

Chapter II

Bling Bling

It was half past the hour of 7:00 and Squeaky heard it first—the scratching sound of frantic paws on hard wood and then a thump.

“Grandpa is here!” shouted Squeaky.

Squeaky knew what the sounds meant. Grandpa Sagacity King III had again outrun Herbert, the mean, crazy, old cat. Across the hardwood floor, bracing his legs as he slid through the hole in the floor trim, Grandpa came to rest with a thump against the steam pipe which heated the home of Squeaky, Posey and their parents.

Extricating himself from the warm pipe, Grandpa picked out a few lint balls from his whiskers and regained his composure just as Squeaky and Posey entered the room.

He walked over, climbed into his chair, crossed his hands, closed his eyes and leaned back with a contented grin. Squeaky didn't know if Grandpa was grinning because he was glad to be with him and his sister, or if he was savoring the vision of outrunning Herbert.

Posey didn't have time for resting. “Tell us how church went yesterday, Grandpa, please?”

Grandpa opened an eyelid and peered into the eager eyes of the two little mice at his feet. He said, “Well, morning service at the Macedonian Conglomerate Church of Freetown started off well. It opened with the song, *The Ninety-Nine*. Sis. Verde Grubbs sang strong and clear as she lead the congregation, ‘The ninety-nine within the fold, Are safe from fears and storms of night, But one is on the mountains cold, ‘Twill perish there—how sad the sight! Go search it out and bring it home, No more in darkness let it roam. You'll find it there in dreadful plight, Oh! go and bring it home.’

“The singing was beautiful and inspired. Bro. Joe Sloan had his wife and seven children all lined up on the front bench and each sang with gusto, all the way from 13 year-old Jack to little two year-old Gertrude.”

“How is Jack's voice doing?” interrupted Squeaky.

“Oh, it's about the same,” mused Grandpa. “He sang a high bass and once in awhile an unintentional tenor.

“Bro. Buddy Hull was over his cold and his booming bass pushed along the flowing notes in fine style.”

“Oh, Grandpa, tell about Bro. Buddy's conversion,” begged Squeaky.

Posie gave Squeaky an impatient look, for Grandpa had told the story a dozen times.

A dozen times wasn't enough for Squeaky, he had to hear it again.

"Okay," said Grandpa, "it was like this. Several years ago Bro. Buddy was a very wicked man. One day he was walking on his farm when the earth gave way and he fell into a dark, deep, wet hole. He realized it was an old well and there was no way he could get out on his own. He hollered and hollered for help. Being unmarried, there was no wife or children to hear him and he soon gave up. He began to pray. He told the Lord that if He would get him out of the well he would get his heart right and be a witness to others.

"Right after he ended his prayer, a neighbor came to the hole and tossed down a rope.

"Being a man of his word, Bro. Buddy gave his heart to God. In order to witness to others, he would invite them to his house and feed them, then take them out back and shove them into the well. He figured if he had gotten saved down there, others could also."

"I think he's a little warped, myself," observed Squeaky.

"Get on with the story of the church service," said Posey.

"Well, as I was saying, the singing was going well. Faces were shining and burdens were lifted.

"Pastor Loudermilk was so inspired that at the end of *The Ninety-Nine*, he requested the song, *I Love to Tell the Story*. It was in the middle of that when things went bad.

"The front door, located in the back of the chapel, opened and two young people stepped inside. Sis. Verde, standing in front and leading the singing, got the first look at them. She was relishing the high notes of 'Twill be my theme in glory,' but 'glory' stuck in her throat and only half made its way out. With her leading voice absent, the rest of the congregation trailed off into silence. All heads turned to see where she was staring.

"There, for all to see, were two young people, dressed as the parishioners would see only on the street. Never in a church, especially theirs! There were chains around their necks, waists and just about anywhere one would hang. They were adorned in medallions and rings. Some of the rings were in odd places. The waistband of the young man's pants was halfway between his knees and waist, and gave the appearance of dangling precariously to the body parts they were supposed to be covering. The two had matching hairstyles, Mohawks, dyed like well-decorated Easter eggs. The young lady smacked gum with the motion and regularity of a pacemaker.

“The young man pushed his sunglasses up on his Mohawk and glanced around the darkened sanctuary. The congregation watched stunned and curious, as he took his companion’s hand, walked half-way up the aisle and sat down on the bench next to Sis. Nettie Crum-pet, who gathered the folds of her pretty, pink, print dress close to her.

“As they sat down, the noise of clanking chains in the hushed sanc-tuary was to the hearers on the scale of Gabriel’s trumpet.

“The young man turned to Sis. Nettie with a wry grin. ‘Excuse the bang of the bling bling,’ he said. Then he crossed his legs and pushed his big toe through a hole in his well-worn shoe, wiggling it with a feeling of freedom. Sis. Nettie saw it more as an act of desecration, and frowned unabashedly. Under her hot gaze, the big toe slowly receded back into its dark confines, and its owner turned to Sis. Nettie and opined audibly, ‘You just can’t buy kicks [shoes] like you used to. Do you feel me baby girl?’

“This was more than Sis. Nettie’s 72 years of inbred modesty could bear. She was abhorred to think that someone might assume they were actually touching each other, and she certainly wasn’t his baby girl! A deep flush surged over her face and her lower jaw worked up and down, but no words came out.

“Bro. Buddy Hall, sitting on the bench behind her, was more amused at her predicament than curious about the strangers. Leaning forward, he said in a loud whisper, ‘If you’re feeling froggy, Sis. Nettie, jump in.’ ”

“What did he mean?” asked Posey.

“He meant,” explained Grandpa Sagacity, “if you have something to say, say it.”

Continuing, Grandpa said, “Sis. Nettie never did have a brotherly feeling towards Bro. Buddy. Once when he told her she was a ‘glitter-ing jewel of colossal ignorance,’ she replied, in an unsanctified mo-ment, that he was ‘Satan’s retarded younger brother.’ Needless to say, neither had forgotten that moment.

“Bro. Loudermilk, wisely discerning that events were out of control, stood to his feet and announced, ‘We will have prayer. Who has a prayer request?’

“The congregation was silent. It was too much to ask for the congre-gation to shift the collective mind from bling bling to spiritual suppli-cation.

“Finally little Susie Sloan, 12 year-old daughter of Bro. Joe Sloan, rose to her feet from the front seat and said, ‘Let us pray for the two souls in our midst who don’t have as much light as we do.’ She sat

back down and looked at her mother with a smile that said she was very pleased with the wisdom she had used in wording her prayer request.

“Poor Bro. Loudermilk feeling that even the prayer requests were getting out of hand prayed a short prayer in which he purposely omitted ‘the two souls in our midst who don’t have as much light as we do.’ However, he did ask that God’s spirit be renewed in all of them.

“Taking the pulpit, he announced his text, ‘But the meek shall inherit earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace.’ Psa. 37:11.

“He was 50 minutes into how to be meek when the noise of bling bling was heard again. Every head in the assembly turned to observe the two young people exiting the church door.

“With an audible sigh, everyone settled back into their seats with the relieved feeling that God’s righteousness really does prevail over all the world.”

“Do you think the young people will go back to church again, grandpa?” asked Posey.

“I doubt it,” grandpa replied, “the church’s mindset doesn’t allow them to relate to the age in which they are living.”

Squeaky, with a mischievous smile on his face said, “Yesterday was a good church service.”

Posey gave him a look that took the sparkle right out of his black eyes.