

CHAPTER 1

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*A Praying Man*

The winter night came quickly; the bitter wind howled through the trees, and the chill crept in under the door cracks and rusty windows of the small village home. Inside the house, a young girl huddled near a fire, trying to escape the cold night air. She was tired, and her belly growled with hunger, for she had not eaten a good meal all day.

The young girl was Lonia; she was twelve years old, and she lived in a small village in England with her mother and father. Lonia and her parents were very poor; her father made a little money as a coal miner, but he did not spend it wisely. He never brought home enough money to feed his hungry family. Day after day, her father came home angry, which caused Lonia and her mother many tears. As winter went on, the sadness turned to bitterness, and arguments filled their small home. "If only I had a loving mother and father like other children," thought

Lonia sorrowfully. But, it was not so, and poor Lonina hardly ever knew a happy time in her home.

Late one cold night, Lonina was lying in bed, when suddenly, she was jolted by a noise so loud that it shook her bed and rattled her windows. Lonina's heart jumped with fright. She tried to move, but she was frozen with fear. She heard the sound of footsteps outside, and suddenly a voice hollered, "Emergency! All men to the rescue!"

Lonia lay still in her bed and waited. Soon, the door to her room opened slowly, and Lonina's mother entered with another woman from the village. Her mother's eyes were filled with tears.

"Lonia," said her mother, weeping bitterly, "There's been a coal mine explosion, and Daddy has been hurt very badly."

"Oh, Mommy! Will daddy be alright?" asked Lonina fearfully.

"I don't know, my dear Lonina," her mother answered.

Lonia could not fall asleep for hours. As she finally dozed off, she could hear the two women talking in hushed voices. The neighbor woman exclaimed, "Oh, Rosa, how I wish our husbands could have different jobs. It's so terrible to live with the constant fear of explosions and accidents in the coal mines!"

The night dragged on, with no news at all about those hurt in the explosion. Finally, as the first rays of dawn shone through Lonina's window, she heard a knock on the door. Eager to hear news about her father, Lonina ran to the door and looked out; to her

dismay, she was greeted by a policeman with a grim face. As soon as she saw his somber expression, she knew that her father had not survived. "Are you sure he's gone?" her mother cried desperately.

"Yes," answered the policeman sadly. "Every effort was made to save his life, but he died this morning. I'm so sorry."

The days following her father's death were lonely and difficult. Mother was distraught, and spent most days locked in her room, sobbing bitterly. Lonina had to find her own food, and was often hungry. She was grieving the loss of her father, and she felt forgotten and forsaken by her mother. Each night, Lonina cried herself to sleep, hungry and exhausted.

As the weeks passed, Lonina's mother fell terribly ill. Her condition worsened with each day, until one day, in the heart of winter, she died, leaving Lonina to fend for herself. As a poor orphan girl, Lonina was given servant's work. She had to work very hard only to earn her food. Her bed was a small pile of straw on the cold ground. No one in her new home seemed to care for her at all. Lonina felt lonely and unloved.

Months passed, and Lonina adjusted to her new job; she worked very hard to please the mistress of the house. One summer morning, Lonina was faithfully going about her chores when a man arrived at the gate. He seemed like a very kind man, but Lonina was shy, and dared not speak with him. The man had come for lodging, and would sleep in the room next to Lonina's. Late that night, after all her work was finished, Lonina lay quietly in her bed of straw, when to her surprise, she heard murmuring

coming from the next room. Curious, Lonía put her ear to the wall, and heard the man speaking. He seemed to be talking to someone named God. Lonía heard the man mention her name. What was he saying? Lonía listened more closely, and heard the man say these words:

Lord, teach the dear little servant girl about sin. Teach her about Jesus Christ, the Savior of sinners, whose blood can wash away her sin. Lord, work all this in her by Thy Holy Spirit, so that she will be saved by grace, for Jesus' sake. Amen.



*Children, do you thank the Lord for a mother and father who love you? Are you asking the Lord for the same thing the praying man asked for: to be taught about sin and to be saved by the blood of Jesus Christ through the work of the Holy Spirit?*

## CHAPTER 2

# Fire

Lonia had never heard anyone speak to God before. As far back as she could remember, Lonía couldn't even recall hearing her mom and dad pray at all. She *did* remember them using the name of God when they were angry and shouting at each other. But the way this man was praying to God sounded very different from the angry shouts of her parents; it sounded tender and sincere. As she lay in her bed of straw, Lonía couldn't stop thinking about the man's prayer. "Why would he pray for me?" Lonía questioned quietly. "Why would he even care about me? No one else does." Suddenly, she burst into tears. Burying her head in the straw, she thought back on her mother and father, and an empty feeling filled her heart.

After some time, Lonía lifted her head and listened. Silence. The man was not praying anymore. "Is he sleeping?" Lonía thought to herself. "Has he

left?" But, not many minutes passed before Lonía heard the man's voice once again; as she listened, she began to think about his words.

"What did he mean when he asked God to show me my sins? Who is the Lord Jesus Christ, and why would I need Him? Who is the Holy Spirit?" Lonía wondered. She was struck most of all when the man asked the Lord to help her to flee from the wrath to come—the wrath of an angry God and an eternity of hell. He prayed that she would find a hiding place in the bleeding wounds of the Lord Jesus by faith.

With all these thoughts going through her head, Lonía finally fell asleep. She slept soundly, hearing nothing, not even the scurrying mice or the screech owl that broke the night silence.

Suddenly, Lonía awoke with a start! For a moment, she forgot where she was. Then, she recognized the dreadful scent of smoke. The smoke began to burn her nose, and she squeezed her eyes shut. The night calm was broken abruptly by a frantic voice yelling, "Fire! Fire!" Lonía was terribly frightened, too scared to move. Crying, she screamed, "Save me! Save me! Someone please save me!"

Would anyone come to her rescue?

Lonia heard footsteps outside her room. A voice said loudly, "Stay where you are, child. I'm coming to get you." Lonía recognized the voice; it was the kind man who had been praying for her! Tears of relief flowed down her cheeks as she waited for him to come. It seemed like a long time before the door to her room swung open, and Lonía felt his strong, gentle arms pick her up and carry her away. Finally,



*Lonia felt his strong, gentle arms pick her up and carry her away.*

they got outside, and Lonía could feel the cool night air on her skin. Relieved to be free from the burning smoke, she opened her tear-filled eyes. What a horrible sight! The fire burned ferociously, devouring the house. Amidst the roar of the fire, Lonía heard the familiar voice again; the kind man was praying.

"Lord, save the souls of the poor people trapped