

Saved by the Cross

by Douglas Scott Clark, Maryville, Tennessee

It rained all day Monday and Tuesday, leaving the red clay of eastern Tennessee a quagmire. By Wednesday, the rain had passed, and my heart leapt with joy. Wednesday was prayer meeting night, and I would get to see and hold hands with the girl of my dreams.

I was 12, and it was my first crush. Jenny Beth was angelic, and every Sunday and Wednesday, I was permitted to sit with her and hold her hand.

On this particular Wednesday, dark clouds practically covered a full moon. After services, Jenny asked if I wanted to stay and help her and her parent distribute new hymnbooks. I said yes. I told Mom I'd catch a ride home with Jenny's parents.

An hour later, all the hymnbooks were in place in the pews. All I could think about was sitting next to Jenny on the way home, holding her hand.

We stood on the front steps of the church, waiting for her parents to turn out the lights. Then Jenny's dad locked the door and turned to us.

"Jenny, tell Doug good-bye," he said. "Doug, I guess we'll see you back here come Sunday."

"Daddy, I thought we were going to give Doug a ride home," Jenny said, disappointed.

"Why would he want a ride? He just lives over the hill. Don't you, Doug?"

"Yes, sir," I said. "It ain't far."

"Besides," Jenny's father added, smiling, "you aren't afraid to walk home in the dark...are you, Doug?"

That old boy knew I wouldn't say I was scared.

"No, sir," I said puffing out my chest. "I ain't afraid of the dark or nothing in it."

"Then it's settled. Jenny, you get in the car. Doug, we'll see you next Sunday."

The night seemed even darker as I watched their taillights disappear down that country road. There was nothing to do but walk home.

I had two ways to go. One lay down the dark road shadowed by cedar trees. The other was across the church graveyard, which was a little brighter thanks to the full moon. If something was going to get me, it would be hiding along the road, not out in the graveyard, where I could see it.

While I thought about his, standing at the edge of the graveyard, a few clouds moved in and covered the moon. I lit out across the cemetery like a frightened rabbit. Nothing could catch me now.

Appendix #1c1

The ground was wet and soggy. I ran between headstones and leaped over graves. On one long jump, I didn't make it. I landed hard, and the ground gave way, sending me knee-deep into a muddy gravesite. Try as I might, I could not free myself. The more I struggled, the deeper I went. Soon I was waist-deep in the mire. My thoughts began to run wild. Now what?

I could try screaming, but what good would that do? If I thrashed about, I'd only sink deeper.

Suddenly, I saw a shadow of something moving in my direction. I heard labored breathing, as if something had run a long way and was trying to catch its breath. But I didn't see anything. Was my mind playing tricks on me?

The clouds moved across the moon, making the headstones seem to close in around me. Now I was trembling. I had to free myself

I turned slowly, trying to reach the cross-shaped tombstone at the head of the grave. If I could grasp it, I might be able to pull myself out. But it was just beyond my grasp; if I struggled, I'd sink deeper. If only I had something to put around the stone, I could pull myself out!

I was about to give up and accept my fate when I remembered my belt. I carefully slipped it off, grasped each end, reached out and looped it over the headstone. I pulled with all my strength and felt the mud release a bit.

I wrapped another loop around my hands and pulled again. Slowly, the mud released its grip, and I pulled myself upright next to the stone.

As I stood there, regaining my strength, I ran my hand over the weathered old cross. The name and dates were obliterated, but the inscription was as clear as the day it had been carved:

“PUT ON EARTH TO SAVE SOULS”

How true that inscription turned out to be!