people sit and sleep.”

“Captain Vanderjack—”

A murder call interrupted the discussion.

4. An Evil Mind

REVEREND WINTHROP was confused as he left the police building. The world was divided, one half not knowing how the other half lived, and the police were in the front-line trenches in the battle of right against wrong. The stories between the lines—the stories which never came to light in the newspapers—were even more shocking than the revealed tragedies. Steve's interview with Sergeant Dunn following Captain Vanderjack's departure haunted him. Virginia Thyme's state of hopeless despondency haunted him. Her life had been a struggle. There were complicating circumstances at every turn in the road. She had fought desperately to protect the good name that her parents had given her, but now the jail doors were swinging open to admit her.

In her search for employment she had met Dick Overmire. He wanted an attractive girl with natural initiative. By glowing promises he had led her to believe that she was the one and only girl for the job. She was "created for the position" the "opportunity of a lifetime." Too late she made the discovery that she was another victim of a licentious mind.

Cautiously, maliciously, craftily, he led her step by step through the process of becoming office assistant, the position she was to assume when he left for a larger field. The mystery of the circumstances intrigued her. Orders for the product they were handling rolled in without apparent effort. Overmire was brilliant. He knew all the answers to the problems of the business world and was training her to take his place at a handsome salary. Someday she would be independent and in a position to dictate terms. So she deluded herself.

She was too busy to ask questions concerning the background of the business which Overmire represented. Everything he said and did was so convincing that Virginia was ashamed to appear doubtful about anything that she did not understand. He wanted her to succeed, to find security.

He lent her his car for "business errands," and slowly but surely the web was woven about her. Little things happened that embarrassed her, things

that were not ethical according to the moral standards established by her training. Still, she did not doubt him. He always had a reasonable explanation. She accompanied him on an occasional dinner date in the interests of the company and was often at a loss to account for the lack of business enterprise that characterized the occasion.

Gradually his attentions became more personal, but she accepted them graciously. He was unmarried, and although the question of marriage did not concern her, the nature of her position would not prohibit the venture. There was only one thing upon which they did not agree. She had been trained as a child to attend Sunday school and church; he considered such activities a waste of time because they did not promote business.

However, when she insisted that she find a church home in keeping with a promise made to her mother when she had left the family fireside in another state, he readily consented to accompany her to a Sunday-evening service.

He called for her at seven-twenty, and ten minutes later they parked in front of the church which they had agreed to attend.

“The church isn’t open!” She explained, glancing at her watch.

A wicked smile lurked around the corners of his mouth.

Acting upon his suggestion that they attend the service of another church, they drove around town, but discovered that none of the prominent churches held a Sunday-evening service.

Consequently, he inveigled her into attending a movie in a neighboring city. There were tears of repentance upon her pillow, and she did not sleep that night. Memories of her mother and the home fireside haunted her. She was homesick, heartsick and lonesome for the inviting hospitality of her own church people.

The next Wednesday night Overmire telephoned Virginia’s rooming house and told her there was a matter he wished to discuss. She invited him to attend the prayer meeting. He reluctantly consented and said he would be “right over.” She waited past the usual hour before he drove up and offered the excuse that he had had tire trouble. It was too late to attend prayer meeting, but he promised that if she would accompany him for an auto ride, he would attend church the next Sunday morning.

It was this Sunday that she discovered that he was married. They attended a little country church several miles out of the city. Virginia noticed that during the service he was exceptionally uneasy and that he failed to in-

troduce her to several people who spoke to him as they were leaving. When she and Overmire were preparing to leave, a former schoolchum inquired about his second wife and their two children.

She was the last person he had expected to meet.

Virginia stood speechless while he suavely made an explanation to fit the occasion, an explanation that left the friend bewildered. Virginia too, was bewildered. He had deliberately deceived her for a purpose which she had failed to understand.

Now aware of his ulterior motives, she assured him that she would no longer permit his attentions. He tried desperately to play on her sympathy! He was seeking a divorce and would marry her! His love for her had led him to deceive her. She was the only woman in the world that he loved.

Finally he discussed her need for employment. Emphasizing the opportunity that she had in her present position, he agreed that if she would remain, he would not press his attentions further. She agreed to forgive and forget and remain in his employ.

There was a noticeable change in Overmire's demeanor. He treated her with the utmost respect until she was satisfied that he had been carried away in a moment of thoughtlessness to commit a transgression of which he had repented.

Then it happened. Virginia discovered that, instead of dealing with her personally, he had employed a third party to bring her under his power. This woman had feigned interest in Virginia and became her constant companion. Within a month they lived together. They exchanged clothing, jewelry and other personal effects as a matter of course. Her newfound friend insisted that Virginia wear her bracelet, her watch and a valuable diamond ring as gesture of good will.

Two weeks later, in need of money, she asked Virginia to have the ring appraised at a certain jewelry store for a loan. The jeweler identified the ring as stolen property and called the owner. When confronted with Virginia's story of how she came into possession of the ring and her reason for having it appraised, Virginia's erstwhile friend disclaimed all knowledge of the episode.

Overmire, posing as a friend in need, offered to negotiate a settlement out of court. He maintained that there were other articles taken which he had been holding in trust. He generously offered to advance money to cover the cost of these articles taken with the bracelet and ring in order to keep

Virginia out of jail. When she refused to concede to his terms, he became domineering and tried to force the issue by a threatened jail-sentence. Insisting upon her innocence, Virginia still refused to accept his offer, and chose to accept the disgrace as a thief rather than sell her honor for the price of freedom.

Stephen Winthrop could not erase the sordid picture from his mind. He was seized with a desire to help Virginia Thyme. He visualized a thousand Virginias who stood at the threshold of despair for the want of a true and loyal friend. He wanted to share their load of responsibility, to share their troubles, to tell them of God's love. His lips moved in prayer for the girl that he had just interviewed. He was determined to help her if he could.

How was he going to do it? He debated the question as he made his way up the front walk. There must be some way to prevent such acts of injustice. He walked around to the side door and stood with key in hand as he looked across the rear yard into the dense blackness that hid the shrubbery. He could understand Virginia's thoughts. Life to her was as dense and black as the night which he faced. There was no ray of hope. She was wandering in the wilderness of sin, the sin of others, which brought heartache and sorrow to her soul. Barriers blocked her road.

A feeling of pride possessed him. He admired her for the stand she had taken. She could not afford to turn aside. She was right. She would face death rather than submit to Dick Overmire's offer to help. He understood how in her fit of despondency she could welcome death, why she could not dispel the fear of its mystery, why eternity haunted her. God had a claim upon her life.

He found his way to his study. All he saw was uncertainty, uncertainty as Virginia saw it. He, too, was bound by circumstances. There were barriers in his road also, barriers that made him cry to God for wisdom and strength. He was bound outwardly by formalism to the traditions of the First Community Church. He was tied to the pulpit. He could neither help Virginia or himself until the shackles were broken. He could not express himself and still conform to his stepmother's ideas.

A step on the threshold disturbed him.

"What is it, Mother?" he asked turning to address her.

"What is it"! As if you didn't know! You couldn't go to the Guild meeting with Jewell and I," she stormed critically. "Yes, I know all about it. Your gutter tramp is taken care of, so Sergeant Dunn advised by telephone a

few minutes ago. Mrs. Brown has very graciously agreed to keep her a few days. I suppose she is tucked in bed by this time.”

Steve realized that there were times when explanations only kindled the flame of his stepmother’s resentment. Therefore he chose to say nothing.

His silence infuriated her. “Just like your father. He wanted to reform the world until I put my foot down.” She faced him. “Just like your father. Sorry for every outcast and gutter tramp that the world throws in the discard.”

“But, Mother, if you saw her—”

“I don’t want to see her,” she retorted indignantly. “Just like your father—always wanted to adopt all the trash that the police dragged in. Now you—you want to disgrace the name of Winthrop.”

“Virginia Thyme isn’t trash. She’s unfortunate, helpless, in need of a friend. She——”

“Oh, Virginia, that—that. She——”

“Virginia is one of God’s ninety and nine, Mother. Tragedy came into her life——”

“People usually get in jail because they belong there. A fine how-do-you-do, the pastor of the First Community Church hobnobbing around with a jailbird!” Her eyes were set in a stony stare. “Stephen,” she said, “I won’t have it! You may as well understand——”

“Virginia Thyme isn’t a jailbird. She doesn’t belong in jail. She’s not going there if I can help it.”

“Ha”——she cut him short——“if you can help it! So she’s just dodging jail. Pray tell me, why should you become so interested in keeping her out?”

“Because she doesn’t belong there. She has done nothing for which she should be locked up,” he explained patiently. “Dick Overmire——”

“That’s enough. Jewell was telling me tonight about Overmire’s article in the paper, charging some girl with the theft of jewelry.” Indignant Janet Winthrop rose to her full five feet five. “That’s enough. It’s funny they should suspend the chief of detectives over the matter if this Virginia you are so taken up with is pure and innocent.”

“The chief of detectives accepted a bribe from one of Overmire’s friends in promoting the scheme to have Virginia released from charges which were unfounded in fact but alleged to be true in principle according to Overmire.”

“Anyone mixed up with a man like Overmire should suffer the consequences,” she flared. “I’m still of the opinion that the place to reform her is in jail.”

“If she goes to jail it will be because the First Community Church wills it to be so.”

“The First Community Church?” Her mouth opened awkwardly.

“Yes, the First Community Church. Virginia was given the cold shoulder when she tried to attend services there. No one spoke to her. She was turned from the church door as an outcast, and no one cared who she was or where she came from,” he complained bitterly. “She has no friends here. You don’t want her. The First Community Church doesn’t want her. No one there cared enough about her soul to give her a cup of cold water in Jesus’ Name.”

“What do you expect anyone to do?”

“Pray for her,” he said simply. “Have enough concern for her soul to bring her back into fellowship with the Lord.”

“It’s not wise to obstruct justice,” Mrs. Winthrop replied artfully.

5. The Test Of Character

STEVE COULD FIND COMFORT only in prayer. the world outlook was dark. No one had the answer that he wanted.

Men were unable to solve the problems that confronted him. He was burdened with a desire to help Virginia Thyme, an earnest desire that would not permit him to dismiss her from his mind.

He had just talked with Captain Vanderjack. Dick Overmire insisted upon securing a warrant for Virginia Thyme's arrest. He was determined to have a showdown. If he could not get action from the police, he intended to consult the prosecuting attorney. The police were trifling with his rights as a citizen; the cold, mechanical hand of justice must take its toll. Ignorance of the law excused no one. This girl must pay the price. He was going to make certain that she did not escape.

There was no hope on Virginia Thyme's horizon. "Steve reflected upon the wasted sermon that he had preached in her behalf on Sunday. The sermon had not been graciously accepted. Fiery coals of indignation were heaped upon his head by his stepmother and opposing members in the church. He could not face the load of opposition. There was no place to turn. He could only pray.

Steve went to his study. God would supply the comfort that he needed for his troubled heart.

"Here is an outline which you can use in preparing your next sermon," Mrs. Winthrop suggested from the doorway. "We don't want a repetition of what occurred last Sunday."

Steve took the proffered notes without attempting to reply.

"Christ the Carpenter"—he read the title which she suggested, the text of which was found in Mark 6:3.

"You should be able to draw evidence of Christ's loyalty to labor from the preceding verse," she advised.

He followed her notes thoughtfully. A question clouded his brow.

“From whence hath this man these things? and what wisdom is this which is given unto him, that even such mighty works are wrought by his hands?” he read.

She studied his face carefully to discern his reaction.

“How does this apply?” he asked.

“Labor is in accord with the idea that Christ is the perfect model of conduct, the model which we are to follow if we would reach perfection. You can exalt His ability as a great Man of the craft, the One that labor should follow as the perfect pattern.”

He was moved with a deep spirit of humility. “I shall exalt Jesus Christ only as Saviour of the soul, Mother,” he said.

“The modern mind takes a broader view. It’s unwise to narrow a sermon down to only one point,” she replied.

“Eternal salvation is that one vital point,” he emphasized. “That’s the need of the hour in this day and age. In fact, it has been the need of every age. Nothing supersedes it; past, present or future.” There was a new light in his eyes— a light that she had never seen.

“One can be too narrow in emphasizing the life of Christ,” she pointed out. “As a carpenter—”

He hastened to interrupt. “The critics in the sixth chapter of Mark were questioning Christ’s miraculous power, weren’t they?” he asked seriously.

“They recognized Christ as a carpenter, a laboring man, a leader with great ability,” she outlined. “Naturally they didn’t agree with Him in all things—a fact that you can emphasize. There are possibilities for an appealing sermon to labor if you handle the text tactfully.”

“But, Mother, I don’t feel led of the Lord to use the text. It doesn’t exalt Christ in the proper light,” he protested.

“You have the wishes of the deacons to consider. An appeal to labor—”

“Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you,” he quoted effectively.

“Take no thought of where your salary comes from,” came the sarcastic reply. “You can’t afford to oppose the wishes of labor—of those in the church to whom we must look for our daily needs.”

“I’m going to preach the unsearchable riches of Christ—”

“In opposition—”

“If the Lord directs, yes. I can’t deny my Lord.”

“Stephen,” she pleaded, “do you realize what that means? A church split; discord; loss of prestige. Please consider.”

“If they understood God’s love—”

“Your reputation,” she continued, “—think what it means. You’ll be ruined as a young preacher. You don’t appreciate the opportunity that you have here. You can’t afford to defy the wishes of your congregation.”

“I can’t deny my Lord, Mother. The world is dying. People are dying without Christ. They have no other hope,” he lamented. “It’s my responsibility. I must preach Christ to a dying world.”

“Steve—”

“The field is already white unto the harvest.”

“You can at least be modest in your convictions.” She tried to convince him of the sincerity of her appeal. “I know the congregation—the heritage of First Community Church. I’ll help you with your sermons as I helped your father. Can’t you see that your reputation, your whole future, is at stake?”

“Thanks, Mother. I appreciate your good will. But I—I cannot. Don’t you see it, Mother. I—I don’t want to say it, but liberalism—” His seriousness troubled her. “Don’t you see that my responsibility lies with the Lord?”

“You mean that you’d give up the opportunity and the salary here at the First Community Church?”

“Rather than deny my Lord, yes.”

“You’d desert me, your father’s reputation and the testimony that he left as a monument to the name of Winthrop?” A plea was in her eyes.

He did not answer.

“Appreciation?”

There was a cutting question in her eyes. It made him uncomfortable. He was facing the test of character that was to chart the course of his future.

“Think it over, son,” she said, and went down the hall.

The young minister bowed in a moment of prayer. Then he reached into the top drawer and selected a key. He picked up his father’s Bible and walked to the opposite side of the room.

“Yes,” he said, looking up at a painting of his father, “you wanted to break the Laodicean yoke of bondage that tied you to the First Community Church. I, too, am at the same crossroads. I can only look to my Lord in prayer.”

The door closed softly behind Steve as he went out. The weight of responsibility rested heavily upon his young shoulders. He wanted to be alone, to commune with God and lay the burden of his heart before Him.

A thousand stars twinkled in a peaceful sky and lighted his pathway. He approached the First Community Church outlined in the moonlight. Her white spire was like a sentinel, a sentinel guarding the glory of God.

“What mockery!” he said aloud. “Oh, that your garments were as spotless as they appear!”

He took the key from his pocket and entered the side door. The spotless white of the interior was even more pronounced.

I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot... Anoint thine eye: with eye salve, that thou mayest see. The words came to him with strange power.

Melancholy settled upon him. He wanted to pray, but he could not.

He walked down the aisle between the empty rows of seats and approached the altar. Stepping between the pulpits on either side, he stood before the communion table and looked up into the darkened recess above the baptistry. The silence of death surrounded him. A painting of Christ hung in its accustomed place.

“Thou art behind the veil, O Lord,” he said and his heart was heavy. “Thy presence here is not felt, Thy way is unknown, Thy glory absent. Thy presence is so dim to the eye, belief so dim in the minds of those that assemble here. Would to God that they might see Thee as Thou art, that Thou might be unveiled to their hearts!”

Silence reigned as he stood in thought.

“Forgive them, Lord,” he said reverently. “Forgive them who deny Thee.”

6. Callouses Of Indifference

THE FOLLOWING WEDNESDAY EVENING Reverend Winthrop gave a heart-searching message that bore no evidence of his stepmother's blue pencil. Deacon Stillwater sat on a front seat with his hand cupped to his ear. A frown of disapproval betrayed his thoughts as he nervously rustled a printed bulletin announcing a series of sermons that the pastor proposed to preach.

No one misunderstood the pastor. His convictions were clear, his doctrine sound and true to the Gospel of Christ. Deacon Stillwater knew the import of Reverend Winthrop's well-chosen remarks as he announced the title of his address: "The Task at Hand." He sensed chastisement in the text. The deacon was moved as he had never been moved before. The pastor's clear firm voice cut through hardened callouses of indifference. God was talking to him and he rebelled.

"The—the—the young upstart." His lips were tense. "The young upstart. Should have kept him in the Army," he mumbled, enraged.

Deacon Stillwater saw a red flag in the text. He was indignant and defiant. Reverend Winthrop had chosen this text especially for him. No man, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, it fit for the kingdom of God. The words burned in his soul. He understood the application. He was a retired farmer and his money supplied all the comforts of life. He had been satisfied, content, happy, until this young upstart had built a fire under him. "Choose this day whom you will serve. Is it God or mammon? You make the choice by your acts in faith. I am the Lord, I change not. Do you believe Him?"

"Today's Christ, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning, is tomorrow's Christ. You cannot change Him, but He can change you." Stephen's voice was rich and strong.

Deacon Stillwater cleared his throat and started to rise.

The long, bony fingers of Deacon Arbutt, who sat in the second row, arrested Stillwater's attention. "Sit down, Silas," he whispered, tapping him on the shoulder.

Deacon Stillwater turned and glared at his colleague.

“Take it easy, Deacon,” an oily voice consoled him.

Stillwater settled back into his seat and relaxed.

“For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the month confection is made unto salvation,” Reverend Winthrop continued. “The task at hand is to confess Christ in our living.”

“Upstart!” Deacon Stillwater sputtered weakly and sank still lower into his seat. He was determined not to agree with anything the young pastor said.

Reverend Winthrop sensed the opposition lurking behind pious indifference to the Word of God. Less than a third of those facing him were at ease, and of that number, only three were in agreement with his message.

The young minister was breaking the cobwebs of complacency that had been spun by the conscience of the church a membership. The devil was active that night. Reverend Winthrop knew this, and was determined to give no quarter. Many pastors were trying to serve God and adhere to the wishes of a liberal congregation. He knew that this meant spiritual defeat. Empty churches through the land were a testimony to that fact. He could not condone the modern theology that contributed to this condition.

The young pastor outlined the task at hand. Everyone present knew exactly where he stood when he closed the meeting and asked Deacon Stillwater to offer the closing prayer.

The deacon arose in surprised alarm. He was in no mood for prayer.

The congregation rose and waited.

Deacon Stillwater began weakly when the silence became unbearable. “We—we—we are here in Thy house, Lord. We—we—we love Thy house, Lord. We—we love Thy tabernacle and Thy commandments. We love Thy Name. We—we—we want Thy Name glorified. We—w-e thank Thee for Thy blessings. We—we—we—we are Thy servants, Lord. Amen.”

Steve continued in prayer and poured out his heart in a petition for divine guidance in directing each member to follow the will of the Lord in the task at hand, the task of serving Him in the spirit of truth, exalting Jesus Christ as, personal Saviour.

“Not quite as perk with your prayer tonight, Deacon,” said the senior pillar of the church, Tracy Arbutt, falling in step with his indignant colleague as they left the church.

Deacon Stillwater cleared his throat again. “We’ve got to get rid of that young upstart. Maybe I ain’t fit yet for the kingdom of God. Maybe I ain’t fit; but the likes of his, preaching ain’t a-goin’ to help none.”

“Kind-a helped start yer blood a-bilin’, didn’t it, Deacon?” Tracy remarked.

“Task at hand, bah! The task at hand is to get rid of him,” Silas barked as they made their way to a large maple in the parking lot where they usually held council of war.

“The Lord cleared the Temple of undesirables, didn’t he, Silas?” Tracy prompted, looking up between the branches of the spreading maple and glo-rying in the opportunity to start another church fight.

“That upstart,” Deacon Silas fumed. “He’s got to go. Do you hear me? He’s got to go!”

“Action means more than words, Silas.”

“Action. I’ll action that upstart. He—he’ll think the whole First Community Church fell on him. I’ll—”

“Something like the atomic bomb, Silas?”

“I’ll get rid of him m-my-myself. I won’t listen to him. I won’t—” Deacon Stillwater chewed his words. “That upstart!”

Deacon Tracy Arbutt smiled a broad smile of satisfaction. “Think you’ll need any help, Silas?”

“He—he’s got to go—”

“How, Silas?”

His colleague’s question challenged him. He had been blowing off steam, wasting power, but had no plan in mind.

“Pictures are powerful.” Tracy dropped the remark casually. “Just wondered if you thought they were good in an argument.”

“Pictures?” Deacon Stillwater’s face was blank.

“My son Webster—”

“Yes, I know. He’s a troubleshooter that takes action pictures for the Press, isn’t he?” Deacon Stillwater was curious. “He must be on the job day and night.”

“He’s always around with his camera when there’s any news. Thought you might have an idea.” The senior deacon had a twinkle in his eyes.

The conversation became inaudible as the two men faced each other and conversed for several minutes.

“Putting it that way it might be all right. I never did anything crooked in my life.” Deacon Stillwater was cagey. “I want to be sure that there’s no reflection.”

“Pictures speak for themselves, don’t they? Preachers never like questionable publicity, do they? No one can blame you for something that you are not responsible for, can they?” Tracy questioned cautiously. “All you need to do is to ask questions. That’s a deacon’s prerogative, a deacon’s moral duty, isn’t it, Silas?”

Tracy warmed to the plan. “You have the right to ask questions if this young ‘upstart’ as you call him, finds himself in an entanglement of complicating circumstances.”

“As long as there isn’t any foul play.”

“Now, Silas, it’s just the question of accepting an invitation, isn’t it?” Deacon Tracy Arbutt put on his best Sunday meeting air of hurt pride. “It’s just a suggestion. You probably have a better plan to invite our church congregation’s attention to the questionable character of their pastor.”

“I don’t suppose it’ll be my fault.”

“Certainly not. He’s twenty-one, isn’t he? He has a right to accept any invitation that he sees fit,” Tracy quickly explained.

“But suppose he doesn’t accept?”

“In that event, no one would question his moral worth, would they, Silas?”

“But if he does?”

“The weakness of sinful flesh.” Tracy smiled suavely. “As a pastor, he’ll have a lot of questions to answer.”

Deacon Arbutt disappeared swiftly into the shadows of the night.

7. Walking Into A Trap

THE MIDWEEK PRAYER MEETING having disbanded, the congregation formed groups of two's and three's. It was evident that Reverend Winthrop's discourse had stirred up a hornet's nest of conflicting opinions. No two groups were in agreement.

While deacons Arbutt and Stillwater were carrying on their private conference under the maple in the church parking lot, others members of the flock were drawing their own distorted conclusions. Two saintly old ladies, who had been faithful to the Lord for many years, agreed with the pastor. They were in hearty accord with him in the recommendation that the church form a united front in expounding the unsearchable riches of Christ. There was no question of their loyalty to the pastor and to the old-time religion that convicted men of personal sin. Saving souls was the task of the First Community Church.

A report of the meeting had preceded Steve via telephone, and Janet Winthrop was waiting to upbraid him for not discussing with her the type of meeting he proposed to conduct.

"Well, I suppose you're satisfied now." She greeted him at the door. "You certainly managed to engineer a fine state of affairs."

"In what way?"

"By insulting Deacon Stillwater."

"I'm sorry, Mother. I don't understand."

"You knew that no one approved of your message tonight." Her eyes were hard and cold. "You can't expect to insult people and maintain church harmony."

"No one should take offense at the Word of God," he replied tactfully, "Deacon Stillwater—"

"—is not fit for the kingdom of God." She added the thought that contributed to the argument.

"You mean that Deacon Stillwater took personal exception to the text I used?" Steve was grieved by the thought.

“Everyone took exception to the application of the text.” Her tone became somewhat milder as she laid her purse aside and removed her hat. “I certainly do not approve of such veiled criticism. You owe Deacon Stillwater an apology.”

“Deacon Stillwater—”

“—is influential. His rights must be respected. You knew that he’s a retired farmer and exceptionally sensitive to ridicule. We can’t afford to lose his support.”

“Evidently the shoe fits, Mother.”

“Stephen! Never dare to breathe such a remark again.” She rebuked him. “You have no right to judge.”

“I’m perfectly willing to leave the matter in the hands of the Lord,” he replied, suppressing a smile. “Deacon Stillwater must answer for his own sins.”

“Stephen! Calling one of your deacons a sinner—what do you mean?” Her voice was shrill. “You told Deacon Stillwater that he was not fit for the kingdom of God.”

“I’m afraid the deacon is kicking against the pricks in God’s Word, isn’t he?” the young minister replied mildly. “I’ll include him on my prayer list.”

His stepmother threw up her hands in alarm. “That would only add insult to injury. Deacon Stillwater has to be handled very, very tactfully. He already resents being singled out as the laughing stock of the church—as not being fit for the kingdom of God.” She pleaded for recognition.

“I’ll have a talk with the deacon if you think it’s that important.”

“No, I’ll see Deacon Stillwater myself.” She surveyed her stepson indignantly. “I’ll see him and apologize. We can’t afford to take a chance on a split in the church. You can’t offend the best givers in your congregation and succeed as a pastor.”

“Which means that one shouldn’t preach the Word of God?”

“The successful pastor is diplomatic.”

“Though he neglects the opportunity to preach the unsearchable riches of Christ?”

“There are times—”

“Yes, I understand.” Steve quoted meekly, “The word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a

discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. Even Deacon Stillwater's heart," he added solemnly.

Janet Winthrop surveyed herself in the hall mirror. "Those are the kind of remarks that make discord. I can understand now why Phoebe Ward was so wrought up when she called on the telephone. You—"

"Now, Mother—"

"Don't 'Mother' me. You don't respect anything I do or say or think. You're determined to stir up trouble among the members." Her voice became a wail. "You have no respect for your poor old father lying at death's door. You don't respect anyone but yourself. What do you expect is going to happen to the church now that you've told the members they aren't fit for the kingdom of God? You could have avoided this if you'd permitted me to check your sermons. But, no, you wouldn't listen to reason. Now everything has gone wrong. Discord, factions, a church split—all because you wouldn't listen to me." She paused to catch her breath.

Steve placed his hand on her shoulder and waited until her eyes met his. "Listen, Mother," he said pleadingly, "there was no reason for Deacon Stillwater or any other member at the meeting tonight to take offense at anything that I said. You know what's wrong with the congregation at First Community Church: there are too many members out of tune with God. Naturally, they're resentful. They resent me because they resent God's Word. Two-thirds of the church membership drift with the current of public opinion. It takes the courage of conviction to row upstream and exalt the Lord Jesus Christ. The way of least resistance is to live as the world lives. Naturally, they rebel against the Scripture declaration that convicts them of sin."

"But your salary. You have to consider—"

"Yes, Mother, I know how important it is. In the light of father's condition it would be inhuman to discount the value of money." He sensed what she wanted to say. "I'll certainly do everything in my power that is best for God and our family."

"Will you promise me one thing?" There was fear in her eyes. "You must promise that you won't desert your father and me in this critical hour. What will we do? We have no place to turn. We are at your mercy; you must promise—"

"I won't desert you—"

“Will you promise to let me suggest the type of sermon that will meet the approval of our congregation? You’ll promise, won’t you?” she urged.

“Will you pray the matter through with me?” he asked. “I’ll agree to any terms acceptable to the Lord.”

“Steve, you don’t understand—”

“Then we’re both safe in leaving the matter with the Lord, aren’t we?”

Stephen Winthrop, his heart heavy, retired to his father’s study. It was the only retreat he knew wherein he could find comfort, but tonight discouragement kept his mind in a turmoil. He could not think. He was in the depths of despair. He had come to another hour of testing. What did God want him to do? He faced a new obstacle at every turn in the road. How could he do anything and face the opposition that confronted him?

An hour slipped by. His stepmother retired. The grandfather clock in the hall solemnly announced the midnight hour. Only the slight, rustle of paper disturbed the quietness as Steve turned the leaves of his father’s Bible.

A step on the walk outside directed his attention. He rose and looked out into the night. A faint tinkle of the doorbell called him into the front hall. Hurrying footsteps indicated a hasty retreat. He swung the door open and stepped out upon the porch, but there was no one in sight.

He turned and examined the mail box thinking he might find a note. Finding none, he again surveyed the yard, returned inside and closed the door. Someone could have been checking street numbers and, finding that he was in the wrong block, hurried on. The thought seemed sufficiently plausible for Steve to dismiss the subject. He glanced at the hall clock as the hour struck two.

Suddenly the telephone rang vigorously.

Stephen hurriedly stepped from the hall, closed the door and lifted the receiver, a safeguard against disturbing the entire household.

“Reverend Winthrop?” a feminine voice asked cautiously.

“Yes.”

“Reverend Stephen Winthrop of First Community Church?” the inquirer repeated nervously.

“This is Reverend Stephen Winthrop speaking.”

“Then you know Virginia Thyme?”

“I’ve met Miss Thyme.”

“Listen, this is a matter of life and death. Come to Thirteenth and High Streets, southeast corner. The house with the stone porch, the first door on

High, upstairs.” The voice was tense with excitement.

“What’s happened?” he asked seriously.

“They want a pastor here. They told me to call you. They said that you knew Virginia—that you’d come. It’s urgent. Please hurry.”

Steve detected a stifled sob. “Who is this calling? Is Virginia Thyme there? Can I talk to her?”

“She’s going to die—” Someone was crying. Then Steve heard faintly, “He doesn’t want to come.”

“Hello.” He repeated into the mouthpiece.

There were voices at the other end of the wire. “Does Sergeant Dunn want some other pastor?” He could hear someone discussing the question.

“Hello, is the policewoman there? Let me talk to her. I’ll com—”

“Thank you, Mr. Preacher. I’ll tell her you’ll drive right over. She’ll meet you out in front.”

“I’ll come at Sergeant Dunn’s request.”

“All right, I’ll tell her. Thank you. Please hurry.”

Steve, hung onto the receiver in a daze following the strange conversation. Virginia Thyme dying? What had happened? Had she attempted suicide? He could think of no other reason for her illness.

Who had placed the call? The mystery intrigued him. Cautiously he lifted the receiver again and asked for Captain Vanderjack’s office. He was out of the city. Steve tried to reach Sergeant Dunn, but she was out on an urgent call and could not be contacted. He replaced the receiver and reached for his hat.

As he stepped to the door the thought occurred that he should notify his stepmother of the call, but he decided against disturbing the household. He would be gone only an hour and could phone if necessary.

He returned to the study and wrote a hasty note telling that he had been called for an urgent conference with Sergeant Dunn. That would suffice should his stepmother discover his absence.

Satisfied that he had done all within his power to cover the situation, he slipped out the side door, started his car, backed out of the side drive and drove away.

Twenty minutes later he parked in front of the old post office. He surveyed the street as he walked across the highway. There was no one in sight, but as he neared the opposite corner, he discovered that someone was waiting on the stone porch.

He hurried up the steps to find that the girl he had seen was just disappearing through the door which he had been instructed to enter. Sergeant Dunn was not waiting as he had expected. The girl no doubt had gone to call her to identify him. He waited a moment in front of the door and tried to decide if he should enter unannounced. Suddenly he heard voices. Someone was coming!

The door swung wide. A girl in a red lounging robe appeared. Steve stepped back, startled by her sudden appearance. She rushed forward, and threw her arms about his neck. He grasped her to prevent her from falling.

“You came.” She sighed, then apparently lost consciousness.

Stephen, dumbfounded, looked into the wide hall.

A flash bulb was blindingly bright. The click of a camera told the story. He had been led into a trap!

Steve backed away trying to free himself from his burden. A man appeared in the doorway. There was another flash and the click of the second camera. A car drove to the curb and lingered long enough for the occupants to observe the scene and then drive on.

“Nice preacher,” said the girl in red, kissing him vigorously on the cheek.

“You—” Steve said in bewildered surprise.

She slipped from his arms and disappeared into the opening behind her male companion. The door closed. The lock clicked. Steve heard the chuckle of victorious satisfaction. He was defeated. He knew that the occupants behind the door were watching and gloating over his misfortune.

A wave of indignation swept over Steve. His first impulse was to insist upon admittance and demand an explanation, but he thought better of the idea when he realized that he was alone and in enemy territory. He had no defense. It was his word against two others, perhaps more, he did not know. He was hopelessly outnumbered and could accomplish nothing by an argument. His enemies had outgeneraled him and the best he could do was to fortify himself before committing some rash act. He glanced about him. The clock in the tower of the old post office reminded him that it would be three o’clock before he could hope to reach home. He hesitated a moment to survey the scene and analyze the situation before entering his car. The entire episode was a deep, dark mystery. No crime had been committed. No one had attempted to rob him. He had not been assaulted except for the kiss on the cheek. Blackmail! The thought flashed through his troubled mind. How

could he defend himself? He rubbed his hand over the spot that still burned on his cheek. His entire being was aflame with indignation.

8. Unseen Enemies

JANET WINTHROP, fire in her eyes was waiting for her stepson to return. She had awakened to find many things to disturb her, unreasonable things that could not be explained, things which in her opinion had no place in the life of a preacher. Quite obviously, her stepson was not an exception. The facts were clear as far as she was concerned and should be dealt with defiantly.

Mrs. Winthrop was in a mood to demand attention. Steve readily conceded that fact when he turned into the side drive and discovered the house ablaze with light from attic to basement. He knew the thing he feared most had occurred: his absence had been discovered and his stepmother was waiting for a showdown.

“Nice little white lie for a preacher.” Janet stepped through the door brandishing the note he had written. “A nice state of affairs, I must say.”

Steve walked past her and waited until she entered and closed the door. “You don’t need to explain, I hate deceit.”

“So do I, Mother.”

“You didn’t see Sergeant Dunn tonight.” She waved the note threateningly. “You made no attempt to see her. I just talked to her. I know.” She shoved the note in his face. “I don’t want to listen.”

He knew that her one objective was to listen, that she was watching eagerly for the first remark that she could criticize. He turned to her with a smile. “Please let me explain,” he pleaded.

“I fail to see the joke,” she retorted.

“Will you let me explain—” Something in her expression stopped him. She had discovered on his right cheek the telltale evidence of ruby lips.

“I’m serious, Mother.”

“Who is she? Why this hour of the night? You look serious. I know it’s needless to ask. That hussy Virginia Thyme again. Don’t lie to me. Look in the glass.”

Steve's only advantage was to play for time. He knew his stepmother. She would be repentant as soon as she learned the true facts. He faced her with a smile.

"Well—"

"The call concerned Virginia."

"Called to advertise a special brand of lipstick, I suppose," his stepmother taunted.

"I doubt if Virginia uses lipstick. At any rate, I didn't see her tonight," he replied emphatically.

"I suppose Shirley Mason is back in town then." Janet was fishing for information.

"No, Mother, Jewell Lombard is the only painted lady in my circle of friends." He smiled.

"Jewell Lombard?" she questioned. "I don't understand. This note—why the deception about meeting Sergeant Dunn?"

Steve launched into a breathless explanation of the mysterious telephone request and his experiences of the evening. Whenever Janet attempted to interrupt, he silenced her with uplifted hand, and insisted upon speaking until she had grasped his meaning.

"That doesn't explain why you went down into the tenderloin district alone at three o'clock in the morning," she challenged.

"To serve humanity—"

"Who's going to believe such a story?" she questioned. "It certainly will take a lot to live it down in this community."

"I shall look to the Lord for strength."

"You're fighting unseen enemies, someone who—"

"I wish I knew, Mother." He tried to console her. "I'm sure that God has a definite purpose in permitting circumstances even as dark as these." He hesitated a moment. "God knows that I acted in sincerity of purpose and in good faith. I'm innocent of any evil intent or wrongdoing."

"I believe you, Steve. I want to believe in you, but your weakness of judgment in so, so many things—I can't forgive you for that." Her voice broke. "If you'd only listen to me. I want to help you, but you won't let me."

"Things happen that we can't explain—"

"But you could listen," she was quick to remind him. "No one knows what may happen now."

“Someone does. There’s a motive,” he replied. “We can only await developments.”

“If it was Jewell,” she said absently, studying the scarlet marks on his cheek, “perhaps it would be best to say nothing about it.”

“I had already decided to keep the matter a secret and wait until we find out where the enemy is quartered. That’s the old army strategy. Don’t expose yourself until you have to.” Stephen studied his reflection in the glass and grinned grimly.

The thump of a walking cane on the upper floor summoned Mrs. Winthrop. She was wanted at her husband’s bedside. “I’m sorry, son,” she said in parting. “Your father—I sometimes wonder why God permits all these afflictions.” A vigorous thumping of the cane called a weary and confused woman to the bedside of one stricken as ordained of God.

9. The Invisible Hand

THE INVISIBLE HAND moved mysteriously among the members of First Community Church and struck Reverend Stephen Winthrop. The blow was meant solely for him, but it struck deeply into the inner circle of the church membership, though he would have preferred to suffer alone.

The deed was done. The invisible hand could not recall the blow intended to injure Winthrop. The hand had struck in the dark. No one saw it; no one heard it. The evidence appeared surreptitiously: a picture lying face upward in the path of Amelia Decker. She was on her way to church, and the path led through a vacant lot, a short-cut which Amelia, with her Bible under one arm and her lavender and red parasol dangling from a braided loop, took every Sunday morning. Finding the picture, she immediately recognized Reverend Winthrop. A strange girl was in his arms! Amelia gasped. It was a shocking picture. She was stunned almost to the point of speechlessness, but her tongue was an organ which never failed to function in sympathetic cooperation with her troubled conscience—and Amelia was troubled. The episode had an alarming effect upon her memories of the past, memories which she had attempted to drown in faithfulness to her church obligations.

Truthful to the letter of the law, Amelia was rigidly conscientious externally. She would not maliciously harm anyone, but she was shocked by this picture of a strange girl in the arms of her pastor.

The picture was sufficient evidence of sin, and Amelia Decker's imagination was active. Horror of horrors, this girl rested comfortably in the arms of her own pastor! Both were in disgrace. Her pastor! Amelia Decker couldn't believe it, but she had to believe what she saw. How could Reverend Winthrop have become a party to such a disgraceful pose? Such conditions must be corrected. She had discovered a scandal. The evidence was in her hand. She was duty bound to act, but her tongue was her only weapon.

Consequently, the picture passed from hand to hand amid a buzz of gossip. The story concerning the picture grew as the circulation of the photo increased.

“Don’t tell a soul, but the pastor has a new girl friend,” said an eager voice.

“Who is she?” asked another.

“Didn’t you see the picture?” a third hushed voice added.

“Oh, it’s the pastor, all right; looks just like him. I never would have believed it if I hadn’t seen it with my own eyes. I wonder what his mother will say?” a voice of authority asked.

“You mean his stepmother. I bet she’s furious.”

“When she gets her hair down, she’ll run him in the doghouse just like she did her husband before he was paralyzed.” The speaker chuckled.

“No doubt about that. I’d like to be a mouse in the corner listening to the postmortem when she finds out!”

“You mean she doesn’t know?” a shrill voice exclaimed.

“She acts rather queer, don’t you think? She knows more than she lets on.” A new volunteer added her comment.

Another picture appeared. It was a different view of the same girl in the pastor’s arms. Her head was on his shoulder, and her face was turned to his cheek. Obviously, he was anything but pleased. His expression of disgust was evidence of that, but the fact was unnoticed by the excited gossipers.

The two pictures circulated throughout the congregation. There was something mysterious about their origin, something that no one cared to discuss, until Amelia Decker discovered there were two distinct views. It was a double shock for Sister Decker. She was doubly certain now: the pictures were the key to a church scandal.

She consulted her most intimate associates and laid the problem before them. They simply must have more information. Who was the girl? Where did she live? How did the pastor meet her? “A cousin, I suppose,” the first friend counseled. “A dear little cousin from the country.”

“She evidently knows her way around.” The second gossip winked. “Why don’t you ask him, Amelia?”

The advice had merit. Her two friends’ loyalty gave her courage, and Amelia asked him. “I’d like to see the pictures,” said Steve, having decided it would be best neither to deny nor affirm their existence.

“To what pictures do you refer?” Amelia gasped for breath. “Why—why—the pictures you lost,” she stammered.

“I have lost no pictures.”

“You—you lost no pictures—the—the pictures you had taken with the girl in your arms?” Amelia struggled to find; her voice.

“What girl?”

“You—you don’t know?”

“I don’t know any girl with whom I posed for a picture at any time,” said Steve truthfully. “Where are the pictures?, Who is the girl? I’d like to know.”

“I—I—I’ll get them,” said meek little Amelia. “I—I thought you knew.”

“I did hear some gossip about some pictures, but I don’t know who took them or where they came from.” Steve was enjoying the drama. “Who started all this gossip anyway?”

“Gossip?” Amelia’s mouth opened like a fish trap. “Gossip?” she whispered. “Who told you?”

“I would advise you to find out,” he replied, with a discerning smile.

Amelia’s lavender and red parasol became a conspicuous burden that suddenly demanded her complete attention. She was undecided whether it should be opened or closed. She picked at a tiny thread at the end of it while asking several insignificant questions. Steve smiled as she attempted to conceal her embarrassment.

“I—I must go,” she said abruptly. “I—I’ve really got to go. Mother will be expecting me.”

He watched her loop her parasol over her arm and depart.

Deacon Stillwater, with troubled brow, entered the controversy as an impartial peacemaker.

“I don’t know what this picture is all about, but that clock in the background sure looks like the cupola of the old post office,” he remarked, referring to the second picture. “I don’t know who the girl is and I don’t want to say who the man is, either. I suppose there is more than one feller who would pass for Reverend Winthrop, but it sure looks enough like him to be his brother.”

“Reverend Winthrop doesn’t have a brother.” One of the gossipers clarified the issue.

“That stone column at the side of one of the pictures looks familiar, too,” said another. “It shouldn’t be difficult to tell where it was taken.”

“Bright idea! There’s a house with a stone porch opposite the post office, isn’t there?” still another volunteered.

“The old Doc Bidwell mansion.”

“Not that hot spot? Say this is getting good.” There were malicious chuckles.

The rumor spread. The milk man, a brother of Deacon Turner’s wife’s beauty operator, knew Reverend Winthrop. He had seen him park his car about two o’clock one morning and go to the old Bidwell mansion. He thought it was unusual for a preacher to be out at that hour to make a call in such a questionable neighborhood.

Flames of gossip as vicious and wicked as a prairie fire crept through the First Community Church congregation following this report. Mrs. So-and-so’s statement, confirmed by Mr. So-and-so, which could be proved by Mrs. You-know’s mother’s aunt, grew like a snowball on a college campus.

Reverend Winthrop, unable to withstand the onslaught, was overcome and left to suffer in disgrace.

10. Termites Of Gossip

THE GOSSIP REACHED A SUDDEN CLIMAX. a select few called a secret meeting of the church board to lay the groundwork for future action. The conclave consisted of certain deacons, trustees and influential key members of the church who were invited to compare notes and make plans to dispose of the pastor.

At a subsequent meeting, Reverend Winthrop was called before this body and given the ultimatum of producing the name of the girl who posed in the picture with him or tender his voluntary resignation. This proposal gave him no alternative: he did not know the name of the girl. He was in no position to produce her for cross examination had he desired. To deny that he knew her was sheer folly. No one would believe him. He knew that the plot was deeply laid.

Steve knew also that certain members had prepared a resolution phrased in a manner that the church could not wisely afford to reject. They could not vindicate him while there was a cloud over his character. He knew this, but he was unable to disperse the cloud. The very nature of the circumstances placed him in an unfavorable light. Consequently, he was at the mercy of those whose opinions were governed by misconstrued facts—opinions which he could not alter. His story, however true, was one to be disbelieved. Such was the nature of strategy behind the plot.

“Am I to understand that, regardless of circumstances, I am to resign or be dismissed in disgrace?” Steve asked seriously.

“You have never given a satisfactory explanation why you posed for such a picture,” Deacon Webster partied. “Perhaps you’d like to give us some of the details.”

“You have heard my story. It is the only explanation I can offer.”

“It isn’t logical.”

“I quite agree with you. Nevertheless, it is the truth.”

“Perhaps you would prefer to resign.”

“And if I do not?” Steve asked.

“You may expect to be fired,” said the deacon irritably. “We are not here to play horse.”

“What are the charges, please?” Steve was playing a game of strategy in the hope of gleaning information concerning the brains behind the plot.

Deacon Webster looked at Deacon Stillwater. Deacon Stillwater looked at Deacon Arbutt. Deacon Arbutt looked blank.

“I presume you have prepared charges?” Reverend Winthrop questioned. “I would like to face my accusers.”

“You know—”

“That’s just it: I do not know,” Steve interrupted. “Which one of you signed the complaint? Who preferred the charges? I think it would be wise to show them to an attorney.”

“We—we have no charges,” Deacon Stillwater said hastily, prompted by fear of court action. “We—we—it’s not like a trial. We—we—”

Deacon Arbutt silenced him with a look.

“No charges; no trial; no complaint. That’s interesting.” Steve smiled.

Deacon Webster flushed. Deacon Stillwater was noticeably flustered. Deacon Arbutt’s jaw set as his face blanched with anger.

Deacon Stillwater cleared his throat. Deacon Webster twisted nervously. Deacon Arbutt stared at his colleague and said, “It is a question for the church membership to decide. They may approve of their preacher chasing around in the red-light district posing for pictures at three o’clock in the morning”—he snapped—“that’s their privilege. I can easily wash my hands of the whole matter.”

“Pilate did the same, didn’t he?” Steve stood his ground unflinchingly.

“You”—Deacon Arbutt rose and shook his forefinger directly under the young minister’s nose—“you despicable—”

Deacon Webster suddenly stood beside Deacon Arbutt and seized his arm. “No names, Tracy,” he cautioned.

“I wouldn’t think of it. I would not lower myself to call names.” Deacon Arbutt’s tone softened noticeably. “It is beneath my dignity. The pictures, after all, speak for themselves. You should be proud of them, Reverend Winthrop— very proud of them indeed.”

“Par excellence in serving your purpose, aren’t they, Deacon?” Steve replied with a knowing smile. “Cleverly arranged. You should feel highly complimented.”

“You—you—”

Again Deacon Webster seized his arm. "Tracy!"

Deacon Stillwater struggled to his feet.

Deacon Webster stepped between his two companions. "It's quite evident that we aren't accomplishing our purpose here," he said. "Perhaps we'd better go."

"By all means, yes." Deacon Stillwater found his voice. "We can go, can't we, Tracy?"

"You are not asking for my resignation?" Stephen purposely challenged them with the question.

"The church will take this responsibility." Deacon Arbuth was curt.

"You mean you would not accept it tonight?" Steve again asked.

"No."

"Come, Tracy," said Deacon Webster.

"Let's go," Deacon Stillwater suggested.

Stephen became reckless. He knew his position was hopeless. His resignation was only a question of time. "I came here prepared to resign, provided we can agree upon the terms," he said with a suave smile.

Deacon Arbuth was skeptical.

"We don't want a church scandal, Tracy," Deacon Stillwater said cautiously.

"No, if Reverend Winthrop wants to resign, we should accept his resignation and avoid the unnecessary publicity that a forced dismissal is sure to bring," Deacon Webster advised. "We don't want any trouble."

"I'll resign as of the first of the month with the understanding that I'm to fill the pulpit until that time," Steve ventured.

"Two more Sundays," said Deacon Stillwater.

"What do you say, Tracy?" Deacon Webster asked.

"What does he want to preach on?" Deacon Arbuth followed with a counter question.

"Sin," the young minister assured them.

"Sin?" Deacon Stillwater asked.

"Sin?" Deacon Webster wanted the matter defined.

"Yes," Steve replied. "You'll agree that all have sinned and come short of the glory of God, won't you?"

"Well," said Deacon Arbuth.

"Or I'll resign next Sunday, Mr. Arbuth"—Reverend Winthrop turned to look the deacon square in the eye—"if you'll invite two people to the ser-

vice— your photographer and the girl you arranged to pose in the picture with me.”

“You can’t prove it.” Deacon Arbutt was caught off guard.

“Would you want me to try?”

Deacon Stillwater was uneasy.

“Would you want me to try?” Steve faced his antagonist like a crown attorney.

“You are accusing Deacon Arbutt?” Deacon Webster asked, mystified.

“The deacon knows the answer,” Steve replied, certain that he had struck a key note in the controversy. “May I resign under those conditions?”

Deacon Arbutt was at a loss to understand Reverend Winthrop’s position. His attitude was an open threat. He might prove far more dangerous than he suspected. Just how much did he really know?

“I’m washing my hands of the whole matter. You can go or stay. It’s immaterial to me.” Deacon Arbutt was noticeably disturbed. “The church can decide. I’m not going to have anything more to do with it.”

“You refer to my resignation, of course,” Steve tantalized, “not to the pictures?”

“I—I What do you mean?” the deacon stormed. “I’m dropping everything.”

“Then you admit dropping the pictures. Your son is a photographer, isn’t he?” The young minister fired a shot in the dark.

“I—I—you—you. How dare you! I’m not admitting anything.” Deacon Arbutt was livid with rage. “I want you to know—” Words failed him; the color left his face; his jaws worked nervously until the blood vessels again stood out in great welts upon his forehead.

Deacon Webster stepped forward and seized his arm.

“Calm yourself, Tracy,” he said, guiding him from the room.

The enraged deacon turned in the doorway, hesitated and attempted to speak.

“Your heart, Tracy; it isn’t worth it.” Deacon Stillwater was gravely alarmed. “Let’s go home.”

The three deacons disappeared, leaving the young minister to his thoughts. He knew that he was defeated, that his resignation was imperative. He could not do otherwise. He had settled that problem by prayer. His only objective in meeting the committee of deacons was to stop the gossip that had spread throughout the church.

Although unable to prove the fact, he was certain, from remarks which he had heard, that Deacons Arbutt and Stillwater were more deeply involved in the plot to force his resignation than anyone in the church suspected. He had just proved that fact to his own satisfaction, but it was evidence to be used only as a veiled threat in dealing personally with the two deacons. From their attitude Steve knew that their consciences condemned them. The backwash of their cleverly-laid plot was uncomfortable. They were in a precarious position.

He was satisfied that they would be exceptionally careful in making further statements. He had convinced them that he considered them under suspicion. How much he knew they did not know. It had been a game of wits in which he had purposely left the impression that his knowledge of the facts exceeded that which he possessed.

Steve was content to leave the matter in the Lord's hand. He did not understand His purpose and plan in the complicating circumstances, but he believed them to be ordained of the Lord. He was reconciled to the fact that he could not serve the Lord at the First Community Church. An unseen enemy lurked in the midst of the congregation, an enemy in league with the devil, an enemy in the sheep's clothing of righteousness.

11. A Sudden Change Of Heart

SINCE IT BECAME CERTAIN that he must resign as pastor of the First Community Church, Steve had dreaded the ordeal of meeting his stepmother. She would chide him incessantly. To stay in the community was impossible. His only alternative was to leave quietly and begin life elsewhere.

“I’m sorry, Mother,” he said approaching her in the library. “I suppose you’ve been informed of my decision to resign?” He stepped forward and placed his hands on her shoulders.

“You could have been more diplomatic. Do you realize the disgrace that’s been heaped upon your father’s and my head? What have we done to deserve it?” Her tone was bitter. “If you’d only listened to me.”

“I have no alibi, Mother—”

“That’s just the point! You don’t care what happens to us.”

“I doubt if you’re considering all the circumstances, Mother,” he replied kindly. “Would you advise that I stay and invite the church to suffer the consequences?”

“You know that I can’t discuss such matters with your father. I had to discuss the problem with someone. I called Deacon Stillwater, and he suggested that I take Deacon Arbuth’s advice. I called Deacon Arbuth, who’s leaving for Cuba for the winter. He said that he didn’t ask for your resignation, and said that you should stay.”

“When is he leaving for Cuba?”

“Tomorrow.”

“A rather sudden change in plans, isn’t it? As late as last Sunday he told me that he’d be here until Thanksgiving and possibly Christmas before going to Florida,” Steve explained. “He expected to return in March.”

“Possibly the purchase of a new car had something to do with it,” she volunteered. “He’s driving through to Key West, and said that he probably wouldn’t see you again before he left. He thought it was my duty to prevail upon you to stay.”

“Very thoughtful of the deacon, I’m sure—”

“He insisted that the gossip about you in the church would soon blow over. He thinks that you should forget it and carry on here as though nothing had happened. I’m sure that Deacon Arbutt has your best interests at heart.”

“Definitely. Three hours ago he wanted my resignation.”

“You must be misinformed.”

“I think I know what occasioned Deacon Arbutt’s sudden change of heart,” Steve said quietly. “I mentioned a conference with Captain Vanderjack.”

“With Captain Vanderjack?” Mrs. Winthrop was noticeably curious.

“Yes, Captain Vanderjack. It might be interesting to hear Deacon Arbutt’s explanation of how he happened to know so much about how, where and when the pictures of me and this mysterious girl were taken,” he suggested. “I’m sorry he found it necessary to leave so suddenly.”

“You think Deacon Arbutt—”

“—is running away, yes. I’m positive in my own mind, but there’s little I can do about it. You can’t convict anyone on personal opinion,” he complained bitterly. “The objective was to secure my resignation; they’re welcome to it. I won’t be a handicap to God’s program.”

“Your father—do you realize—”

“God must come above self and family,” Steve interjected. “When one reaches the place in Christian service where it’s definitely apparent that his efforts are a subterfuge for the devil, it’s time to resign.”

“Stephen!”

“I mean it, Mother. I could remain here a hypocrite, preach a social gospel, coddle the congregation into self-sufficiency, draw my salary and let souls go to hell.” His heart was burdened with responsibility. “That, Mother,” he continued, “is something that I can’t do. You don’t approve of the blood-bought Gospel of repentance that brings people to their knees in a confession of sin: I do. The church board objects to a soul-saving program. No pastor can meet the need of the community in any other way. I could remain here as a pastor in sheep’s clothing, but I can’t remain here and serve Christ. You don’t want a pastor that preaches the Gospel of repentance. Therefore I can’t stay.”

“It’s only because you’re so definite and self-centered in your view of the Gospel,” she counter challenged. “People should be able to decide for themselves.”

“Granted. Consequently, they shouldn’t object to a sermon exalting the unsearchable riches of Christ. But, no, they refuse to listen for fear they’ll be brought under His convicting power.”

“Why be so morbidly pessimistic?”

“Because the devil is an optimist. He wants people to believe that they have nothing to fear, that none have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, that your sin won’t find you out.” He had the assurance of conviction. “God’s Word is definite on the subject.”

“Well—”

“I quite agree with you that people should decide for themselves, but they should be willing to weigh both sides of the question first.” He continued the conversation. “I realize you can’t always make the horse drink, but show me the farmer that doesn’t offer to water his stock.”

“That’s beside the point,” she retorted irritably.

“It’s exactly to the point; nobody can compel another to drink at the trough of Christianity; it’s a personal matter between each individual and his God. It’s my duty as a pastor to lead my hearers to the Water of Life, sparkling with the truth of the Gospel of Christ.”

“The same tiresome argument.”

“Yes, Mother. I’ll resign as pastor of the First Community Church, with malice toward none and charity for all. May God richly bless you and every member in the congregation. I’ll continually pray for you.”

“I suppose you expect God to pay us a salary in your absence,” Mrs. Winthrop replied scornfully. “Your pastorate here has been our only hope.”

“I understand that the church board will continue to pay father on sick leave.”

“We can’t accept charity; I’ll have to go to work.”

“I’ll help with your obligations as soon as I get a job,” he advised graciously. “I don’t expect to desert you.”

“If you insist upon leaving, you may as well forget us. I don’t feel that we should become indebted to you,” she said coldly. “If you want to help, it is your duty to stay.”

“Suppose the church insists upon my resignation.”

“I’ll see to it that they don’t.”

“What are the terms?”

“If you carry on as your father did, you won’t experience any difficulty.” She was encouraged.

“Which means that you’re to blue-pencil all my sermons as you did Father’s before he was stricken?”

“If you wish to call it that. You must agree to maintain harmony in the congregation. You’ll never have another opportunity such as this.” Her voice was stern.

Janet Winthrop gazed into the past. Steve had spoken truths that brought her under conviction, truths that she had respected as a girl, but in the competition of life she had exchanged these enduring treasures for material security.

Steve bade her “Goodnight” and watched her ascend the stairs to care for his father, who in the patience of hope continued to pray for her.

12. More Precious Than Gold

“I SAID IN MINE HEART, God will judge the righteous and the wicked: for there is a time there for every purpose and for every work.” Reverend Winthrop laid his Bible aside after reading this verse of Scripture from the third chapter of Ecclesiastes.

There was a tense silence as he studied his audience. It was his last sermon. The church was full for the first time since he had accepted the pastorate. All were eagerly anticipating the unexpected. Gossip had fanned the fire of interest.

A battle was expected by the divided congregation. Steve knew that some of his listeners were allied against him and awaited the first opportunity to demand their pound of flesh. He let the tension reach the breaking point before he spoke.

“I have been ordained to preach the Word of God,” he said quietly. “Under existing circumstances I should preach a great sermon from this verse of Scripture, but I shall forego that privilege. It is more expedient in this last opportunity that I preach a greater sermon. God willing, we shall consider the seven pillars of the foundation of the house of God. If the foundation be destroyed, what can the righteous do.”

He could feel the wave of resentment that swept through the congregation as he proceeded to outline the seven pillars. His hearers were girded for war. They did not want to listen to a pacifist. They had chosen sides for a church fight. But he was not giving them the conflict they sought.

“I shall leave it to God to judge the righteous and the wicked,” he said solemnly. “He knows the intent and thought of every heart.”

An air of expectancy permeated the room as the young pastor closed his stirring sermon with the truth that “the coming of the Lord draweth nigh.”

The crowd stirred uneasily as the Christians present were asked to pray for the salvation of souls and the return of those who had strayed into the world and forgotten God.

Two girls made their way down the center aisle. Certain members, unable to control their curiosity, glanced in the direction of the young women.

“It’s that Virginia that be dragged out of the gutter,” the woman in the back seat whispered as she nudged her companion.

“You mean the Thyme girl that was mixed up with Dick Overmire?”

“Yes.”

“They were engaged, weren’t they?”

“I suppose so. How’d she get out of jail? Do you know?”

“I understand Captain Vanderjack wouldn’t lock her up.”

“After all Overmire had to say about her in the paper?”

“There’s something funny about the whole deal,” a third woman commented. “She’s another of those mysterious women our pastor is interested in.”

“Who’s the other girl going down to the altar with her?”

“Maybe it’s the girl in the picture!” laughed a fourth companion, who was seated in the row in front of the trio.

“Don’t let your imagination run away with you.” Her husband corrected her irritably. “The other girl is Shirley Mason. She’s going down as a personal worker.”

“A waste of time and talents, if you ask me,” said his wife. “I thought she was attending the Detroit Bible Institute.”

“She’s at least loyal in her deputation work while spending a week away from school,” he replied. “I admire her for showing some concern for the welfare of others. If everyone would support the pastor in a soul-saving campaign, God could bless this church.”

“There are six at the altar now,” one of the women commented.

“Yes, and Philip Hartley is one of them. He was just released from service, wasn’t he?” asked the first speaker. “He comes from one of our best families. I wonder what happened to him overseas.”

“He evidently discovered the personal need of salvation,” said the male participant in the discussion.

“I wonder—”

“Of course, all you ladies are wondering how, when and where he sinned and fell short of the glory of the Lord. Now that he has come to appreciate what the Lord has done for him, you can watch Phil Hartley. His light won’t be hid under a bushel; he’ll be out and out for the Lord. This church needs more young men like him!”

“You men all stick together,” said his wife. “I suppose you’ll be agreeing with the pastor and inviting him to stay.” The sarcasm in her voice was drowned in the closing prayer by the young pastor whose testimony for righteousness was to remain in the church long after he had left. He had sown seeds which were to become a harvest of souls more precious than gold.

13. A Cast Off Branch

JANET WINTHROP saw her stepson depart without further misgiving. She was satisfied that if he was not to serve God her way, he was not ordained to serve the Lord. She was present at his last appearance before the church and was among those who were greatly disturbed by the fact that Virginia Thyme had reconsecrated her life to the Lord and desired to continue in His service in the First Community Church. Was it not enough that her stepson should prove a disappointment? Why should she be burdened with one of his converts, who undoubtedly would prove as great a trial as the young pastor? Philip Hartley, too, promised to become a problem. His influence over the young people would be hard to match. She could not compete with his energy, vitality and determination.

Jewell Lombard visited her to get Steve's forwarding address. Jewell had been one of the few who did not want the young minister to leave. Rather, she wanted Steve to continue in the pastorate and vindicate himself. She even agreed that he should select and write his own sermons, and Jewell openly disagreed with Janet Winthrop concerning the issue.

"I don't know where he intends to go," Mrs. Winthrop replied in answer to Jewell's question. "He didn't choose to tell me, and I didn't choose to ask. It's enough to have to put up with the disgrace of having him leave this way."

"Steve had some natural gifts as a minister."

"You mean he would have if he would listen. His main fault is that he has no appreciation or respect for the opinion of others."

"I love to hear him pray. His petitions are so soul-searching," Jewell confessed. "And he seems to live his prayers. They're so uplifting."

"I can't understand why you haven't a greater influence over him. I really thought—"

Jewell's cheek reddened. "Steve and I had a perfect understanding concerning his future ambition," she replied casually.

“I noticed that he prayed very earnestly for that Thyme girl last Sunday,” Janet said sarcastically. “You should admire him for his prayers.”

“I admire him for his interest in souls.”

“He never found any time to pray with me.”

“Perhaps you didn’t encourage him.”

“I never cried on his shoulder, of course,” Janet replied irritably. “I never wanted to make a show of my religion. A Christian should be dignified.”

“I quite agree with you, Mrs. Winthrop.”

“Don’t ‘Mrs. Winthrop’ me,” she snapped. “I’m surely surprised at your change in attitude, Jewell. I thought you were more dependable.”

“Dependable?”

“Yes, dependable. One would think you approved of a barnstorming preacher dragging misfits out of the gutter and filling the church with them. Who is this Virginia Thyme? What do you know about her past? What does Stephen know about her? Are you sure that it’s her soul that he’s interested in? It’s easy to pretend.” The glint in her eye was not hard to interpret. Another had dared to cross her path with conflicting opinions.

“I think we have all misjudged Stephen.”

Mrs. Winthrop eyed her coldly. “Well,” she said, “you, of all people.”

“What do you mean?”

She repeated the statement with greater emphasis. “I suppose you’ll want to turn our church into a rescue mission next. I can’t understand what has come over you, Jewell. I certainly—”

“I’ve discovered that Christians have a grave responsibility,” Jewell interrupted.

“Has Philip Hartley been talking to you?”

“We’ve discussed some things, yes.” Jewell smiled.

“Not a revival, I hope?” Mrs. Winthrop was disturbed.

Jewell offered a counter challenge. “Stephen said that he couldn’t leave a greater testimony in the community than to have a revival sweep the church.”

Janet Winthrop threw up her hands as though warding off a blow.

“A group of young people are praying that Steve may be cleared of the false gossip about him,” Jewell confessed. “God works in mysterious ways His wonders to perform.”

“Never. We’ll never, never open the doors of First Community Church to all the riffraff in town. We don’t want a revival, and we aren’t going to have

one. I'm glad Steve has gone." Mrs. Winthrop stood her ground haughtily. "Yes, I'm glad; glad he went when he did."

"His last sermon may still bear fruit."

Janet Winthrop considered for the first time the possibility of defeat. What had happened? She did not trust herself to speak.

Jewell opened a New Testament, a parting gift from Reverend Winthrop, which she withdrew from her bag.

"Jesus said; I am the vine, ye are the branches; He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for apart from me ye can do nothing."

She waited for her hostess to reply, but, noticing that she was distressed, continued. "I didn't come here to quarrel with you, Mrs. Winthrop. Please forgive me."

"What—what were you saying, Jewell?" she asked dazedly.

"Apart from Jesus we can do nothing. Steve brought that out so clearly in his sermon on the seven pillars. I think it was the most wonderful sermon I ever heard," Jewell confessed happily. "I never realized just how much Christ means to me and to the world."

Mrs. Winthrop was nonplussed. She was helpless. She had no defense; she was defying God's Word.

"You remember how clearly Steve emphasized the hopelessness of the possibility that the cast-off branch would bear fruit? There's no disputing the fact that our church is a dead branch." Jewell grew braver as she witnessed to Her newfound faith. "I'm just as guilty as anyone. I've been a lukewarm Christian, indifferent to the Word of God until last Sunday."

"You mean—"

"I mean—I don't know how to say it—something happened to me last Sunday when Steve was preaching his farewell sermon." Jewell's heart was so full that she could hardly speak. "I—I think I discovered myself. I want to do something for the Lord."

"You were just emotionally upset on account of Steve's leaving. I wouldn't let it disturb me if I were you," Mrs. Winthrop found the courage to reply.

"No, I see more clearly. This verse that Steve marked has taken on a new meaning. She pointed to the fifth verse of the fifteenth chapter of John and

read,"Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye except ye abide in me."

"I've always been faithful," Mrs. Winthrop murmured in defense.

"Steve says that it isn't a question of being faithful to an ideal. Our responsibility lies in being faithful to Him and the manner in which we tithe our talents. We must be more fruitful."

"By what authority do you quote Reverend Stephen Winthrop, Miss Jewell?" Janet sneered. "I never found his wisdom so valuable that he should be claimed as an authority."

"I believe he marked this verse to help us." Jewell smiled as she turned to Matthew 13:57. "A prophet is not without honor, save in his own country, and in his own house."

"I admire your impertinence," she replied haughtily. "My illustrious stepson undoubtedly spent considerable time prompting members of the congregation to stir up discord. He must have taken particular pains to mark certain passages of Scripture for that purpose."

"Jesus' words are just as true today as they were before Calvary," Jewell countered.

"For instance?" Mrs. Winthrop was prompted to ask.

"The Lord was very emphatic in this verse spoken on the way to the garden and His betrayal: If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin: but now they have no cloak for their sin. Perhaps you didn't get the significance of Steve's use of this verse in his last sermon."

"Are you accusing me of being a hypocrite?"

"Does your conscience convict you?"

"I think that you're very unkind," Mrs. Winthrop lamented. "I thought you were loyal to the church. I'm surprised to find that you are not. It's a shame to have you throw away your talent for singing. What is this strange influence that Stephen seems to have over people? Why do you want his address? What are you scheming to do now? You know that the church board doesn't approve of catering to a group of religious fanatics. Steve has gone. Forget him."

"That is exactly what he expects us to do. He refused to give me his forwarding address for that very reason," Jewell explained patiently. "It doesn't seem right. It's cruel to let him go this way—sending him away like a thief in disgrace."

“He made his own bed. Let him lie in it.” Janet retorted. “The Lord knows that I did everything I could to help him.”

14. The Dust Of Criticism

IT HAS BEEN WELL SAID, “He whom the gods would destroy, they first make mad.” Many have gone the way of destruction as victims of anger.

When Reverend Stephen Winthrop left the First Community Church the pot was boiling. A majority of the church members were nursing what they considered righteous indignation. In his own eyes each had a justifiable excuse for his anger.

In the First Community Church, God’s purpose and plan had been forgotten. The members were fighting God’s battle in the power of their own might.

The shadows of mystery gathered around Reverend Stephen Winthrop. Where he had gone was a puzzle. His disappearance was an open challenge to Dame Gossip, and she seized the opportunity.

The young minister had wiped the dust of criticism from his feet and quietly disappeared. To Dame Gossip this was an admission of guilt, and no one could question her authority.

At First Community Church there were many victims, misguided victims, who accepted the counsel of the wicked and rejoiced to imagine a vain thing. Strife followed in the wake of the idle rumors. Unsigned letters appeared—anonymous letters with a sinister motive which cast suspicion on everyone.

Jewell Lombard received such a chastising epistle, written under the guise of friendship but carrying purposeful threats. She was out of harmony with the church program. Her friendship with Reverend Stephen Winthrop was detrimental. The letter intimated that she was concealing knowledge relative to the whereabouts of the missing pastor. The rod of correction also fell upon Virginia Thyme, who was anonymously accused of being insincere in her Christian stand. Her motive was that of a hypocrite, her accusers declared. She was capitalizing upon sympathy as a means to an end. Nor did Shirley Mason escape the thrust of the poisoned pen. Her friendship and interest in Virginia Thyme’s spiritual welfare condemned her. She had no

right to impose upon the good graces of the church membership by inviting Virginia into their midst; Virginia was a questionable character, mistrusted and unwanted, so the letters declared.

The climax of the discord was a letter addressed to the board of deacons in which Janet Winthrop's faults were stated and emphasized. There was an ulterior motive in the lengthy epistle, and the writer was aware of the psychological effect which the letter was meant to produce. Janet focused her complete and biased attention upon Virginia Thyme. She was certain that this unwanted hussy was responsible for the letter. It could not be otherwise. There were remarks in the letter that she had made only to Virginia. It could have been written by no one else. Even the handwriting accused her.

"That looks like Virginia Thyme's handwriting." Janet addressed Deacon Stillwater. "It looks like the writing on her pledge card, anyway."

"I wish Deacon Arbitt were here. He'd know what to do," the deacon replied. "All this trouble would never have happened if he hadn't gone to Cuba. He should have stayed here until we found a new pastor."

"No pastor would take the church if he knew the discord that exists."

"He'd soon find out, wouldn't he, Janet?"

"What are we going to do?"

"When will Deacon Arbitt return?"

"We can't wait for him." Some of her old determination asserted itself. "Why not call this Thyme girl before the board of deacons and confront her with these letters?"

"She'll only deny them."

"It's enough to unchurch her, isn't it? I could never get away with anything like this," she interrupted peevishly. "After all I've done for the church."

"If Deacon Arbitt would only come."

"Why don't you do something? You're the chairman of the board," she complained. "Don't sit around wishing for Deacon Arbitt. Act. You can at least call a meeting."

To add to Janet Winthrop's increasing burden of trouble, her aged husband suffered another stroke.

"What am I going to do?" she lamented. "Nobody knows where Steve is. A fine son to run off and leave me to care for his father! He knew it was impossible to find help. Where's the money coming from to pay a nurse? He knows that I can't do it all."

Jewell Lombard came in to offer her services until she had to return to school on Monday.

Janet met her at the door. "We haven't any money to pay for extra help," she remonstrated.

"You don't object to my serving humanity, do you?" Jewell smiled sweetly. "Just as a love gift to the Lord. Won't you let me do what little I can to help?"

"It seems to me you could have exercised a little more influence over Stephen." She flared in rebuke. "No one ever appreciates anything I do."

On Sunday evening Steve phoned the family residence to inquire about his father's health. Mrs. Winthrop was attending a meeting with some of the deacons, and Jewell answered the telephone.

"I just learned of Father's relapse. I'm in Chicago. I'm glad to find you there. I'll return, of course, if Mother wants it. Is there anything that I could do to help?"

"Are you a good nurse?" she teased.

"Would you expect me to confess?" Steve asked.

"No," she replied seriously. "I have things arranged very nicely. Virginia Thyme is coming in to take my place while I'm at school teaching next week."

"I might take your school and let you carry away the honors as nurse." He laughed. "You haven't told me about Father's condition since his second stroke."

"You haven't told me how you found out."

He did not reply.

Jewell caught the significance of his silence and did not press him for an answer. Instead, she gave a careful account of her patient's condition and explained that Steve's stepmother was attending an informal meeting concerning the trouble that had arisen in the church since his absence.

Stephen thanked her and declared that he was in a position to keep in close contact with affairs at home.

"Tell Mother that I'm wiring some money tonight. She'll hear from me later should father's condition grow serious." They exchanged farewell greetings and ended the conversation.

Jewell stood at the phone perplexed. How had Steve learned of his father's condition? His stepmother had accused her of knowing his whereabouts. The telephone call would make her more suspicious than ever. She

would think that her presence in the home was planned, that she was there expecting the call. What was she to do? She could not keep the matter a secret. Stephen was sending money home. Perhaps there would be a note of explanation with it. No, she had always been straightforward, and she did not intend to change her policy now. Steve had endured the hardship of criticism until circumstances had driven him from home. She likewise would take the consequences of the bitter remarks which she knew would follow.

Jewell was explaining the nature of the call to her patient when Mrs. Winthrop arrived.

Janet studied Jewell. She was suspicious. The girl wasn't telling all she knew.

"Why couldn't he call when I was here?" she challenged.

Jewell did not reply.

"I suppose that Thyme girl is writing to him. It's more important that he keep the contact with her."

"I'm sure she would tell me."

"I'd hate to believe anything she told me." Janet jerked out the words. "Who is she? What do any of you know about her? I wouldn't trust her out of my sight."

"You don't have to," Jewell replied sweetly. "You can keep her in sight all next week. She's the only person in the church that would volunteer to come and take care of Mr. Winthrop."

"You—you. You mean she's coming here!" she exclaimed, scarcely able to believe her ears. "She—she's coming as a nurse?"

"If you'll permit her."

Janet stared. Her mouth opened and shut like a hungry, machine.

"Perhaps you've found someone who would take her place," Jewell remarked. "You won't have to keep her, of course. Stephen will return if you think it advisable."

"A lot of help he would be; just another man under foot to wait on and feed," she retorted. "I'll get along some way; nobody cares what happens to me."

But in spite of Mrs. Winthrop's protest it was proved that there were those who did care. A group of women from the church cleaned the house thoroughly, did a week's baking and left Virginia Thyme in charge of the welfare of the invalid for the remainder of the month.

For a day Janet Winthrop displayed the attractive side of her dual personality and donned the jewels of sweetness, patience, love, devotion, consideration and humility. Everyone was thrilled by her deep sense of appreciation. She professed a new loyalty to her Lord—a loyalty long hidden.

“I shall never be able to repay you for being so generous with your time,” she said to Virginia, after the other women had left. “Jewell mentioned that you might come. I’m so glad to have you in our home. It will be a real opportunity to get acquainted. I’ve been eager to know you better ever since you joined the church. I do hope you’ll like it here. Stephen always spoke so highly of you.”

“This is one way that I can serve the Lord. I feel so helpless. Jewell has such a wonderful talent,” she replied meekly. “I have so much to learn as a Christian, but I’m glad to do what I can to let my light shine.”

“The Lord has been very gracious to all of us.”

“I shall never, never be able to repay Him for all He has done for me,” Virginia commented. “It is so much easier to live the Christian life when you are with Christian friends.”

“Poor child, I do hope that you find employment soon.” Janet consoled her earnestly. “God always rewards the faithful.”

“It’s the first time that I have been really happy since I was a child,” Virginia confessed. “I feel that I’m in the place where God wants me. Stephen made the way of salvation so plain. You must be real proud of him. I always lived such a doubtful Christian life before.”

“A doubtful Christian life”—Janet was apprehensive—“that applies to all of us, doesn’t it? Stephen’s leaving has changed things in a way that is hard to comprehend. Do you believe that God really has a purpose in it?”

“I’ve been such a poor Bible student—”

“Stephen seems to think God will work it all out,” she said absently, meditating upon the parting words of her stepson. “So many strange things continue to happen.”

“I want to live day by day for God and the future,” said Virginia with a hope born of spiritual understanding. “God willing, I want my life to count for Him.”

The two women, their hearts hungry for the indwelling Spirit of Christ, were drawn together by their need.

15. An Important Meeting

IT IS THE TEMPTATIONS MASTERED, not those from which they are shielded, that make men and women. Steve discovered the truth of this fact as he sought to adjust himself to the responsibilities of civilian life. He was without a job after severing connections with the First Community Church, and his credentials as a pastor had been marred by gossip. He did not dare to request a letter of recommendation from the church board. The few months during which he had served as pastor were pages of experience to which he could not safely refer.

Therefore he sought employment as an ex-GI carrying the rating of an Army chaplain. His desire was to serve the Lord, but the door had been closed in his face as he had made an earnest attempt to exalt his Saviour. His faith was being tried, and his only hope was to look to the Lord and take advantage of the opportunities that came his way. His duty was to live a day at a time.

Steve was working in a restaurant in Chicago when he learned of his father's relapse. Through an arrangement with Captain Vanderjack he had been able to keep in contact with conditions at home. His work as a bus boy threw him into contact with those who had very little concern for the Lord. His testimony appeared to be hopelessly lost in the environment, but he witnessed faithfully whenever and wherever he could.

Obviously he was to face many trials. He realized the position in which he had left his parents. He had a financial responsibility to them, and was morally obligated to contribute to their support, an obligation which he met willingly. He expected to secure a better paying position as soon as conditions permitted, but because of labor unrest, the way failed to open.

The restaurant where Steve was employed, unable to cope with the tense labor situation, closed its doors. He was out of a job. The street became his home, a park bench his bed. God was calling him into a new experience, and he joined the milling throng that combed the city streets seeking employment.

One day he watched the restless throng pay homage to a soapbox orator ranting about labor grievances. The labor leader suddenly ceased speaking and stepped down into the crowd to converse with someone whom he knew. There was a babel of voices, each clamoring for recognition.

“Whom rewardeth evil for good, evil shall not depart from his home,” Steve quoted to a young man who stood beside him. “There are many devices in a man’s heart, nevertheless the council of the Lord, that shall stand.”

“What do you mean?” he replied, quick to take offense. “You must be a preacher.”

“I’m not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ,” Steve acknowledged. “I was referring in a general way to the attitude of the crowd.”

“I’m an agnostic; I don’t believe in God, man or the devil,” he said. “I haven’t any use for these silly reformers who think they have an answer for everything.”

“Do you have an answer?”

“The Bible——”

“As an agnostic, you doubt the Bible.” Steve interrupted him. “That, of course, is understood.”

“The Bible——”

“No, it’s not a question of the merits or demerits of the Bible. I’m interested in your personal solution to the evils of society that culminate in such conditions as confront us in this demonstration.”

“God certainly isn’t the answer.”

“Do you have an answer?”

“I—if they’d forget about God and their fear and prejudices, and stop trying to be good”—he stumbled through an explanation—“I wouldn’t have any difficulty.”

“Who can say, I have made my heart clean, I am pure from my sin?” Steve reminded him.

“Without God there isn’t any sin.”

“Would you say that without God there is no crime? The two are synonymous, aren’t they?”

“The Bible——”

“——defines both sin and crime as a transgression of law,” Steve hastened to explain. “The Bible doesn’t justify murder or robbery. Neither does law.”

“The——”

“You don’t believe in God; you don’t believe the Bible. They are nonexistent as far as you are concerned. Why debate the subject if life is self-sufficient?”

“As far as inspiration is concerned, the Bible is nonexistent, yes. I believe that there is a book called the Bible, but God didn’t have anything to do with it. How could He, when there is no God? The Bible is just man’s idea, the written record of a god of his imagination,” he emphasized valiantly.

“That’s what I’ve been trying to tell you. Why should I be concerned about any man’s alibi for his mistakes? That’s all the Bible is. Man had to have something to blame, so he created a God to take the responsibility. I’m not criticizing the Bible as a book or God as the hero of the Old Testament. Christ is all right as the hero of the New Testament. As far as I’m concerned, I respect His principles. He was a good man as men go, a lot better, in fact than the most of us, but I don’t believe in the divinity of God or Christ or anyone else. I don’t believe anything beyond the teachings of nature or experience.”

“I believe in God. I believe the Bible as the inspired Word of God. I was known in the army as Captain Stephen Winthrop,” the wandering minister replied, extending his hand. “I carry the credentials of an honorably discharged chaplain. I notice that you have also seen service overseas. I believe, further, that God ordained our paths to cross for a definite purpose.”

The young man hesitated and then offered his hand.

“Your name is—”

As they shook hands, the young man studied Steve, trying to decide his motive for forcing an introduction.

“I’m not ashamed of my name or my Army record,” he said, reading Steve’s mind. “The point is, I don’t care much for preachers.”

“Let’s say that that is agreeably understood.” Steve laughed. “But materially speaking, we’re in the same boat looking for work, aren’t we?”

“Our troubles are mutual as far as a job is concerned,” he smiled. “There isn’t any question about that.”

“If I forget that I’m a preacher, can you forget that you’re an agnostic?” Steve matched his smile and tried again.

“My name is Bob Truman. I was honorably discharged as a staff sergeant, and came back from the South Pacific last month. My home is in Seattle. Landed in New York and been knocking around looking for a job.”

He appeared relieved to talk with someone. “No, I’m not going home. I don’t care if I never go back. The girl I was going to marry ditched me for a fellow that had religion—another preacher. Can you blame me if I don’t like preachers?”

“If I promise to forget—”

“I can’t forget, and I wouldn’t ask you or any other man to forget his convictions. That’s what’s the matter with the world, with Christians, with everybody,” he said bitterly. “I’m an agnostic and I want everyone to know it.”

“We should be real friends. We can both voice our convictions without causing offense,” Steve replied jovially. “You’re looking for converts and so am I. Why not practice on each other?”

“Say, you seem to be a real fellow, even if you are a preacher.” Bob laughed heartily. “It’s going to be a fight to the finish. If you can’t convert me or I can’t convert you, we’ll have to agree that there is something wrong with both of us.”

“You get the first strike, Bob. I’ll admit that there is plenty wrong with me. I’m one of those who have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.” Steve laughed with him. “Now, tell me frankly what you think is wrong with all of us Christians. There must be something lacking or we wouldn’t be such failures.”

“Lack of testimony,” Bob shot back with determination. “Look at that mob out there. Look at their faces. Do you see any evidence of ‘the love of God,’ as you call it? Yet I dare say that there are hundreds of so-called Christians in that mob of lunatics—Christians when they’re in church on Sunday. Do you hear any word of testimony from them? No, they don’t know God, save at the appointed time and place. Christians, bah! The name makes me sick.”

“Strike two, Bob. You are absolutely right. Christianity’s greatest failure is the lack of testimony. It has been my greatest failure as a Christian and I know from experience that it’s the world’s greatest failure,” Steve confessed seriously. “But God willing, it’s not going to be my greatest failure in the future.”

“You’re not going to strike me out agreeing with me, are you, Captain?” Bob chided humorously. “You asked me what’s wrong with Christianity: there are too many Christians that need the definite experience of salvation—Christians that don’t know what they profess.”

“Strike three, but we’ll have to call it a foul. You see, Bob, they aren’t Christians. They’re church members who wear the cloak of religion and pose as Christians but don’t know the power of God unto salvation. They don’t know Christ as their personal Saviour.”

“We agnostics call that superficiality.”

“May I ask you why you’re an agnostic?”

“Because I think.”

“I challenge that remark. It’s my opinion that you aren’t a Christian because you don’t think,” Steve said kindly. “The mere thought of thinking that God doesn’t exist isn’t sufficient. You should be able to prove it.”

“Can you prove that there is a God?” Bob challenged with a smile. “Turn about is fair play, isn’t it?”

“No, I can’t prove the fact of God to an agnostic,” the young minister admitted, “but I can let any agnostic who will think with me prove to his own satisfaction that God does exist.”

“Then it comes to a question of changing my mind, doesn’t it, Captain?”

“No. God will supply the convincing proof if you’ll permit Him to occupy your thoughts,” Steve explained. “There are many infallible proofs in the Word of God which you must read with an open mind. As an agnostic you’re prejudiced in your thinking.”

“You want me to read the Bible?”

“Faith believing, yes. I want you to read it with the desire to know the truth, to read it with the heart-searching conviction that if there is a God that He will convince you of His omnipresent personality and power; and likewise, if God doesn’t exist, that the fallacy of the myth be exploded with soul-satisfying proof that man is self-existent.”

“I’ve read the Bible. I’ve a praying mother. I’ve heard all these arguments before. I’ve a college education. I used to believe in God as a boy before I knew the difference,” Bob confessed. “If we don’t find work, it doesn’t make any difference whether there is a God or not. We’ll both die of starvation.”

“Let’s stick together, Bob, and prove God,” said Steve, taking his new-found friend by the arm as together they lost themselves in the mass of seekers as heart-hungry and discouraged as they.

16. Hidden Fear

THAT NIGHT Steve and Bob shared their last coin for a bowl of soup and a bed at a rescue mission. An early fall rain drove them from the park to a place of shelter. Because of the storm the meeting place was filled with an exceptionally large number of disgruntled misfits who had no home but the street. The majority lived from hand to mouth, and roamed the country to eke out a living. None of them were interested in a permanent position. Many of them used artful strategy in securing sympathy and were cleverly subtle in making new contacts.

“Look at those hypocrites.” Bob pointed out two street tramps who were taking advantage of the ignorance of a group of Christian students conducting an evening service. “Both of them are avowed agnostics. I don’t know how they can be so deceitful. I feel guilty about coming here even when I can pay my own way.”

“Like the Christians we were discussing, they’re agnostics without a testimony,” Steve remarked.

“They’re certainly out of their environment here,” Bob said. “I feel like a fish out of water.”

“You could go back out in the rain.” Steve laughed.

“And still be a fish, I suppose.” Bob caught the significance of the remark. “God would take care of me, according to your theory.”

“Now, Bob, let’s not get technical on biblical doctrine,” the young minister prompted. “Man’s goings are of the Lord: how can a man then understand his own way?”

“It’s quite obvious that no one does in these days of calamity,” said Bob ingeniously. “I’m sure that I don’t know what the future holds for me.”

“That’s true of all of us,” Steve commented. “Nobody knows how to meet the complications of life, or where the search for opportunity may lead him.”

“One thing is certain: we can’t stay here without money or work.”

“No, we’ve come to the place of a real test of faith,” Steve said bravely. “I’ll admit that I don’t have the answer. I don’t know what we’ll do or where we’ll go. But I know His commission: Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths.”

“We are now to expect a miracle.” Bob scoffed humorously.

“I know that my Redeemer liveth,” Stephen testified. “We won’t starve.”

A burly truck driver stepped through the door and approached the superintendent’s office. “I’m looking for a man as a helper on a cross-country trip with a load of furniture,” he said to the attendant in charge. “Got anybody here you could recommend?”

A half-dozen drunken derelicts crowded around the office window looking for a hand-out and another drink.

“I’ll go, Mister,” said one. “I’m not particular; it don’t make any difference to me where I hang my hat.”

“Isn’t there some dependable man here that doesn’t drink?” the truck driver asked, looking about the room. “I want someone who’ll stay sober until I get to Denver and leave a load of goods. I just had the police take one fellow off the van to sober up.”

“Could you use two of us?” Steve asked, stepping into the circle. “I have a buddy here; neither of us drinks.”

“I’m only allowed the price of one man.”

“It isn’t a question of money. We’re both veterans looking for a ride west. We can fill the bill if you’ll give us the chance.” Steve suddenly decided to welcome any opportunity to get away from the busy metropolis.

“Where’s your credentials? Do you have any identification with you?” he asked, turning to evaluate Steve and his companion.

Both men produced their discharge papers, driver’s licenses and other personal identification.

“A preacher and an engineer—you should be dependable if you really want to work. I’m not allowed to carry hitchhikers, but if you’re working for the company on a trial run, that’s different.” He smiled knowingly. “I’ll take you if you’re ready. I’ll pick you up here at daylight tomorrow morning.”

Bob’s face fell.

“You fellows are broke, of course?” the man queried sympathetically, noticing the look of displeasure on Bob’s face. “Here’s a couple of dollars.

You fellows look honest. I'll take a chance on you."

"Thank you," Bob replied, taking the proffered money. "We'll be waiting here any time you say."

"How about six A.M. sharp? I'll be eating at the restaurant across the street. You might drop over and have breakfast with me."

"We'll be there," both men promised.

The truck driver stepped to the office window and held a short conference with the attendant, evidently to make certain that Bob and Steve were registered there.

"I think our friend is a Christian," Steve volunteered.

"How do you know?"

"I don't; it just struck me that way."

"Just because he gave us a couple of bucks in advance?" Bob was curious. "I never supposed you fellows wore identification tags."

"We don't, I'm sorry to say—that is, the majority of us. It's another case of being guilty of a lack of testimony."

The following day dawned clear and bright. The red rays of the sun was just streaking above the horizon over Lake Michigan when Steve, Bob and the truck driver emerged from the restaurant. The large bright-colored van was parked on a vacant lot alongside the company warehouse a half-block down the street.

The long tedious job of fighting traffic through busy Chicago was finally accomplished. Steve breathed a sigh of relief. He was glad to leave the chaotic city behind. The open country inspired hope. He could forget the faces haunted by the fear of uncertainty, the faces of worried mothers who knew that their families faced hunger and want.

17. Victory

WITHIN THE WEEK the truck and the trio of tired men arrived in Denver. Steve and Bob were faithful in helping the driver unload the van and rearrange a new load to be taken back to a city in Iowa.

For several days following the departure of the van they worked at odd jobs until Bob answered an advertisement seeking someone to drive an aged couple and an invalid granddaughter to Los Angeles.

It was an uneventful six-hundred-mile trip except for the scenic delights and the long night drive across the Mohave Desert.

“We’re here because we’re here,” Bob remarked to his companion who stood beside him in the California sunshine several days later.

“Yes, old fellow,” Steve replied cheerfully, “and we’re stuck here, too, until we find jobs.”

“About the only job there isn’t a premium on here is preaching,” Steve replied.

Bob eyed him coldly. “It’s certain that if you tried that we’d land in jail,” he said.

“It would be one way to get supper.”

“No, thanks.” Bob found no pleasure in the thought of iron bars. “I’d rather be on the outside hungry and looking in.”

“I was never so near starved in my life.”

“A preacher should live on faith.” There was no malice in Bob’s remark.

“I don’t expect the ravens to feed us as they did Elijah by the Brook Cherith. But God will find a way to open the door.”

“There goes a man with a Bible under his arm. He’s probably on his way to a banquet. Think we’d better follow.” Bob’s repartee was timely.

The gray-haired man, his face glowing, turned and approached Bob. “I am going to a banquet,” he said. “May I invite you men as my guests to partake of the Bread of Life?”

“This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die,” Steve quoted.

“I see that you are one of His disciples,” the aged man replied joyously. “Then may I urge that you men accompany me as specially invited guests? I’m going to the rescue mission around the corner, and I’ll be more than pleased to have you go with me.”

“What do you say, Bob?”

“We were just talking about living on faith. The mission is probably our only port in a storm.” Bob was sullen.

“You men appear to be strangers in the community.”

“We arrived today, down, out and hungry.” Bob was consistently pessimistic.

The stranger hesitated as he searched Bob’s face, and then; said, “I’m just a humble errand boy for my Lord, but you are welcome to His blessings and my hospitality.”

Steve breathed a prayer of thanksgiving for the answer to his prayer of faith that God would solve their problem. He knew now that his Heavenly Father had been faithful.

“I’m just a voice proclaiming God’s Word in this wilderness of sin,” said the sage of seventy. “My name is John Whyte. Won’t you accept the Lord’s call to be my guest tonight?”

Words failed Bob as he fell in step with this man. There was something about him that attracted, something that made one desire to know him better. He was so sincere, so like a father. Here was a man about whom Bob wanted to know more, a man whom he did not dislike because of his views or testimony.

John Whyte proved a congenial host. He insisted that his guests order a delicious meal at the cafeteria where he stopped, and sensing that Bob was ill at ease, he made every effort to take his guest’s mind off himself and his troubles. In his diplomatic and patient way he soon influenced Bob to share the conversation and enjoy himself.

After the meal it seemed to be an accepted fact that Bob and Steve were to accompany him. He led the way to a small mission where he selected an inconspicuous place that just suited Bob’s fancy.

Both men enjoyed the half-hour song and testimony service, after which Whyte gave a twenty-minute message.

“One thing about a fellow like that, he makes you feel right at home,” Bob commented. “I hate anyone who thinks his first duty is to stick a har-

poon into all comers and then use high-pressure methods to drag them down to the altar.”

The meeting was dismissed with prayer followed by a request for volunteers to conduct a street meeting.

“There’s the opportunity you’ve been looking for,” Bob pointed out. “I never did hear you preach.”

“Come on.”

Bob possessed the type of manhood that does not fail when put to the test. He had given Steve a challenge that expanded to include him. He had no thought of retreating when he found that his friend had turned the tables and placed him on the spot. A street meeting wouldn’t trouble him. He could listen to the “religious ballyhoo,” as he chose to define it, but it would not change his views. He was determined, however, that he would never be a hypocrite.

Bob studied the crowd of young people conducting the meeting. They seemed to be lighthearted, carefree, happy. Their joy captivated him, and he wished that he were as happy as they. Could it be that knowledge destroyed happiness? Why had ten years made such a change in his life? Before he attended college, he had been happy. Then Bob compared Steve’s life with his own. Steve, too, had a college education, but was not burdened with the problems of life for which there seemed to be no answer.

“You’re a liar; prove there is a God!” the challenge rang out in the night air above the din of traffic.

Bob had been so engrossed in thought that he had not noticed who made the statement. The speaker had become incensed by Steve’s opening remarks as he stepped to the platform to declare why he believed in God.

A well-dressed man, his disheveled hair hanging shaggily from beneath a soiled hat which he repeatedly pushed down on his head, stood before the speaker. It was evident that during the evening he had imbibed freely. He took a bottle from his pocket and started to pound on the edge of the platform to demand attention. -

“God is dead!” he shouted. “Ha! Ha! God is dead! God is dead!”

Thinking that he had not been heard, he pounded more vigorously for order and shouted at Steve.

A crowd gathered.

The man took off his hat and threw it on the platform. “Did you hear me?” he repeated.

There was a ripple of laughter at the outer edge of the crowd.

“Did you hear? God is dead.”

He pounded his hat with the bottle until the cap came off and the contents splashed in his face. The shock was a surprise which sobered him for a moment. With a foolish grin he offered the bottle to a woman who stood beside him. When she refused his offer, he tried to start an argument, and then turned to take a drink. Soon a policeman forced his way through the throng and arrested him.

Amid jeers and catcalls the meeting was resumed. Another drunk continued to argue the merits of religion. John Whyte attempted to draw him aside to avoid further trouble, but the man became indignant and accused the Christians of causing the arrest of his companion. He insisted that he was ready to go to jail, too, if they were going to lock up his “buddy.”

Other friends, realizing that the derelict was only arguing himself into jail if he continued to disturb the meeting, came to his rescue and took him away bodily.

John Whyte stepped beside Steve and asked divine guidance for a message to fit the occasion.

Again Steve attempted to speak, but a shower of ripe tomatoes greeted him. A group of hoodlums at the outside of the crowd enjoyed the episode and laughed heartily as a well-aimed tomato struck Steve’s face.

Bob Truman bounded onto the platform beside Steve and took off his coat. The possibilities of the growing disorder struck him with full force.

“Listen, those of you who are friends of mine, you fellows out there with the tomatoes”—Bob’s voice was clear with determination—“I’ve been an avowed agnostic since I graduated from college. Someone a few minutes ago flung out this challenge: ‘Prove there is a God.’ I’ll accept that challenge.”

Steve, not knowing what to make of the situation, attempted to reason with his friend.

Bob ignored him and turned to the crowd.

“I’ve been an agnostic for ten years. Now, let’s have your tomatoes and anything else that you may have to throw at me. Then we’ll get down to the question about God.” Bob turned to the group with a winning smile. “I can’t afford to be interrupted, you know.”

The Christians in the group stood with bowed heads in a petition of prayer.

Silence settled over the group.

“As one agnostic to another, come, let’s reason together,” Bob continued. “By your own acts here tonight you have proved the fact of God. You stand guilty before Him for the fulfillment of prophecy. Every one of you should be ashamed of himself. You are a disgrace to the cause of agnosticism. By your acts you recognize a God that you claim does not exist. Why persecute these good people who harmed you in no way? Why challenge Christianity if it doesn’t exist?”

It was evident that Bob had command of the situation. Every eye was fixed upon the man in his shirt sleeves.

“I’ve been an agnostic,” Bob continued. “I should be ashamed to say it, but I’m not. It was through this experience here tonight that I found Christ. It has brought me to my senses. Agnosticism doesn’t satisfy. Therefore I’m taking Jesus Christ as my personal Saviour. I’m taking Him because I need Him. I’m guilty of every known sin under the sun, exclusive of highway robbery and arson. I’ve read the Bible from cover to cover. I’ve fought God continually trying to find an excuse for my sins. I’ve tried to read God out of the Bible. I’ve denied the deity of Christ, but thank God, I never rejected the influence of the Holy Spirit! God used my good friend, Captain Stephen Winthrop, here on the platform with me, to convict me of my sins. It was through his testimony that I discovered my lost condition. I discovered that there’s no other way of escape, no hope, no satisfaction, no peace, no happiness without Christ. By your defiance of God tonight, I was brought face to face with myself, a sinner without merit of any kind. By taking Jesus Christ as my personal Saviour I have a new hope, and henceforth I’m going to serve Him as my Lord and Master.”

“Praise God for such a testimony!” John Whyte said humbly.

18. The Man Of Mystery

BOB TRUMAN A CHRISTIAN! Nothing had moved Steve to greater humility. Bob, of all people! Could it be possible that he was sincere? The possibility made Steve speechless with surprise. Bob had been so determined and methodical in his agnostic stand. What had wrought the sudden change?

“Say something. Do something. Act,” a still, small voice urged.

“Go ahead. Make a fool of yourself,” came the counter challenge.

Steve surveyed the crowd around the platform. Anxious faces confronted him—eager faces—puzzled faces—faces that he would never see again. Time was important. Another moment might mean the lost opportunity of a lifetime.

The tempter confronted him again. “You aren’t sure. Why make a fool of yourself? Wait.”

If God be for us, who can be against us? Steve’s confidence was restored. The Scripture reference armed him with a challenge. He stepped to the edge of the truck platform and paused before the waiting throng.

“I don’t want to preach to you. I don’t think that I should preach to you. You don’t know me; I don’t know you,” he said sincerely. “I’m not asking you to believe anything I say. I ask you only to believe what your own heart tells you. If your heart tells you that you are an angel, believe it. I couldn’t change your opinion, anyway.”

Laughter rippled through the crowd.

“But if the Spirit of God whispers in your heart and tells I you that you’re a sinner, believe that also; for you are listening to firsthand evidence of the truth.” Steve lifted his hand. “No one needs to take offense if the shoe doesn’t fit,” he said with a gracious smile.

Steve had won the confidence and good will of the majority before him.

“You heard Bob Truman’s confession of sin tonight. He stands before you saved by the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. I’m not urging any of you to do that which is definitely against your own will and judgment. Perhaps

you'd prefer to have us close the meeting with a song of your own selection."

"Another crackpot preacher," someone scoffed. "He certainly has been talking to me," said the man at his elbow.

"God knows your weakness for sin, your transgressions of the law, your desire to hide your evil acts," Steve continued. "He knows also that there is no cure in the law for the criminal intent of your heart. Ye must be born again!, Accept the Lord Jesus Christ as your personal Saviour, and be set free from sin and death. Stop; think; consider, lest you die in your sins."

An old man raised a bony finger and attempted to speak, but lost his courage and disappeared in the shadow of a near-by building.

"Put a muzzle on the crackpot," said a sullen scoffer.

"Leave him alone; let him go," his companion insisted. "Why get uneasy? It takes a lot of hellfire and brimstone these days to warm the skin of a lot of you hidebound sinners."

"You never melted down very many church pews," his friend retorted.

"At least I go to church every Sunday."

"So do I, but I don't like that kind of preaching."

"You don't have to stand here and listen."

"The only reason you're here is because of the opportunity it gives to brag about how good a Christian you are," said the indignant scoffer. "You don't hear me telling people how pious I am. I don't believe in that kind of preaching."

The meeting was interrupted by the debate. John Whyte closed with prayer and then offered his listeners the opportunity to ask a question which would be answered by someone on the platform.

"Hey there, preacher, why don't you get a church if you want to preach?" someone shouted.

"The Lord commands us to go into all the world and preach the Gospel," Stephen answered.

"Wiseacre."

"What's wrong with the churches?" another wanted to know.

"How about it, Bob? You have the answer to the question. Would you like to answer the question?" Steve turned to his latest convert.

"The crux of the whole matter is the lack of testimony." Bob was thrilled by the opportunity to glorify the Lord with what formerly had been used as an agnostic complaint. "The Christian influence and zeal to serve the Lord

burns only at the wick. There is no oil in the lamp. The only witness is a cold black smudge.”

The old man in the shadows of the building raised a bony finger.

Steve stepped back to the outer edge of the truck platform. He surveyed the crowd before speaking. The hour was getting late. It was unwise to prolong a street meeting.

“This is our first appearance in Los Angeles,” he informed them. “This is Bob Truman’s first appearance at a street meeting. We’re both ex-service men. We’ve been invited to give our life-stories at the mission tomorrow night. I’d like to invite every one of you to come.”

“God have mercy! It’s him! It’s him!” said the old man, waving a bony finger above his head. “It’s him! It’s him! Why should he haunt me so!”

Then he lapsed into unconsciousness.

19. Redeeming The Time

REVEREND STEPHEN WINTHROP and Bob Truman were in Los Angeles for a purpose known only to God and their steps had been directed by Him.

Bob, now a new creature in Christ Jesus, was eager to redeem the time. Ten years of his life had been wasted, given to the devil. How was he to render a just account of such stewardship? The thought was a burden. His influence had misdirected many souls.

John Whyte, sent of God, met Bob the following morning at the rescue mission.

“I’ve been wondering if I might not meet you here sometime today, but I hardly expected you this early. You look sleepy.” Bob greeted him at seven.

“I’ve been up all night,” Mr. Whyte informed him, wearily. “Just came from the hospital. I’ve been there with the old man who passed out at the street meeting last night.”

“I wondered what became of you. I guess Steve didn’t see you leave, either. You must have left in a car with someone,” Bob replied. “What happened to the old fellow?”

“He seems to be an old man of mystery. He has plenty of money, but we can’t identify him, and for some reason he doesn’t want his identity known,” the good Samaritan explained. “He was in such mental distress that I didn’t want to leave him.”

“I noticed last night that he was greatly disturbed.”

“He’s been delirious all night. There is some great burden on his heart,” Mr. Whyte continued. “Some great wrong or injustice that he’s done someone. Is there any possibility that you might know him?”

“I don’t think so; but I’ll go to the hospital and see, if you’d like me to,” Bob assured him.

“Where is Reverend Winthrop?”

“The superintendent of the mission asked Steve to go with him to a radio broadcast.”

“At the Bible school? I should have known,” said Mr. Whyte. “It would be nice to have you go over with me sometime, if you’d care to.”

“Maybe we should go to the hospital.”

A half-hour later the two men visited the strange old man. He was in a talkative mood, and obviously was afraid of death.

“I’m not ready to die,” he insisted. “I don’t want to die. God makes things so hard. I—I mustn’t die.”

“What troubles you so?” Bob asked.

The old man studied his face. “I don’t know you,” he said. “God will never forgive me.”

“Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God.” John Whyte gave him the assurance of the Scriptures —“that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life.”

“Too late! Too late!” He lamented in agony of soul. “Satan torments me so. I can never return. I had my opportunity and said, No. God has forgotten me. God has forgotten—”

The old man lapsed again into unconsciousness. Bob summoned an orderly from the hall.

“There apparently is nothing wrong with him physically,” he volunteered, “but he’s desperately afraid of death. Three of the best doctors in the city have diagnosed the case.”

“Poor soul.” John Whyte breathed a prayer in his behalf.

De profundis. Bob read the Latin phrase scrawled across the upper corner of the old man’s chart.

The orderly, referring to the note, said, “They all agree that he isn’t mentally or physically sick, but laboring under some heart-depressing sorrow that he doesn’t want to talk about.”

“Confession is good for the soul.” Bob testified from experience.

“You don’t know,” said the old man returning to consciousness. “You don’t know me, do you?”

“No,” Bob replied, “I don’t know you.”

“Then forget that you ever saw me.”

“Why should you cover your past?” Bob took his hand and stroked it tenderly. “What you need is the sincere evidence of God’s love.”

“God doesn’t love me. I wouldn’t let Him. He—He has forgotten.”

“You are just out of fellowship with Him.”

“No. He wants me to confess. I can’t confess,” he lamented. “It would ruin my family—everybody.”

“You could be forgiven, if God forgives; he forgives others.”

“If I-should die, no one would know.” He was discussing his problem with himself. “God, why don’t you let me die and forget?”

“God always knows best,” Bob consoled him.

“No one would ever know—but—but—”

“Pitiful, pitiful.” John Whyte addressed the orderly. “I suppose there are hundreds like this old man that are trying to run away from God.”

“Yes, thousands of them,” the orderly replied.

“Yet they must all face a pay day when God reckons time,” said Bob. “I was trying to do the same thing for ten years, but today I can praise Him, for whom the Lord loveth he correcteth.”

“No one will ever know.” The old man was talking to himself again. “No one but God—and—”

“Listen,” Bob addressed him earnestly, placing his hand on the old man’s shoulder as the patient lifted himself to his elbow. “Let’s reason things out: if you should die here today, tomorrow or any day, you could never conceal your identity. The very fact of being unknown, nameless, invites curiosity. Every newspaper in the city would assign reporters to discover who you were. Your picture would be published, your fingerprints taken. Someone would identify you.”

“Reverend Winthrop—God.” The old man lost consciousness again.

“Who is Reverend Winthrop?” asked the orderly.

“Does he know him?” John Whyte turned to Bob with a look of inquiry. “You might have him call and see.”

“He must know Steve,” Bob volunteered. “That throws some light on his strange actions at the street meeting last night. He’s clamoring for recognition, yet fears the consequence of discovery.”

“A very strange case. He certainly is inviting enough scientific attention,” said the orderly. “A couple of psychiatrists will be here in a few minutes to study the case.”

“Will it be all right to bring Reverend Winthrop over?” Bob asked.

“By all means. The specialists no doubt will want to interview him if he should happen to know the old man.”

“I don’t know him. I don’t know him. I don’t know anybody,” the patient moaned. “Don’t let anyone in to see me. I’m a forgotten man. Nobody

knows me.”

“We’ll try and locate Reverend Winthrop,” said Mr. Whyte, stepping into the hall.

“No! No! No!” The voice of the sin-sick old man echoed in the corridor.

20. A Broken Link

CHANGING EVENTS are the fabric of human life. Life never stands still. Even a tree expands and continually sends forth new shoots.

The strange old man invited concern. Who was he? Where did he come from? Why had he suddenly decided to leave the hospital? No one seemed to know anything about him. What was the mystery in his life? Did he know Reverend Winthrop?

“He must have thought he knew Steve,” Bob emphasized at the superintendent’s office, when he and his friend heard about the patient’s mysterious departure the following morning.

“From a casual observation the night of the street meeting, I don’t recall ever having met him,” Steve replied. “I think I’m fairly good at remembering faces, but he fails to register with me.”

“There’s no question about it; from what they tell us here at the hospital, he seems to have gotten away from everybody.”

“He walked out on us during the night,” said the superintendent. “We’re holding nearly a hundred dollars and other personal effects that we hope he’ll call for.”

“You still think he’s mentally normal?” Steve asked.

“The psychologist seems to think so,” replied the superintendent. “His trouble is a fear of being discovered by certain people for some reason known only to himself.”

“Reverend Winthrop is one of those persons evidently,” Bob remarked.

“Apparently.”

“He must think I’m someone else. Is there anything in his personal effects that would indicate where he might go?” Steve was trying to determine possibilities. “An address or picture that would identify him?”

“Not a thing. We’ve checked the Missing Persons Bureau, but they have nothing answering his description,” the superintendent replied. “They weren’t able to help us.”

“What about the police?”

“Record, you mean?”

“Yes.”

“They’re looking for him as a hospital escape. We requested this as a matter of protection in case of a lawsuit. He’s such a queer character that we thought it best to cover all angles. One never knows in this age of rackets what to expect.” The superintendent did not propose to leave any stone unturned. “He may be floating out to sea. We can’t afford to be charged with contributory negligence.”

“There are certainly a lot of queer people in the world,” Bob commented. “I wish I knew what was in the back of the old man’s mind.”

“If he was considered crazy I could understand it,” Steve replied.

“We’re all a bit peculiar.” Bob was thinking of his former agnostic stand. “I’ve been called crazy more than once.”

“That includes all of us, doesn’t it?” Steve asked. “Some of us for running to God for comfort, consolation and protection, and others for running away. We’re all crazy in the eyes of the other fellow, especially those we don’t agree with.”

“That used to be my philosophy,” Bob said truthfully. “But I realize now how much all of us need divine guidance.”

“We surely need supernatural wisdom as to how to help the old man.” Steve was thinking aloud.

“I don’t know of anything more that can be done,” said the superintendent. “I’ll be glad to notify the mission if we have any news about the old gentleman.”

“It looks like a broken link in our chain of events,” said Bob, as they descended the hospital steps. “One thing is sure. We can’t linger here worrying about somebody’s trouble that doesn’t concern us.”

“No, it doesn’t speak well of two ex-service men of our standing to be on the rocks so soon after mustering out of the Army,” said Steve, “but the fact still remains that we’ve got to find jobs.”

“I regret my days of foolishness,” Bob confessed. “The old proverb ‘A fool and his money soon part’ fitted me. My mustering-out pay and the little savings that I had accumulated were spent as the wages of sin. I wish now I’d saved some of my money.”

“Thank God, I’m out of debt, even if it did take all I was able to save in the Army. My education is paid for. All I need now is an opportunity to use it.” Steve reviewed his past for Bob’s benefit. “If I’d known that the country

was going to be tied up with strikes, I would have extended my credit a while longer.”

“O ye of little faith,” Bob reminded him. “Doesn’t the Bible have a verse of Scripture running something like that?”

Steve quoted the last verse in the sixth chapter of Matthew: “Take therefore no thought for the morrow; for the morrow shall take thought of the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.”

Bob automatically fell into military step with him. “I think John Whyte is right: you should be out in full-time Christian service as an evangelist,” he said.

“I’m awaiting the will of the Lord,” Steve replied. Bob had begun to understand what that meant.

21. Ghosts Of The Past

A WESTERN UNION MESSENGER stood talking to John Whyte as Steve and Bob returned to the mission. "There's the man you're looking for," said Whyte, pointing out two men approaching on the sidewalk. "See that handsome fellow on the right in the blue suit?"

"Now what's up?" Bob called, realizing that the messenger boy was waiting for them. "Bad news of some kind, I suppose."

"I have a telegram for Reverend Stephen Winthrop that needs an answer right away," said the boy, approaching Steve with several envelopes. "Are you Reverend Winthrop?"

Steve was grave.

"Yes," he replied thoughtfully, having a premonition of his father's death.

"It isn't a star message, sir," the lad volunteered, reading his thoughts.

Steve signed for the message, tore open the envelope and read the contents.

"There's our friend!" Bob exclaimed excitedly, pointing out into the street. "See that old fellow in the car?"

Steve's face was serious.

"Look, there's the old fellow that escaped from the hospital. He's driving the car that just turned the corner. Why didn't I think to get the license number?" Bob started to run. "Wait," he called. "I'll be right back."

Steve turned and confronted John Whyte. "I'm wanted back home by the police," he said smiling mischievously. "Maybe I should go back. Tell Bob that I've gone to the Western Union office."

A few minutes later he was laboring over the telegram to be sent to Captain Vanderjack. He studied the message which he was to answer, but it gave no concrete information as to why he was wanted as a witness. He turned it face down, then picked it up and decided to read it aloud:

*Reverend Stephen Winthrop
C/O Rescue Mission
Los Angeles, California*

Witnesses advise that you can furnish material evidence in a pending blackmail and extortion case. Urgent that you return immediately. Reservations United Lines arranged at airport. Pick them up. Time is important element. Do not fail me. Come.

CAPTAIN R. J. VANDERJACK

Who were the other witnesses? Who were the parties or party charged with extortion? What material evidence could he furnish in a blackmail case? Why should he return? Steve could not answer any of the questions that ran through his mind. He was certain of just one thing: he would not fail Captain Vanderjack.

Steve called the airport and learned that Flight 44 would leave within the hour. This barely gave him time to notify Bob and reach the airport in time for the flight.

He dashed back to the mission in search of Bob, and called the hospital when he found that his friend had not returned since leaving in quest of the old man. "Something like this would have to happen. What was he going to do?" he complained. He could not wait for Bob. He would have to go and explain later why he had deserted him.

The disappointment was a crushing blow. A feeling of homesickness overcame him. He wanted to talk with Captain Vanderjack. He would know about circumstances at home, the condition of his father's health, the latest developments at First Community Church, who had been selected as the new pastor.

John Whyte shoved a bill into his hand, hailed a cab and saw him leave for the airport. What a consolation to have a Christian friend who understood!

Seated in the cab, Steve let his thoughts turn to Virginia Thyme and Jewell Lombard. He wondered if Virginia was still taking care of his father. Would Jewell be friendly with Virginia and his stepmother? What had happened to Shirley Mason? They were three fine girls, and true friends.

Reaching his destination, he rushed hurriedly to the ticket window, secured his reservations and five minutes later was in the air.

“I wish Bob were along.” He sighed, settling back in his seat and trying to make himself comfortable.

Relaxed, he let his mind carry him back over the events of the day. His thoughts were in disorder. There were so many things he wanted to know, so many questions he could not answer. Why did he have to leave Bob and John, his newfound friends.

Then he remembered what he had tried to forget. He was again confronted by the ghosts of the past that brought unpleasant memories—the spiritual indifference at First Community Church; the scandal attached to his name; his stepmother’s determined attitude; his father’s hopeless condition. He wanted to forget, but he could not.

22. A False Shadow

TWO YOUNG MEN APPROACHED STEVE as he stepped from the incoming plane and hurried toward the transportation office at the airport.

“I’m Detective Derby,” said the first. “You are to accompany us. My partner here, Sergeant Sterling, has a letter of credentials for you. Captain Vanderjack has outlined the instructions he wants you to follow.”

“Let me have your check,” said Sergeant Sterling, handing Steve the letter. “I’ll get your luggage while you satisfy yourself that we aren’t impostors.”

“Captain Vanderjack has arranged accommodations. He has provided a car for you to use while you’re registered at the North Star Motel Court,” Detective Derby explained. “Captain Vanderjack doesn’t think it wise to have you stay in a local hotel. There are too many newspapermen interested in the outcome of this case.”

“I understood that Captain Vanderjack was to meet me.”

“He’s waiting for you at the motel court,” Sergeant Sterling replied.

Detective Derby handed Steve the keys to a late-model coupe. “You’ll enjoy driving this one,” he said. “Are you ready to follow us out to the motel?”

“This has turned out to be a real reception,” said Steve. “I was not sure whether I was to be thrown in jail or not; there has been so much mystery attached to this case, or whatever it is I’m supposed to be here for.”

“Captain Vanderjack is waiting to explain everything.”

“Come on, let’s go,” Sergeant Sterling urged. “Show Reverend Winthrop where his car is parked.”

“Now I’m curious.”

“I’m taking it for granted that you drive,” said Detective Derby, opening the door of a new blue coupe. “Do you suppose you can handle this in traffic?”

“Show me the highway!” Steve’s enthusiasm mounted.

“Get in and take over; I’ll direct you. We’ll follow Sergeant Sterling,” said the detective, taking a seat at Steve’s right.

“You fellows aren’t helping me kidnap myself, are you?” Steve asked.

“I don’t blame you for being suspicious,” his companion replied. “I think I’d wonder myself if someone offered me the same reception. But you don’t have anything to fear.”

“It isn’t exceptionally pleasant to find yourself in the hands of the law. It’s a new experience for me,” Steve replied. “I’m not quite sure yet whether I’m going to enjoy your company or not.”

Thirty minutes later the two cars parked in the yard of a new motel court. Captain Vanderjack came out of the office to meet them.

“Reverend Winthrop thought we were kidnapping him, I guess,” said Detective Derby, putting Steve’s luggage on the porch.

“I wouldn’t blame anyone for being suspicious of a couple of bloodhounds like you two.” Captain Vanderjack laughed. “I’ve been wondering myself for the past hour what happened.”

“We always get our man, Captain. The plane was late.”

“Good. You’re relieved for the next assignment.” He was pleased. “Professor Steel and I have a few things we want to straighten out before he appears in court as a witness.”

“You men are to report at headquarters and remain on call.” Captain Vanderjack addressed the two detectives. “I’ll get in touch with you before I leave for the day.”

“Professor Steel?” Steve faced the captain in quest of information.

Captain Vanderjack laughed. “Come with me, Professor. Let me show you to your new quarters,” he said, enjoying Steve’s perplexity. “You’ll appreciate the joke, too, when I have the opportunity to explain.”

Reverend Winthrop followed Captain Vanderjack to the last motel, and followed the officer in.

“How do you like this?” he asked, and there was a twinkle in his eyes. “Privacy de luxe, isn’t it?”

Steve glanced at the elaborately furnished room. Except for porter service the accommodations provided all that one might find in a hotel. “That tile bath and shower looks good,” he said. “If I didn’t have to meet Professor Steel, I might be tempted to chase you out.”

Captain Vanderjack laughed heartily. “You’re a hard one to fool, I see. I’m glad that you do a little thinking for yourself. Maybe you’re in the

wrong field. Maybe you should have been a detective instead of a minister. Let's have a chair and talk things over."

"At your service, sir." Steve laughed with him. "I want to find out why I'm here."

"You're Professor George Steel," he began, "that is, you're registered here under that name. Every newspaperman in town is on your trail looking for an interview. I purposely arranged to have you brought here to keep you away from advance publicity."

"I see."

"The story about your being photographed with a girl in your arms has leaked out. There are two angles: one newspaper is dangerously anxious to cover up the story and protect their photographer, as we've charged him with extortion and blackmail."

"Wh——"

"Wait. The other papers are just as anxious to get your side of the story and propagate a scandal."

"Wh——"

"We're holding the woman who stole the pose with you in the picture."

Steve's face was troubled.

"Just a minute, son. I urged you to return for two reasons: first, to help us convict a couple of crooks, and second, to clear your name and protect your character." Captain Vanderjack was earnest. "This community needs you. I wouldn't be your friend if I let you flee from a false shadow."

"The shadow proved painfully realistic to me," Steve commented. "I thought it wise to get as far away from it as possible."

"Certainly, at the time, yes. It was the wise thing to do," said the Captain, "but the scene has changed. The wise thing now is to return and vindicate yourself."

"If it can be done."

"It can be done. The truth of the matter is: it is going to be done." Captain Vanderjack's enthusiasm was high. "You're Professor George Steel because I'm not going to have a bunch of publicity hounds ruin a perfectly good case. That's why I brought you out to this motel and gave you a car for your own use. No one would think of looking for you out here."

"Thanks, Captain. I think I'm beginning to see the light."

"Good. All you have to do is to lay low until the date of trial."

"Who are the parties that you have in custody, if I may ask?"

“You’ll be surprised: Clarence Arbutt and Mildred Tackels.”

“You mean Deacon Arbutt’s son? I don’t know the girl.”

“She doesn’t know you, but since she’s found out who you were, she has proved to be a real friend,” the Captain explained. “Yes, it’s Deacon Arbutt’s son, Clarence, that she’s mixed up with in the Dr. Johnson blackmail case.”

“I hadn’t heard about it. Where am I in the picture?” Steve asked. “How can I testify to something I don’t know about?”

“You can identify the girl as the one appearing with you in the pictures, and testify to the circumstances under which they were taken,” Captain Vanderjack explained patiently. “She’ll substantiate your story of being framed for the picture and how she came to be a party to the plot.”

“Which implicates Clarence Arbutt—”

“Exactly. He was the photographer in both cases.”

“Dr. Johnson—”

“Yes, Arbutt used her in the same way to take a picture with Dr. Hubert Johnson,” said the captain, “but he made the mistake of trying to extort money from the doctor by threatening exposure once too often.”

“By mail, I suppose—”

“No, Arbutt was too smart for that.” Captain Vanderjack proceeded to explain fully. “He used the unique system of setting the story of the doctor’s supposed clandestine affair in type. It was then submitted to him confidentially with the offer to have the story squashed for a consideration. Dr. Johnson, realizing that the story, true or false, would ruin him professionally, entered into an agreement to pay five hundred dollars to have it suppressed. The story, of course, didn’t appear in the paper, and the money was paid at the time stated. Dr. Johnson received the canceled galley sheets and the pictures which he promptly destroyed.”

“How did you secure evidence—” A vivid panorama of the circumstances involving himself and the two conspirators flashed across Steve’s mind.

“Arbutt became money-hungry. He couldn’t leave well enough alone; the first five hundred came so easy he went back after more, using the negative of the picture to exact his price for silence. Dr. Johnson got suspicious and called me.” Captain Vanderjack explained modestly, “We just let him walk into a trap set with his own bait, and the rest was easy.”

“After he unexpectedly found the police waiting for him—”

“He didn’t appreciate the surprise, I assure you.” The Captain smiled. “Then the fun began. You never saw so much fancy fencing on legal technicalities trying to evade the law! The rights of a newspaperman to gather news and take the pictures he may choose are unlimited in scope if one bows to the opinions of some of our promising attorneys.”

“Who’s this Mildred Tackels?” Steve was seeking the tie between the two defendants. “Do you expect to convict her, too?”

“She has already pleaded guilty as an accessory before the fact and is waiting to take the stand as a witness against Arbutt,” the Captain continued. “This poor girl is a victim of circumstances, one of the many whose misplaced trust led her into difficulty. After sacrificing all for love, she found herself destitute and alone in the toils of the law with a deceitful companion who deserted her in an effort to save himself. She didn’t know Arbutt was married until after their arrest.”

“In which case he invites a woman’s scorn.” Steve understood the setting.

“Yes, human nature runs true to form. She was crushed with humiliation. Revengeful anger was her only defense when she learned how he’d deceived her. The worm turned when she realized that she had been used merely as a tool to serve Arbutt’s own selfish ends,” Captain Vanderjack outlined clearly. “She got no money from the transaction. Arbutt refused even to contribute toward the expense of an attorney for her as a matter of his own defense; he claimed that he acted only as an agent in securing news. Consequently, he’s on her black list.”

“I suppose I’ll have to face her in court.”

“You have nothing to fear now,” he assured him. “You’ll be the most interested spectator there, when you hear her story. Her one ambition is to vindicate you and Dr. Johnson.”

“Dr. Johnson?”

“Yes, her testimony will clear up the damaging evidence of the pictures.”

“I’ll be glad when it’s over.”

“You’ll never be sorry that you faced the issue like a man.” Captain Vanderjack visualized the outcome with pride. “It may prove embarrassing to review the unpleasant scene in court; but you’ll congratulate yourself when you reap the benefit from this contribution to justice.”

Before they parted, Steve and Captain Vanderjack came to a definite understanding of what was expected of each witness. The veteran officer had

made detailed plans. He had successfully hidden Steve in a motel court just outside the county to await the eventful day in court when he would be called upon to give testimony. The car would permit him to visit his most trusted friends, drive to and from home and arrange a schedule for securing his meals. His chief concern was to avoid contact with anyone who would; betray him to newspaper reporters.

Would the plan be successful?

23. Running The Gauntlet

REVEREND STEPHEN WINTHROP tired of the monotony of living the life of a recluse the second day after establishing residence at the motel. “I think I’ll run in and see Father tonight,” he said, speaking by telephone to Captain Vanderjack. “I’ve followed your instructions to the letter and nothing has happened. I haven’t even seen the shadow of anything suspicious.”

“That’s fine; we don’t want anything to happen,” replied the captain patiently. “We can’t afford exposure now.”

“I understand that.”

“You may expect to be called Monday,” the captain informed him.

“I just talked with Virginia.”

“So I understand.”

Steve gasped.

“She says that someone has been calling for me on the telephone,” he explained.

Captain Vanderjack laughed, then interjected, “Some newspaper reporter. I just talked with Miss Thyme myself; she told me how persistent they were in trying to locate you.”

“Virginia thinks it would be O.K. to come in for a late dinner” Steve argued. “I can go in the back way. The newspaper reporters haven’t surrounded the house have they?”

“They would surround it if they thought you were there.”

“Father—”

“You’re sure that the attraction isn’t Virginia?” Captain Vanderjack teased. “I don’t know as I blame you for running the gauntlet.”

Steve was perturbed.

“Well,” he said, trying to hide his disappointment, “I suppose Father can wait.”

Captain Vanderjack sensed that Steve was in no mood for joking.

“Call me after you visit your father,” he said graciously. “Nothing like being prepared in the event you’re asked about the visit on the witness

stand.”

“Would you advise me not to go?”

“Not necessarily. I just want to keep in touch with you,” the captain replied. “I’ll be at the office until ten-thirty.”

“I’ll report before then.”

“Fine, Steve. Give my best regards to your father and Miss Thyme.”

Steve caught the amusement in Captain Vanderjack’s tone as he hung up the receiver.

“He wouldn’t think it was so funny if he was out here holed up in this motel court,” he grumbled, trying to figure out why the captain was trying to rib him. “If I were smart I’d still be in Los Angeles.”

Steve swung the new coupe from the motel drive into the highway and fought his way through traffic for three miles, then swung from the main highway into an angling lane that wound its way for half a mile in a semi-circle around a new subdivision. Ten minutes later he left the coupe parked in the shadow of a dark side street directly behind the First Community Church parsonage.

Conforming to the habit formed while he was pastor at the church, he walked through a alley alongside the building. Lights in the basement assured him that there was a meeting in progress.

“Praise God!” he said, stopping before a partially-open window and gazing down upon a happy group of young people participating in a Gospel service. “Things seem to have changed since I left.”

Steve saw that Jewell Lombard and Philip Hartley were conducting the service. Jewell was at the piano almost directly under the window where he stood, and Phil was addressing the group from an improvised pulpit on the platform at Jewell’s right.

A pang of jealousy stirred Steve as happy smiles of cooperation were exchanged between the two leaders. He was an outcast. Someone had started a project that had been his soul-inspired ambition. How had they gained his stepmother’s consent? His efforts had always met with cold indifference. He wondered who the new pastor was.

A man approached on the sidewalk and, hesitating, watched the figure in front of the window. Steve hurried away. It would not do to have anyone stop him. He felt like a hunted animal as he turned in the alley and walked past his father’s back gate. There was a light in an upstairs bedroom. Vir-

ginia Thyme passed in front of the window with a tray. She was serving his father's evening meal.

Steve continued down the alley past several houses, walked between two that were unlighted, and was suddenly confronted by a car approaching him in the driveway. He did not dare to show alarm. Walking past the car with his head down, he turned out upon the sidewalk and continued around the block. The same strange man stood on the sidewalk under a street lamp two hundred feet from his parked car.

"Two can play the game of strategy, if that's your motive," Steve murmured. "I'll soon find out if you're checking on me."

He stepped off the curb and jaywalked across to the opposite corner. The man sauntered at an angle toward him. Steve turned the corner and hurried around the block. As he again approached the church, he stepped into the shadows and waited. There was a trace of cigar smoke in the air, but a careful search revealed no smoker.

Certain that no one lurked in the vicinity, he stepped to the sidewalk and hurried past the church into the alley. The coast was clear when he again reached the rear gate of the family residence.

A minute later Virginia Thyme admitted him at the back door.

She flashed an understanding smile, placed her forefinger across her lips and whispered, "Your stepmother—you'd better see her; she's in the front room."

Janet Winthrop met him in the study doorway.

"Well," she said, with an air of indignant surprise, "so you decided to come home?"

"Hello, Mother." He ignored her cutting remark. "You're looking well. How is Father tonight?"

"A lot you know or care about your father or how I look," she complained. "When we needed you the most, you weren't interested."

"Please, Mother—"

"You don't need to 'Mother' me. You can go back out to the kitchen. You wouldn't be here if Virginia wasn't out there." She surveyed him jealously. "You had plenty of time to call her and talk for half an hour."

"But you weren't here when I called."

"You didn't want to talk to me, anyway."

"I'm sorry, Mother, if I offended you. I never dreamed—"

“You never did anything else but dream. It was nothing but an idle dream that started you off across the country barnstorming your way from pillar to post. Now you come back and hang around town for two or three days. You’re too busy to call or come near until you find out that I’m going to be away for a few hours.”

“Captain Vanderjack—”

“I know all about Captain Vanderjack. Everybody has been calling here for you. They all seem to know you’re in town except me and your father. Chase clear across the country from Los Angeles, for I don’t know what—some kind of subpoena. Every newspaper reporter in town has called here insisting that I knew where you were. Because I didn’t know they think I’ve been lying. Your father and I have had enough trouble without this. You went away and left us. Why didn’t you stay?”

“I’m sorry, Mother, to find you so upset. I thought that Captain Vanderjack had explained.”

“He hasn’t done anything but explain,” she stormed. “Everybody has explained, but no one tells me anything. I don’t know yet why you’re here. I don’t know why the newspapermen want to get in touch with you. I don’t know why you didn’t come home like any decent son would have done. I don’t know anything but trouble, trouble. And you’re to blame for all of it. Now you’re whining about being sorry.”

Steve eyed her sympathetically.

“Mother,” he said tenderly.

“Stephen Winthrop, don’t call me ‘Mother,’” she retorted. “You haven’t any right to call me ‘Mother.’ I’m not your mother and you know it.”

“You’ve been a mother to me—the only mother I ever knew,” he said, his eyes reflecting how he had been hurt. “May I go up and see Father a little while?”

The pathos in his voice touched her.

Janet Winthrop was fighting with herself. Inwardly she was grievously sorry, but she was not reconciled to an outward show of feelings. Expressing her thoughts was her way of vindicating her ideas. Her greatest pleasure came when she was humoring her own convictions. Later there would be satisfaction in voicing a compromising apology, an apology disguised in repentance and motivated by self-pity.

Steve spent a half-hour at his father’s bedside. It was difficult for the older man to talk, but he enjoyed the companionship of his son. There had

always been a mutual understanding between them, and they agreed concerning the fundamentals of Christianity. They understood each other and found satisfaction and happiness together. Both had firm faith in God and His promises.

Though hope was dim in the old man's eyes, he rejoiced in the fulfillment of God's promises for his son. His boy was to carry on in his place. There had been disappointments, many of them caused by the attitude of his wife, whose Christian convictions had been a matter of much controversy. But Steve was a son who brought joy to a father who loved the Lord.

He had married unwisely when he chose the second Mrs. Winthrop as his wife. Her name was not mentioned; it was too late to make amends. But the father and the son understood each other.

Janet swept into the room. Her manner has changed surprisingly.

"Dinner is ready now, Stephen" she said sweetly. "Virginia has prepared a special salad for you. Daddy will excuse you while you eat, won't you?"

She emphasized her remarks by going to the invalid and stroking his brow.

The stricken man murmured a reply and reached for her hand. His long illness had made him devotedly grateful. He had long since accepted his burden as a cross to bear for His Lord.

Following an appetizing dinner and a congenial hour of fellowship around the table, they were interrupted by the telephone.

Mrs. Winthrop answered.

"It's for you, Steve," she said. "Captain Vanderjack wants to talk to you."

Steve acknowledged the call.

"Listen," Captain Vanderjack cautioned, "someone is checking on your car number. You left it parked back of the church."

"Yes."

"I called to advise you not to go near the car."

Steve explained the circumstances that he had encountered at the time he parked.

"I don't know exactly what their move is," said the captain, "but the idea is to be careful. Don't let them surprise you. I'd rather order the car towed in than take any chance."

"You can leave that to me. I'll take care of the situation," said Steve, thanking him for the call. "I think I can manage things O.K. at this end."

“Whatever you do, be careful.”

“I’ll call when I get back to the motel.”

“Would you do a favor for me?” he asked, turning to Virginia.

“If it’s in my power.”

“Here are the keys to a blue coupe parked on the street directly back of the First Community Church. Would you mind driving the car around for a few minutes and parking it elsewhere a few blocks from where it is now?” Steve asked seriously. “I know it seems like a cowardly thing to do, but I don’t want to take a chance on being discovered.”

“Suppose I pick you up at the end of the alley north of State Street opposite the city park,” she suggested. “I’ll drive past and continue on around the park. You can see if anyone tries to follow me.”

“I’d better give you the registration slip for the car in case anyone should stop you,” he said, handing her a paper. “It seems like an imposition to ask you to do this.”

“You didn’t ask me.” She smiled. “I’m merely volunteering my services to repay a debt of gratitude.”

“If anyone tries to follow you—”

“Don’t worry. I’ll head straight for Captain Vanderjack’s office,” she interjected. “I don’t think anyone would want to follow me into the police station!”

“Good idea.”

He opened the door for her and stood behind the curtain as she disappeared down the front walk.

Twenty minutes later Steve stood beside a telephone pole at the mouth of the alley waiting for Virginia to drive around the park.

24. Furious Living

VIRGINIA THYME and Jewell Lombard were detained by a newspaper reporter for the *Evening Mail* as they approached the blue coupe that Steve had left on the street at the rear of the First Community Church.

“I presume you were attending the Youth meeting tonight?” he asked, using this excuse to open the conversation. “Who can give me a story of the meeting?”

“Phil Hartley has always given you the details, hasn’t he?” Jewell countered. “I think you’ll find that he’s ready to leave the church now.”

“This’s his car, isn’t it?” he asked bluntly. “I’ll wait for him here.”

“You’ll be waiting a long time.” She ignored his direct question. “I’m going to drive Virginia around by the house before I go home.”

“You—I didn’t know that you had a new car.”

Jewell stepped around Virginia and tapped her on the arm.

Virginia took the cue and slipped the car registration and keys into Jewell’s open palm.

Jewell opened her purse and, apparently indifferent to those about her, searched it. She flipped out the keys, stepped over to the coupe and unlocked the door. While she was lifting the release on the opposite door lock, her eyes searched the panel dash for the ignition switch.

“You get in here and I’ll go around on the other side.” Jewell smiled at Virginia.

“I thought maybe you were going to let me drive.” Virginia laughed. “I’ve always wanted to own a car like this.”

The reporter stood beside the open door and deliberately attempted to prolong the conversation.

“How do you like the new model?” he asked, watching Jewell insert the key and snap on the ignition switch. “What mileage do you get?”

Jewell pressed the starter button and the motor started obediently.

“You’d better run along, my good friend, if you expect to contact Mr. Hartley at the church,” she urged. “It’s time Virginia was home getting

her beauty sleep.”

The reporter backed away as the car started. Virginia pulled the door shut and left the bewildered reporter standing on the curb watching them until they turned the corner. Jewell turned left at the next corner and doubled back for two blocks to determine if they were being followed.

“There’s no one in sight,” Virginia observed. “It should be safe now to pick up Steve.”

They circled the city park and stopped momentarily at the appointed place. Steve stepped out of the shadows as the car door swung open to admit him.

With a sigh of relief he settled back in the seat as the three sped away.

“Very cleverly arranged,” he commented, when the girls outlined their experience of the evening. “Now comes the question of getting you girls home without running into half a dozen newspaper reporters. I’m getting sick of being chased like a hunted fox.”

“There’s a lot of satisfaction in being foxy enough to outsmart them.” Virginia looked appreciatively at the driver. “You can be thankful that I ran into Jewell when I did tonight.”

“Virginia wasn’t so slow at playing the real counterpart.” Jewell laughed. “I thought for a minute that she was going to shut that snoopy news reporter’s nose in the door when we drove away.”

“I wonder if he’s still there waiting for us to come back.” Virginia was apprehensive. “We can thank God that we left him standing like a statue watching his shadow.”

“We won’t take any chances tonight.” Jewell addressed Steve. “I’ll drive over and pick up Father’s car and take Virginia home.”

“And leave me to shift for myself, I take it,” Steve cupped his chin in his hand. “What have I done to deserve being deserted by two beautiful girls?”

“You should be thankful that you’ve been kidnapped and released uninjured,” Jewell teased. “It doesn’t often happen that way in real life.”

“There may be internal injuries,” he complained.

“—of the imagination,” Virginia added.

“It could be a delusion”—Jewell glanced in the rear-view mirror—“but I want to be sure that we aren’t being followed.”

Virginia laughed.

Jewell suddenly drove slowly and turned into a side drive.

“Just when I was enjoying being kidnapped,” Steve lamented.

Jewell parked the car and gave the keys to Virginia. “Whose car is this, anyway?” She laughed. “I want to be sure I return it to the legal owner.”

The three chatted a moment. Then Jewell left to get her father’s car.

Virginia dropped the keys into Steve’s hand. “You’ve shown us a very exciting and adventurous evening,” she said. “How does it seem to be kid-napped?”

“You wouldn’t appreciate the explanation unless I turned the tables.” He laughed. “May I reserve the privilege of answering that question later?”

Virginia hesitated, trying to frame an answer.

“I’ll expect it the next time you come for dinner,” she replied. “The trial will be over soon. Then you’ll be free to come and go as you please.”

“I wonder—”

She stepped from the car and searched for the proper reply. “One never knows in this age of furious living what to expect next,” he added as an afterthought.

“Be of good courage, and he shall strengthen your heart, all ye that hope in the Lord.” Virginia quoted the reference of encouragement. “God is waiting to show you your place of service for Him.”

“Forgive me, Virginia,” he said. “I’m ashamed for being such a weakling. I have no right to complain.”

“Trust and obey,” she said as they parted.

Steve backed the blue coupe from the drive and waited until Jewell followed with her father’s car. As the two girls swung past him he waved and waited until two other cars passed. He was determined to take no chances.

25. The Court Drama

THE COURTROOM WAS ELECTRIC as the bailiff ordered the spectators to stand while Judge Denstead marched from the chambers at the rear of the bench.

Curious eyes surveyed the two defendants as they took their places and stood behind their attorneys at the counselor's table. The trial was unique because the case involved two trials in one. Both defendants were charged jointly with blackmail and extortion. However, the complaint had been amended to provide for a plea of guilty on the part of Mildred Tackels as an accessory before the fact. Clarence Arbutt stood alone in his own defense, having entered a plea of not guilty to any part of the charge. It was the duty of a jury to decide the responsibility of each of the defendants. Consequently, the defense attorneys were fighting a dual battle, as they had to defend their clients not only from the charge of the prosecution but the counter charges of an opposing defense attorney.

The battle of wits between the prosecution and the divided defense was about to begin. The air was tense. Eager spectators who had followed the newspaper account of the circumstances were on hand for the court drama.

Judge Denstead, solemn, dignified and wearing his long black robe, stood beside the judicial chair while the bailiff intoned the formula announcing the session of the court.

A murmur of excitement spread through the court as Judge Denstead banged the gavel and sat down.

"Are you ready to proceed, Mr. Prosecutor?" the court asked.

"I am, Your Honor."

"Do we have a jury this morning, Mr. Clerk?"

"The court officer has a panel waiting, Your Honor."

"I understand that the defense is ready. Bring in the jurors and proceed."

Additional spectators crowded the aisles and the back of the courtroom as they awaited development of the trial. New arrivals, anxious to see the newspaperman on trial, craned their necks and discussed possibilities.

A crash of the gavel on the marble slab before the judge restored order, and the monotony of selecting a jury continued.

The morning wore on and the court adjourned for recess following the attorneys' agreement on the panel.

"Are both sides satisfied with the jury?" The court addressed the attorneys, when the court reconvened.

Answers in the affirmative assured him that they had reached an agreement.

"You will arise and be sworn," the court ordered, addressing the jury. The drama of entangling evidence, as one witness followed another, kept the spectators tense. The wrangle of attorneys added excitement. Captain Vanderjack had prepared his case well. Every detail tending to incriminate the defendants was presented methodically. The prosecution determined to spare no effort in this case filled with technicalities. All were arming for the battle in which the State was fighting a newspaper syndicate to determine where license ended and justice began.

Clarence Arbutt, arrogant and defiant, seemed indifferent to the drama about him as he faced the jury. He studied the jurors coldly and mechanically, and gave each a convict-me—if-you-dare look.

Judge Denstead, with a placid air of assurance, ruled calmly. He was determined that no reversible error should creep into the trial. His sole duty was to see that justice was served in a manner that would draw no criticism from a fair-minded public nor technical objections from the opposing press. He was a judge of facts only.

Steve was the last witness called for the prosecution.

Objections by defense attorneys as to his right to testify entailed extended legal argument. It was late afternoon before Stephen was permitted to give a resumé of his experience the night he was photographed with a girl in his arms.

The State prepared to rest their case following Steve's identification of two pictures marked "Exhibit A" and "Exhibit B."

"Your witness," said the prosecutor, turning to Attorney Clark who represented Clarence Arbutt.

"Now, Reverend Winthrop"—Attorney Clark began the cross examination—"let's see, your full name is Reverend Stephen J. Winthrop, is it not? And as a minister of the Gospel, you desire to tell the truth; and in telling the truth, you want to convey all the facts to the jury. Is that correct?"

“I certainly do.”

“You certainly do; of course you do,” Attorney Clark emphasized clearly, turning to confront the jury.

Judge Denstead looked over his glasses at the prosecutor and invited an objection.

The prosecuting attorney, wise to the strategy of the courtroom, ignored the play.

“Now, Reverend Winthrop,” Attorney Clark continued, “isn’t it a fact that you went to the southeast corner of Thirteenth and High Streets on the night in question?”

“Yes, sir.”

“And, isn’t it a fact also that you went voluntarily? You can answer that question ‘Yes’ or ‘No.’”

“I went at the invitation—”

“Yes or no?” Attorney Clark thundered. “You went voluntarily of your own free will and accord now didn’t you? Yes or No?”

“I was invited—”

“Certainly you were invited! And you went voluntarily just as other young men might go to this section of the city after midnight, didn’t you?”

“I went—”

“Now, isn’t this correct? You went, as you testified, alone in the early morning hours to confront a girl whom you claim you did not know.”

“That is correct. I was called as a minister.”

“A minister. Now, Reverend Winthrop, isn’t it strange and unusual for a minister to go out alone after midnight to meet a strange girl?”

“A minister accepts emergency calls like a doctor—”

“Are you sure it was an emergency?” Attorney Clark asked sarcastically.

“I was so informed.”

“Now, Reverend Winthrop,” Attorney Clark drawled, “will you please explain to the judge and the jury what kind of emergency existed that occasioned you to take a strange young lady in your arms at such an unreasonable hour?”

“I walked into a trap,” Steve replied honestly.

Attorney Clark hesitated. The reply was unexpected. A moment passed, and in that moment the jury became curious. What was the strategy? Was Attorney Clark sincere in his allegations? Was Reverend Winthrop playing a game of deception? Would the defendants be able to vindicate themselves

in face of the charges against them? What would happen if they failed to take the stand in their own defense?! There were questions of doubt on both sides.

The defense made a dramatic appeal based on the right of free speech and upon the merits of a news-gathering, fact-finding reporter's liberties. Clarence Arbutt took the stand and refuted Dr. Johnson's testimony as well as that of all the corroborating witnesses. He was followed by numerous character witnesses who established the ethics of a newspaper and the right of freely gathering and publishing news.

On behalf of the defendant the defense contended that he was merely the agent for a newspaper syndicate and, therefore, not guilty of willful wrongdoing. The money transaction was alleged to be a legitimate advertising purchase on Dr. Johnson's part, the contract still being in the process of negotiation. The proper recourse, therefore, was not procedure at criminal law, but civil action. Mildred Tackels, as Captain Vanderjack predicted, proved to be the key witness. She took the stand in her own defense, to rebut the reporter's testimony. Her frank, sincere and uncompromising testimony immediately gained favor with the jury. She was an innocent victim of circumstances, deceived into aiding and abetting a plot to blackmail Dr. Johnson. Her open and frank testimony concerning her part in the plan to humiliate Reverend Stephen Winthrop held the jury spellbound. Deceived in love, she became an unsuspecting and willing tool in the hands of one wise in the ways of the underworld. She could only place herself at the mercy of the court. Her attorney set the stage for her acquittal before the jury, but it was too late. The law was specific. Her plea of guilty as an accessory before the fact established a mandatory conviction. Her testimony was vital. While the truth might clear her in the eyes of the jury, the cold, heartless fact of law excused no one. There was no other way to present the case to gain favor with the court and the jury.

It was a clever move on the part of Attorney Hawley, an unsuspected move that earned a suspended sentence for his client, Mildred Tackels, and the popular approval of the court, the prosecutor and law enforcement officials.

Clarence Arbutt and Attorney Clark reviewed the case with misgivings as the jury retired to the jury room. They had relied upon the influence of a newspaper syndicate to mold public opinion and define justice. A young upstart of an attorney had dared to oppose them. He had dared to expose all

the facts and bring the testimony to a climax which removed all uncertainty from the minds of the jurors.

Anything might happen now. Clarence Arbutt, his face grave, his eyes solemn, awaited the verdict of the jury. The first half-hour passed and brought hopeful relief. Time was an element in his favor. Every minute the jury remained in deliberation added possibilities of a disagreement or an acquittal.

Spectators in the courtroom drifted away, uneasy because of the lapse of time. Judge Denstead retired to his office for a conference. Court attendants impatiently watched the clock for the hour of adjournment.

Suddenly the outer courtroom door opened and an old man, haggard, travel worn and weary, shuffled down the center aisle and studied the faces of those present. A young man at his elbow tried to pacify him, urging him to find a seat.

“My boy! My boy!” the old man exclaimed mournfully, scrutinizing the nerve-worn defendant sitting alone beside the counselor’s table.

The young man placed his hand on his arm to prevent him from climbing over the barrier rail.

“My boy! My boy!” wailed the old man, stumbling around the end of the rail and staggering forward.

Clarence Arbutt rose, defiant, and as haggard as his father.

“What are you doing here?” he demanded.

“Don’t. Don’t.” The old man stopped and faced his son. “I know you hate me, but—but don’t look at me so. I’m guilty. I’m guilty. I came clear from California to tell the judge. I’m guilty. I’m guilty. I came to go to jail for you.”

“Shut up!” Clarence Arbutt hissed sternly. “You’re crazy. You don’t know what you’re saying.”

Bob Truman caught the old man in his arms as he tottered backward.

“Who are you?” Clarence Arbutt was unmoved. “What did you bring him here for? Take him away. Get him out of here; this is my own affair. I’ll take care of it.”

The court attendants crowded forward. Judge Denstead and Attorney Clark appeared in the doorway of the judge’s private office.

Steve rose and stepped up behind Bob.

“Avoid a scene here if possible,” he whispered, then added aloud, “I’ll help you carry him into the hall. Call a doctor, please,” he said to a young

man standing at his elbow.

The bailiff appeared and announced that the jury had reached an agreement and were ready to return their verdict.

“Bring them in,” Judge Denstead ordered.

The jury filed into the jury box.

“Have you reached a verdict in this case?” the court asked.

“We have,” replied the foreman.

“What is your verdict?”

“We find the defendant, Clarence Arbutt, guilty as charged, Your Honor.”

26. Without A Pilot

THE FIRST COMMUNITY CHURCH was ablaze with light. The number of cars parked in the vicinity was unusually large. The service was unique. The pews were full, and many in the congregation carried Bibles. A call had been made for prayer. An occasion had arisen which demanded intercession. A special request had aroused their imagination and curiosity and the membership wanted firsthand knowledge of the intricate secret behind the meeting.

Dame Gossip carried the news of Deacon Tracy Arbutt's return, his appeal to Judge Denstead in behalf of his son, his connection with the facts concerning the trial and his special request for a meeting of the membership of First Community Church. She was busy, this messenger, Dame Gossip, who had wrought such havoc in the church. All her forces were marshaled for a new attempt to defeat the purposes of God.

Bob Truman, the only person foreign to the membership, sat beside Deacon Arbutt at the front of the church. Steve sat across the aisle at the right of Deacon Webster. Janet Winthrop and Deacon Stillwater occupied seats three rows behind Jewell Lombard who sat in front of them at the piano. Philip Hartley was in charge of the song service.

Following a half-hour of praise and song, ringing with a resounding testimony to the glory of God, Phil Hartley announced that in the absence of a pastor, Deacon Webster would assume charge of the service.

Deacon Webster rose, Bible in hand, and took his place before the pulpit on the platform.

"I want to call your attention to a verse of Scripture which will enlighten you as to the purpose of this meeting tonight," he said, studying the crowd with grave concern. "But before I read from the Sacred Word, I have this confession to make. I have been ashamed of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. I have failed in respect to reading the Bible. Many of you never saw me with a Bible in my hand. I have been a carnal Christian, of which I am deeply ashamed.

“Deacon Arbutt’s return has brought us to the crossroads in our church policy concerning which you, as members, are to sit in judgment,” he continued. “You are the judge and the jury. You have been called here to decide prayerfully the future road we shall take.”

The congregation relaxed.

“May I suggest the verse of Scripture to point the way,” he said, turning the leaves of his Bible to the thirteenth chapter of Romans. With his finger on the twelfth verse, he read, “The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light.”

Two girls came in and were seated in chairs placed in the aisle.

“I shall now call upon Deacon Arbutt to assist you in deciding the course you may wish to follow.” Deacon Webster was deeply moved. “May God speak to you through him.”

“I’m an old man,” said Deacon Arbutt, leaning over the pulpit for support. “I’ve traveled a long way in life. I’ve been without a pilot. The course has been crooked. I’ve led many astray.”

The old man’s voice broke.

“My—my only son faces state prison. You are without a pastor because of my sin,” he continued. “I have been haunted, haunted, haunted. I tried to run away from God. I had no peace of heart or soul or mind. I prayed for death to cover up my sin, but God would not listen. Instead, he sent Reverend Stephen Winthrop to pursue me, to torment my soul with the memory of the injustice which others had suffered at my hand. I was so black with guilt that I couldn’t think. I prayed to undo the past, but God wouldn’t forgive me because I wouldn’t repent of my sin.”

The congregation leaned breathlessly forward. The church was silent while the old man struggled to regain his composure.

“Then my boy continued in my footsteps,” the aged deacon continued. “The example I set to disgrace Reverend Winthrop became a tool in his hand, a tool for the devil to use to get him into state prison. The sins of the father were revealed in the son. My boy isn’t a bad boy. He’d never have thought of taking the pictures if I hadn’t suggested the idea. He never would have attempted to blackmail Dr. Johnson if I hadn’t invited him into the plot to bring the curse of disgrace on Reverend Winthrop.”

The agony of the old man’s soul brought tears into the eyes of those in the congregation.

“I’m guilty before God and man,” he sobbed. “I come to seek your forgiveness, thanks to Bob Truman who prayed for this victory. I had no peace of heart or mind until I met him. God sent him to talk to my soul. He convinced me that God loves sin-sick sinners who repent of their sins.”

“Praise God!” A voice from the audience relieved the tension.

“I want you to meet Bob Truman. He drove me back from California,” said the prodigal deacon. “Come up here, Bob, and tell them how you found God and how God found me.

Bob rose with his Bible under his arm and mounted the platform. Solemnly he placed his hand on the old man’s shoulder and surveyed the congregation.

Deacon Arbutt seemed to regain courage as he introduced Bob and told of his experience in meeting him.

Bob acknowledged the introduction by complimenting Deacon Arbutt’s sincerity and humility of spirit. He explained how he had met their former pastor and the circumstances which led to his conversion at Los Angeles.

“God has indeed been more than gracious to me,” he said. “I praise Him for this opportunity of bringing tidings of the good news of salvation. I thank God that he permitted Reverend Stephen Winthrop to cross my path with God’s promises of eternal life. I want to thank God also for a pleasant surprise tonight—a surprise that I trust is as mutually pleasant to one in the congregation as it is to me.” Bob faced the piano. “Your pianist well remembers my ungodly atheistic stand in college. She knows that curse from which I was saved. Would you permit me to ask her to sing, Jesus Paid It All as my testimony here tonight?”

Jewell Lombard’s voice vibrated with God’s love. She poured out her soul in a song of rejoicing for an ungodly college classmate who had repented.

The spirit of the song gripped the congregation.

“Thank you, Miss Lombard. It’s a pleasure to hear you sing again.” Bob complimented her. “Would to God that everyone here were thrilled with the assurance that Jesus paid it all!”

“Perhaps there are others who would like to give their testimonies and praise God for some particular blessing or experience,” Deacon Arbutt suggested. “This is an informal meeting in which we shall look to the Spirit of the Lord to lead.”

In rapid succession a dozen young people offered their simple testimonies of praise and thanksgiving for that which the Lord had made possible in their lives.

Deacon Stillwater's eyes filled with tears as he leaned forward in his seat to catch every word.

Janet Winthrop was noticeably perturbed. Why didn't they get around to the business of the evening? Why give so much time to a group of young people? What was Deacon Arbutt's objective in calling such a meeting? Why the air of mystery.

Janet was puzzled. There had been a tremendous change at the church since Steve left. Naturally, he was to blame for the discord. He had rightfully earned the criticism. No wonder the membership was unable to agree on a pastor! There were still possibilities, but who would accept a call under existing conditions? What could Deacon Arbutt expect to gain by calling a meeting such as this?

Deacon Arbutt was also aware of the fact that the meeting was significant. Could he overcome the opposition allied against him? He was in a difficult position.

"I've intimated that the purpose of calling this meeting was to undo a wrong for which I'm responsible." The deacon chose his words carefully. "I came here to make a public apology to the church membership and to apologize personally to Reverend Stephen Winthrop for the injustice done him."

Stephen sensed the shifting of eyes in his direction.

Deacon Arbutt stepped from the platform and confronted the young minister.

"I don't deserve sympathy. I don't expect it. I've done nothing to merit your forgiveness," said the deacon, moved with compassion, "but I want you to know that I'm sincerely sorry from the very depths of a sin-sick heart. Could you forgive?"

Steve rose and took his extended hand.

"Deacon Arbutt," he said, and his tone was warmly understanding, "you are freely forgiven. God has used this occasion to serve His purpose. I assure you that I hold no malice. Bob Truman's conversion is the reward for which we can thank Him. My humiliation is not to be compared with such a victory. It's a pleasure to forgive and forget."

"Thank you," was all the deacon could say.

Deacon Webster stepped forward.

“Deacon Arbutt feels that the only way to right a wrong is to confess and seek forgiveness. He has done this.” Webster was emphatic. “He also feels that he has done a grave injustice to the church. He has prepared a resolution for the consideration of the membership to extend a call to Reverend Stephen Winthrop to reconsider his resignation and accept the pastorate of this church.”

The church was still.

“Would anyone care to entertain such a motion?”

“Has Reverend Winthrop been consulted?” a voice from the crowd asked.

Deacon Stillwater attempted to rise, but Janet Winthrop’s hand upon his arm caused him to change his mind.

“I think, Mr. Chairman,” said Steve, rising, “that such a motion would place this congregation at a disadvantage.”

“You mean that you would not consider returning to the pulpit here?” Deacon Stillwater asked, taking courage. “We would not want to embarrass you further, of course.”

Deacon Arbutt rose and suggested an amended motion.

“In the absence of support to my previous motion, I move that Reverend Stephen Winthrop be invited to the pulpit of this church for the morning service next Sunday. The question of extending a call may be considered later.”

“I most heartily support such a motion,” said the song leader, rising with songbook in hand.

“Would such a motion meet with your consent?” Deacon Webster turned and addressed Steve.

“If it meets with a majority approval,” Steve replied gravely, “provided also that I may be permitted to arrange lights to emphasize my sermon.”

There were no objections voiced to the motion. The curious congregation awaited the next move.

27. An Unforgettable Meeting

AND HE THAT SEARCHETH THE HEARTS knoweth what a is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for them according to the will of God.

Steve meditated upon this verse of Scripture. He had never been placed in a position of graver responsibility. His message to the First Community Church on Sunday must be acceptable to the mind of the Spirit. He was God's messenger. He must not fail.

Fear seized him. Perhaps he was not qualified to exalt the Lord effectively. Many of his previous sermons had served as an occasion of offense. How was he to appease this congregation? From the human standpoint it was impossible. His message must be ordained of God. How was he to know the mind of the Spirit?

He turned to Scripture for wisdom and instruction.

"With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible," he read aloud. "Thy way is perfect above all ways. I shall bring the message that Thou hast laid upon my heart. Direct me, Lord," he prayed.

Steve felt the burden of responsibility roll from his shoulders. He would be God's messenger in every sense. He was not preaching to the First Community Church only: his message was to thousands of churches throughout the land. He would forget personalities. He would forget his own shortcomings, the weakness of sinful flesh, his own ideas, his doubts, his hopes, his fears. He was to be God's messenger of the hour.

Bob Truman's telephone call interrupted the meditation.

"I haven't been able to free my mind of thoughts of you all day," he confessed. "Is there anything that I can do to help in the preparation of your sermon for next Sunday?"

"You can always pray."

"After prayer—"

"Yes, I know, Bob. I appreciate your concern for me." Steve meditated upon the action to be taken. "Maybe you could help me arrange the church

tomorrow morning.”

“What are your plans for tonight?”

“Let’s see, this is Friday, isn’t it?” Steve was thoughtful. “What did you have in mind?”

“A prayer meeting.”

“Have you made any arrangements?”

“I’ve been discussing the matter with Jewell Lombard.”

“That’s interesting—”

Bob was at a loss for words.

There was a silence for which neither desired to assume responsibility.

“How about a dinner date tonight?” Bob began. “Jewell suggested the prayer meeting afterward. Phil Hartley has agreed to bring Shirley Mason. The girls thought it would be nice to invite Virginia Thyme.”

Steve laughed agreeably. “That leaves me with only one choice, doesn’t it?”

“You’ll have to admit it’s a perfect one,” Bob retorted.

“I’ll have to call you back on that.” Steve laughed. “Where are you?”

Bob gave the phone number at the Lombard residence.

“Well,” Steve chided, recognizing the number, “someone stole a beach-head, evidently.”

Bob ignored the remark.

“All right, Bob, old fellow, I’ll call you back,” Steve assured him cheerfully.

Consequently, a group of happy young people gathered at the Rainbow Cafe for a time of fellowship and prayer.

Phil Hartley had made arrangements with the manager for weekly meetings of the young people’s prayer band. This group came from all denominations and proved an inspiration to the young people of First Community Church.

Bob Truman needed no urging to give his testimony. He immediately caught the spirit of the meeting and was received enthusiastically as a public speaker of merit.

“Bob and Jewell make a striking couple,” Steve remarked to Virginia Thyme.

“There has never been a greater opportunity for young people in Christian service,” she ventured. “I’ve been definitely praying for your meeting Sunday.”

“Thank you,” he replied humbly. “Your prayers mean much.”

Phil Hartley rose and announced the Sunday service.

“We want the power of the Holy Spirit there,” he said. “No pastor can do his best without the praying support of his congregation. It’s hard work to row upstream alone. The trouble at First Community Church is that most of the members want to drift. They are self-complacent and satisfied as long as nobody rocks the boat.”

Phil turned to Shirley and smiled.

“They’ve been reckless since you were away at the institute,” he said, the glint in his eyes emphasizing his remarks. “Someone has been rocking the boat.”

“God knows why,” Shirley replied reverently.

“And when they were threatened with shipwreck they threw Jonah in the sea.” Bob smiled significantly at Steve, whose face reddened perceptibly.

“Then I ran away,” he confessed.

“It wasn’t entirely voluntary.” Virginia defended him. “You weren’t trying to run away from God.”

“At any rate, I went out to be swallowed by a whale of a world.” Steve was honest.

“A whale of a world of sin from which many preachers never return when they go out.” Phil Hartley raised his hand. “Salvation is of the Lord. We thank God for the one who has returned to make straight the way at First Community Church!”

There was but one course for First Community Church: to hold fast and repent.

The congregation gathered early on Sunday morning. Jewell Lombard, at her accustomed place at the piano, watched the faces before her. Phil Hartley, in charge of the song service, opened the meeting. Bob Truman had consented to give his testimony. He took his place on the platform and was followed by Reverend Stephen Winthrop. The deacons sat at the front of the church with Janet Winthrop and other church officials. Every seat was occupied as Steve stepped to the pulpit and announced his text and the title of the message which he had chosen: “Behind the Veil.”

“I invite you to think with me through the text, John 1:11: He came unto his own and his own received him not. I want to introduce you to Jesus Christ this morning. In Him was life; and the life was the light of men. Many of you do not know Him. You are not on speaking terms with Him,

yet as you face life you are deluded by the false impression that your church membership is the purchase price to include you as His own.”

Janet Winthrop scrutinized the black curtain in front of the baptistry.

“Christ is behind the veil. You have no spiritual contact with Him. You are still in the outer court of His earthly tabernacle,” Stephen continued. “Jesus Christ is still behind the veil in your life.”

Stephen turned and faced the baptistry.

“Christ is behind the veil,” he said, and there was pathos in his voice. “How many of you actually know Him?”

There was a moment of tense silence.

“Everyone of you has seen the painting that hangs over the baptistry. A few of you know its historical background and how it came to be hung here in this church,” he explained. “To most of you it is merely a painting. Truly, Christ is behind the veil,” Steve said, drawing a cord that opened the curtain in front of the baptistry. “The painting represents Christ, the Christ behind the veil in your lives, the Christ that you think you know.”

At a signal from Steve the electric lights were dimmed. shadows enshrouded the painting.

“This represents the Christ whom most of you worship, a Christ whose reality is dim, the Christ behind the veil.”

A strange silence filled the room.

Reverend Winthrop stepped across the platform and suddenly light filled the baptistry.

Each member was occupied with his own thought. Most of them had viewed the painting since they had become members of the church, yet only a few could describe the picture. Similarly, they had been sitting in church for years facing a Christ of whom they had heard but whom they had never come to know.

28. Harvest Time

REVEREND STEPHEN WINTHROP faced his congregation apprehensively as he prepared to close his sermon with an appeal to those out of fellowship to consider and repent of the evil which troubled their hearts.

“How many of you have the desire to permit God to have His own way in your life today?” he asked. “May I see the hands of those who would see Jesus, those who would permit God to rend the veil of modern thought, thought that dulls the senses and dazzles the eyes?”

Bob Truman rose. “I’m a stranger in your midst,” he said, “but I want to be one of the first to accept God’s call to full-time service.”

He glanced lovingly in the direction of the piano.

“There’s another here who has consented to join me in honoring Him.” He stepped out into the aisle. “We shall covet your prayers to His glory.”

Jewell Lombard, blushing happily, came forward and placed her hand on Bob’s arm.

“God loves those in love with Him and with each other,” said Reverend Winthrop, grasping the significance of the occasion. “This is indeed a happy surprise, Bob. Would you and Miss Lombard step to the pulpit and give your testimonies?”

The young couple joined the pastor on, the platform.

“God works in mysterious ways His wonders to perform!” said Bob, escorting Jewell to the pulpit. “I praise Him for this happy occasion. Miss Lombard and I were secretly engaged in our college days, but we broke our engagement because God didn’t honor our views of life. We were both worshipping strange idols. I was serving Satan; I was an agnostic—cruel, vicious, ungodly. I was obsessed with the idea of defending my opinion by persecuting the Christians. I had but one weapon: criticism.

“Jewell accepted the self-sufficient theology of Modernism, but God intervened, praise His Name! He permitted Satan to create discord here in this church. Jewell found favor with the Lord in the new experience of personal salvation, and Reverend Winthrop made his way westward with the true

Gospel. We met, and my conversion was the result. Providence permitted Deacon Tracy Arbutt to cross my path. God ordained that we should come back to this locality and that I should return to the girl I love, a girl who is now a new creature in Christ.”

A mist of tears gathered in Janet Winthrop’s eyes.

“We’ve dedicated our lives in full-time service to the Lord,” Jewell informed them. “We await the call as God opens the door.”

“Let me congratulate you spiritually as well as materially.” Reverend Winthrop took each of them by the hand. “May God bless both of you! I’m sure everyone present joins me in voicing such a prayer in your behalf.”

Jewell and Bob expressed their appreciation.

“What a challenge!” said Reverend Winthrop, facing the congregation. “I can’t let it go unheeded. I shall rededicate my life to any call that God may extend.” He hesitated, then flashed a winning smile. “I wonder if there are others who would like to join this happy young couple in a lifetime of service for the Lord?”

Philip Hartley left the platform to converse a moment with Shirley Mason.

Deacon Tracy Arbutt rose and joined the group inconspicuously. Deacon Webster and his wife followed him. The church secretary and several young people from her Sunday-school class crowded in behind the assembled group. One by one others came, until the platform could hold no more.

The atmosphere was charged with the Spirit of the Lord. Steve offered a prayer of thanksgiving.

“Does anyone have a testimony?” he asked. “Does anyone feel the call to unburden his heart in praise to God?”

Philip Hartley crowded his way to the front of the platform. Shirley Mason was with him.

“We want to dedicate our lives to the service of Christ,” Phil said, humbly addressing those who remained seated. “We’ve prayed for this hour, that the membership of this church might discern wisdom. God has answered those prayers. Truly, Christ has been unveiled to our hearts, for we see Him as He is, the Saviour of mankind. God has answered our petitions. We’re assembled in a church family reunion. Our hearts rejoice in love and praise.”

Virginia Thyme stood pleading with Janet Winthrop and Deacon Stillwater. There were tears of unsundered repentance in Janet’s eyes.

“Don’t urge me, Virginia,” she replied, in protest to the the girl’s earnest plea. “Don’t ask me to humiliate myself here. God is so unjust. I—I tried so hard to please Him.”

“Forgive me. I don’t want to be impertinent.” Virginia was moved to compassion for the one she loved as a friend.

“God wants to talk to you, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may he purchased with money.”

“Please, Virginia.” She permitted the tears to overflow her cheeks. “I’ve been serving without love. He’ll never forgive me. I can’t. I can’t. Don’t you see? I can’t.”

“Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee, Scripture tells us,” said Virginia gently.

“Oh, God, Stephen, forgive me!” She permitted Virginia to lead her to the platform where the others made room for her beside her stepson.

Deacon Stillwater followed and stood in bewildered meditation.

“God bless you, Mother.” Stephen was burdened by a humility that rendered him speechless.

There were sacred moments of silent prayer. The spirit of formalism in First Community Church had been broken! The veil had been rent!

Steve drew Virginia aside to the pastor’s study.

“I want to praise God for the victory He has wrought in their hearts today,” he said. “I’m no longer a member of this church family, yet He has given me the blessing of bringing them to the light. I—I don’t want to impose on them. It will be better if they are alone with God.”

“We’ll never forget this.” Virginia spoke gently.

“We gathered the harvest today,” Steve said, and it was still, like the stillness of an autumn afternoon. “Virginia, you’re part of the harvest. I don’t know how to say it, but I love you, and I need you.”

“Steve, oh, Steve... Virginia was glad with the gladness of being loved.” Our message—we can bring it together—His message for the world.”

Printed in the U. S. A.

Copyright Notice

This book was published 2019 by The Lutheran Library Publishing Ministry LutheranLibrary.org. Some (hopefully unobtrusive) updates to spelling, punctuation, and paragraph divisions have been made. Unabridged.

Originally published 1947 by Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Image on imprint page is *Still Life With Bible* by Vincent Van Gogh.

This LutheranLibrary.org book is released under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0) license, which means you may freely use, share, copy, or translate it as long as you provide attribution to LutheranLibrary.org, and place on it no further restrictions.

The text and artwork within are believed to be in the U.S. public domain.

566 – v5.1 2020-02-18

ISBN: TBD (paperback)

How Can You Find Peace With God?

The most important thing to grasp is that no one is made right with God by the good things he or she might do. Justification is by faith only, and that faith resting on what Jesus Christ did. It is by believing and trusting in His one-time *substitutionary* death for your sins.

Read your Bible steadily. God works His power in human beings through His Word. Where the Word is, God the Holy Spirit is always present.

Suggested Reading: [New Testament Conversions](#) by Pastor George Gerberding

Benediction

Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, To the only wise God our Savior, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen. (Jude 1:24-25)

Encouraging Christian Books for You to Download and Enjoy

Devotional

- *The Sermons of Theophilus Stork: A Devotional Treasure*
- Simon Peter Long. *The Way Made Plain*

Theology

- Matthias Loy. *The Doctrine of Justification*
- Henry Eyster Jacobs. *Summary of the Christian Faith*
- Theodore Schmauk. *The Confessional Principle*

Novels

- Edward Roe. *Without a Home*
- Joseph Hocking. *The Passion for Life*

Essential Lutheran Library

- The Augsburg Confession with Saxon Visitation Articles
- Luther's Small Catechism
- Luther's Large Catechism
- Melancthon's Apology
- The Formula of Concord

The full catalog is available at LutheranLibrary.org. Paperback Editions of some titles at Amazon.