

God's Grace

~ PROLOGUE ~

The table tennis match was fierce. Ping-Pong balls whizzed, paddles flayed in a blurred motion, and sweat dripped from the two players as they danced about either end of the table. Intensity increased as the volleys got longer and longer. The players began to pant for air, lungs straining. Hands were soon aching, white-knuckled from the death grip they had on the paddles. Smiles of exhilaration were on their faces as they were completely engrossed in the competition with each other.

No ... wait! It soon became apparent that they were not opponents, these two intensely focused participants. They were teammates fighting against the ball, the table, the laws of gravity and physics, and above all, the floor. "21, 22, 23 ..", they counted as the length of the volleys increased. Soon the ball hit the floor. With disgust, one of the players snatch the offending ball off the floor and put it back into play. "One, two, three ..."

They battled for hours, these two, seeking the long elusive goal of one hundred consecutive hits. Each time the ball hit the floor, the count would begin again at one.

As day waned into night, the couple began to make progress. "50, 51, 52..." the count crept up. Excitement dared to mount from the two now-exhausted players. Could this be it? Nah - there were too many previous failures, too many false hopes. Even so? "... 68, 69, 70..." Hope began to build. Maybe? "...81,82 ..." The ball skimmed the top of the net and dropped, barely being rescued by the sliding paddle of a diving player. "89, 90, 91..." Adrenaline was oozing, intermingled with sweat. A few returns later the ball hit the edge of the table, careening wildly off to one side. With determination engraved her face, the player flew through the air at a mind-boggling speed. The edge of the paddle barely caught the ball. "95!" Then the ball slipped to the floor.

As the ball hit the floor, so did the two figures at the ends of the table. Slumping down in sobbing humps, heads buried in hands, they wept.

~ CHAPTER ONE ~

The sandy shore seemed to stretch for miles; some said it had no ending. The sea lapped up against the shore, proceeding and receding in rhythmic beauty. The sands of the shore glistened in the sunlight. It was smooth, soft, and warm, untrod on by human feet.

A figure of blazing light appeared a little farther down on the shore. Having an apparent disregard for the unbroken bliss around him, the Angel of Light began to dig. After some work, a pit emerged, about twenty feet deep. Having completed one deadly trap, Lucifer dug another ... and another. Soon pits dotted the once beautiful shore, pits of blasphemy, false religion, and pride.

Lucifer was soon joined by a sinister looking creature, a deformed, foul-smelling man named Flesh. With the help of this new companion, pits of lust, pleasure, addiction, and selfishness began to accompany those dug by Lucifer.

Before Flesh was finished with his diabolical work, a man in a black suit came by. Seeing the destructive labor taking place, he lent a hand. Without much effort, World added a few pits of his own: greed, power, self-image, the love of money, and many others.

After careful and strategic work, the three left arm in arm, hand in hand, very satisfied at their decimation of the once gorgeous sandy seashore.

~ CHAPTER TWO ~

A little figure stumbled along the sandy seashore. Flowing dark brown hair curled slightly above the shoulders of the young lady. Her jaw was set with the grit of determination. Her eyes glistened -- that is if anyone could have seen them -- for they were covered with a thick, heavy, black blindfold bound around her head. Though she wore clothes of royalty, they were tattered and torn from numerous falls into the pits that lined the shore. Bruises covered her arms, legs, and face from those sudden descents.

As Princess walked, she learned to do so hesitantly and with fear. Many times she would put one foot halfway down, and then lift it up again, unsure of what fate may befall her on her next step. Sometimes, Princess would walk in circles, finding an area that seemed safe. But invariably her circle would widen or get off course. A nasty fall soon followed. At other times, out of frustration and exhaustion, Princess would sit down, unwilling to move. Soon, out of boredom and from the pain of the glaring sun, Princess would have to move again.

At a time of frustration when Princess had just climbed out of a particularly nasty pit, she heard a voice. Startled, she pondered its origin, for she had never met anyone on these pit-filled shores.

"Daughter." The deep voice startled her again, but it was spoken with kindness.

"Yes...?" stammered the Princess, trembling a little, "Who are you?"

"I am the one who made these shores."

"You! Well, you did a terrible rotten job, and I hate these shores. They are filled with pits, holes, and all sorts of dangers. Go AWAY!" cried Princess.

"I do all things well, and I love you," came the gentle response.

"Yeah, right! What do you want anyway? Did you come here just to torment me?" sniffed Princess.

"I want to take your blindfold off, child."

"Why? How could you? It's been on me all my life. I've tried and tried, but it is tied too tightly. And even if you could get it off, I'm not sure I want it off.

I have grown quite accustomed to it. It keeps the sand and sun out of my eyes, dries my tears, feels comfortable. I like it."

"Whenever you are ready," responded the wise voice, "Call, and I will come."

"I doubt it, but just in case, whom shall I call?"

"My name is KING, and you, Princess, are my daughter." With that, the voice vanished.

Stunned and confused, Princess stumbled on her way, trying desperately to avoid the pits that eagerly awaited her. Princess had no idea that she had a father. Why had her father not spoken to her until now? And why had he put all these agonizing pits in front of her? Princess pondered these thoughts all to no avail.

Many pits later, Princess stumbled head long into a particularly large, painful pit. Tired, bruised, and hurt, she lay there, crying. Before she knew what she was doing, Princess cried out, "Father, help me."

Instantly a deep voice could be heard right beside her. "Yes, my child, how can I help you?"

"I don't know," sobbed Princess, "just help me."

"Let me take off your blindfold."

"I'm afraid. It has been own all my life," stammered Princess

"Trust me. Trust me with your blindfold; trust me with your pits, trust me with your life," came the quiet yet urgent reply.

"Will it hurt?"

"Invariably, but trust me."

Princess was silent for a moment. "Okay. I will," came a quiet, feeble voice. KING knelt down and gently went to work. With skill possessed by no other, he deftly unsnarled the knot that had been tied for years. Soon the blindfold of sin that Princess had worn from the beginning slipped off her face, and Princess was struck by blinding light.

Squinting, with watery eyes, Princess tried to make out the blurry shapes. The first thing that came into focus was a sparkling tear dripping down the corner of Father's eye, and a smile upon his face.

~ CHAPTER THREE ~

Princess looked up to see the beautiful shores before her. The sand glistened in the sunlight and the waves sparkled as they lapped upon the shore. "I had no idea it was so beautiful!" exclaimed Princess to herself.

Exhilaration quickly changed to horror as Princess paid closer attention to the sands. Treacherous pits lined the shores hungrily awaiting their next victim. "Oh, Father! Why, oh why did you put all those filthy pits all over the beautiful shores," cried Princess.

"I did not create those," came the simple reply. "Trust me."

Princess walked with her father, the KING. She walked hesitantly at first, carefully avoiding all the pits. Shortly she began to walk more quickly, firmly planting each foot on the ground. Every once in a while, Princess would even dare to jump a little. Soon, jumping transformed itself into running, which turned into leaping for joy.

It was bound to happen sooner or later. Princess did not see it until she was on the very edge, but it was too late. Down, down, she fell. The impact at the bottom of the pit hurt, but not as much as the knowledge that she could have avoided it. Ashamedly, she wondered what her new found Father would think of her now. Burying her face in her hands, Princess cried.

Princess felt a gentle hand on her shoulder. Looking up, she saw KING, extending a sturdy arm down to her, beckoning her to get out of the pit. "He still wants me?" she wondered. Princess wiped the tears from her eyes and cautiously took her Father's hand. Strange. These pits did not seem as big as she remembered.

King scooped her up in one motion and held her in a loving embrace. Looking into her eyes, he gently reminded her "Watch out for the pits."

Princess gradually learned how to walk confidently with her Father, hand in hand. She discovered that if she paid more attention to KING than to where she walked, she avoided more pits. When she kept her eyes fastened devoutly on him, all went well. There were still times when Princess saw something of more interest on the sandy

shores. Glistening objects would draw her away from her Father, and invariably she would fall painfully into a pit as she ran toward them. But her Father's hand was always nearby, extended, ready to scoop her out of the pit.

KING never scolded her, just gently reminded Princes,
“Watch out for the pits. You are not made for pits, but for the sandy shores
... and for me. Come walk with me, and let us enjoy the shores, forever.”

~ EPILOGUE ~

As the ball hit the floor, so did the two figures at the ends of the Table of Life. Slumping down in sobbing humps, heads buried in hands, Prince and Princess wept. As they cried at their failure, at their lost opportunity, as they mourned over how many times they had failed in the past, they failed to notice a quiet figure moving toward them.

Somewhat mysterious, yet full of power and beauty, the figure gently picked up the ball. Crouching down beside Princess, then figure lovingly took Princess by the hand lifted her up to her feet. Grace handed the ball back to Princess and declared simply and yet with authority, "96!"

"For of His fullness, we have all received, and grace upon grace." - John 1: 16

"In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according the riches of His grace." - Ephesians 1:7

Go and walk in the GRACE and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

