

A troubled teen's descent into darkness. What drove Kevin to plan revenge? A gripping novel exploring warning signs, hope, and redemption. Perfect for youth groups.

The Cloud

By Mary Clark Dalton

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THE
Cloud

MARY CLARK DALTON

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Chapter One

Kevin came in late as usual, making sure his dad was already asleep. Asleep. Ha! More like passed out. Whatever, he didn't feel like dealing with him, so, the less he saw of him the better.

He tiptoed in as quietly as possible, taking off his shoes, walking in his socks. He opened the door to his room slowly as to not make a sound. *Squeak*. Oh no! What was it doing shut anyway? Had his father been in his room nosing around? He hated when his dad came into his personal space.

Just as he sat down on the bed, thinking all was clear, he heard a groan, then the sound of his dad stumbling around. *Please*, just let him be turning over, he thought, shaking at the idea of another confrontation. No such luck. He heard the heavy footsteps heading down the hall.

“Kevin! What do you think you're doing, coming in here this time of night? Do you have any idea what time it is? One o'clock in the morning on a school night!”

“Yes, *dad*, I know what time it is. Did I miss family night? You should have reminded me this morning when you fixed my breakfast.” Kevin knew as soon as the words came out of his mouth it was a mistake, but for some reason, he couldn’t stop himself!

“You never learn do you, boy? Your mom and I taught you respect, but it seems like you must have forgotten! Well, I guess I’ll just have to give you a reminder!”

Kevin edged closer to the door, hoping he could escape. His dad was right about one thing; he couldn’t seem to keep his thoughts to himself, even if it meant punishment.

“Mom, ha! She sure stayed around to make sure I knew my manners!”

His dad moved closer. “You will not disrespect your mother!” he yelled. “Do you understand me?”

That was one thing Kevin never understood. His dad always showed respect for his mom and demanded he do the same. Why? He never knew. After all she was the one who left them, not the other way around.

Just when he thought he was in the clear, his father lunged at him. His fist hit just under the jaw. It hurt like the dickens, but Kevin moved quickly enough the old man didn’t break anything. His father slapped at him several times but was unable to connect because he was unsteady on his feet. Kevin almost fought back, *almost*. That was one thing Kevin hadn’t done—hit his dad. He’d come close, but he always stopped short of hitting back.

This was the first time Kevin heard the voice in his head speaking to him. “Go ahead, Kevin. You know he deserves it! You can take him. Better yet, what about one of those guns in there? You can leave tonight, and no one will ever find you.”



Kevin brushed away the thought, realizing it was crazy. *Wasn't it?* Instead, as his father was leaving, he hollered after him, “*I hate you!*”

Looking in the mirror at his jaw, he was afraid of what he might see. Fortunately, his face didn't look too bad this time. He was tired of making excuses for the bruises on his face and arms. He plopped down on his bed and thought about what he should do.

I'm so tired of this! That's when the *plan* started to form in his mind. *My dad, the big hunter.* “You know, Dad, there's a lot of people I'd like to hunt,” he whispered out loud.

Mentally, he made a list of all those who had made fun of him—picked on him—over the years. A lot of teachers were in that group too.

Then he heard that strange voice again. “Yeah, Kevin, you can solve all your problems in one day! You'll be famous too!”

“Yeah, Dad, tomorrow I'm going on my own hunt, and I intend to make quite a haul.”

Kevin snickered in anger. He knew all about guns. His dad made sure of that. He also taught him about the danger

of guns and gun safety. He even knew where the key to the gun safe was just in case of an emergency, his dad had said. And boy, was this an emergency!

They used to go to the gun range together to target practice. It was the only thing his dad had any interest in—hunting.

After he made sure his dad was dead to the world, Kevin emptied the gun safe, and every rifle and pistol, along with more than enough ammunition clips now lay on his bed. The guns gave him a feeling of power. How many would he need? Kevin had gone hunting with his dad a few times, but his dad had always criticized everything he did.

You'll be impressed with the big game I bring down this time. Kevin laughed softly, the evil sound making him feel powerful. He then loaded all the guns he'd need in his truck while his dad snored away, clueless about his plan.

Chapter Two

Pastor Mark enjoyed his youth group. They really were a great group of kids. Of course, they were like all kids, they liked to have fun. That's why he always started their meetings with some fun games and food, a hit every time. The kids' parents always provided enough pizza, chips, and soda to feed a small army.

Mark believed that was the real reason some of them came to their meetings. They acted like they hadn't eaten in days. Some of the guys were tossing mini pizzas like Frisbees, while others were balancing them on their noses. He couldn't help but laugh with them. *Oh, the bliss of youth. I guess that's the signal they're finished eating.*

"Okay kids, it's time to get down to business. I want you to get your Bibles out, and I'll give each of you a slip of paper. I'll tell you what to write on it when I'm finished with our devotion."

Pastor Mark shared his version of the prodigal son. "This story," he began, "was one Jesus told of two sons. The younger son wanted to live in the fast lane. He couldn't

wait until his father died to get his inheritance. He wanted it now!

“But his father knew what would happen, and it saddened him. After pleading with the boy, he could tell his son had made up his mind, so, he gave him his share of the inheritance. His son kicked up his heels and headed out of that stinking farm, straight into the city. It was a blast at first. He had chicks hanging all over him!”

Everyone laughed at that.

“After living his so-called dream, his life became a *nightmare*. When all his money was gone, he looked around and so were his friends. Now here comes the good part. His father prayed for his son every day. Not only did he pray, but he also watched for his son to return. How did he know his son would eventually return home? He knew God loved his son more than he did. He pleaded with God to bring him home, and he had faith God would answer his prayers.

“Then one day, when the father was watching and waiting as he did every day, he saw a dirty boy headed up the road. He knew in an instant that it was his son. Running to meet him, he grabbed him, and he hugged him, saying, ‘This is my son who was dead and is now alive, who was lost and now is found!’”

Pastor Mark sat in silence for a moment before asking his youth group, “Who is your prodigal?”

Everyone sat in total quiet, not sure exactly what their pastor meant.

“We all know a prodigal,” Pastor Mark said. “Someone who’s headed down the wrong path and needs to come home. Now, I want you to ask God to put on your heart one person that you know is headed in the wrong direction. It may be someone you haven’t talked to in a while or maybe someone that will come to mind later.

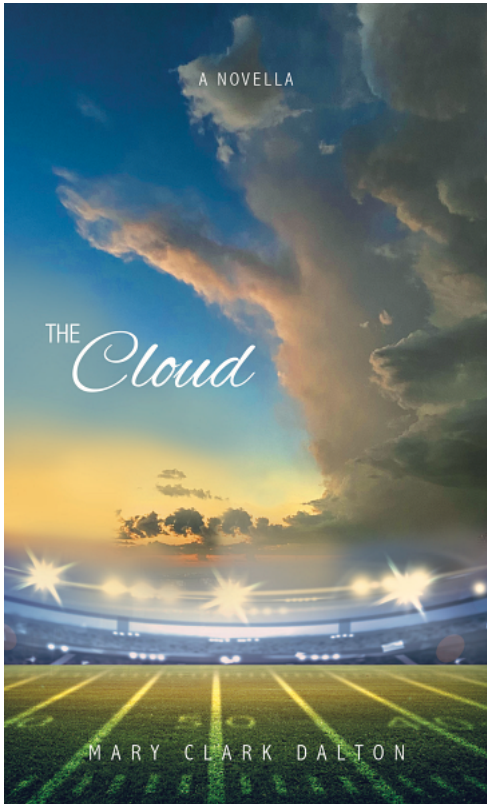
“Write that name down on the slip of paper I gave you. I’ll write down someone’s name too. This will be our action step for every day this week. I want you to pray for this person’s spiritual, mental, and physical needs, asking God to give you an opportunity to witness to him or her. I’m not talking ‘Now I lay me down to sleep,’ praying. I’m talking, ‘Lord, help me find a way to touch their heart!’ Pray the prayer that brought the prodigal son home in our story tonight.”

Mark had no way of knowing how many had written Kevin’s name down, the same one that God had laid on his heart. He prayed silently, “Lord I did what I felt you were calling me to do. Now speak to their hearts and lead them to their prodigal.”

The group seemed more solemn than usual as they left that night. Each one, no doubt, was thinking about the name on that slip of paper. How would God open the door for them to witness to their prodigal?



As soon as Pastor Mark mentioned a name to pray for, instantly Kevin’s name popped into Bobby’s head. He



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