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## Wedding Miracle

By Mrs. Paul E. King

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Gwen stirred the tea in her cup in a mechanical sort of way, her eyes fastened in a fixed stare on the amber-colored candle that burned dimly in the center of the table. She took unhurried bites of food, her gaze wandering every now and again across the room to the cozy surroundings of the restaurant dining-room. This would be her last time to eat at Deming's... solo and unmarried.

The thought of her wedding to David Hattaras sent a thrill of excitement through her and quickened her pulse. Less than twenty-four hours away! She sighed. It was a contented sigh.



It was a miracle, she thought — a wedding miracle!

She would miss coming to Demings and she would miss not working in the office of Carson and Carson Inc. anymore. After their marriage, David's call would take them to pastor a small church in a small city.

Bright tears (happy tears they were) trickled warmly out her eyes and danced merrily down her cheeks, flushed prettily now with thinking of David.

Simultaneously a sting of pain and hurt pricked her heart. It hit her with sudden fierceness and her tears changed from happy tears to tears of pain and sadness. "Mother! Father!" she moaned, covering her face with the ample napkin.

She was thankful that Sue Deming had seated her in her very favorite secluded nook in the restaurant. She could weep there unnoticed.

"Something more for you, Gwen?" Sue asked, coming noiselessly up to the table. Noticing Gwen's tears she puckered her lips and furrowed her brow as she ejaculated, "A girl's not supposed to cry when she gets married and unless you stop it now, this very minute, I'll not be your maid of honor!"

Gwen brushed the tears aside and smiled up into Sue's pixie-looking face. "I'm sorry, Sue dear. I was just thinking of Father and... Mother."

"I'm sorry too," Sue apologized, her own lovely face suddenly clouding over. Giving Gwen's hand an understanding and sympathetic little squeeze, she commented, "Everything's going to turn out fine, Gwen. See if it doesn't." With that she hurried away from the secluded spot to wait on other customers.

Gwen watched as the statuesque and beautiful blonde-haired Sue disappeared inside the swinging doors of the kitchen. She was proud of Sue Deming. Like herself, Sue was a devout Christian, engaged to a deeply spiritual young businessman.

Deming's Restaurant, like the Demings themselves, was noted far and wide for its excellent and delightfully different but delicious cuisine and its clean, wholesome and home-like atmosphere: the latter created largely by the tastefully chosen and carefully arranged dining pieces and the personal touch of the Demings themselves who chose to mingle with and among their clientele as they dined. Gwen hoped that sometime in the future she and David could dine together in this same lovely spot.

She ate leisurely. She wanted to absorb all the warmth and relaxation of Demings that she could. She would need it for tomorrow.

When she had finished she walked slowly toward the cash register where Mr. Deming, dressed neatly and conservatively in a dark suit, pushed her money aside. "'On the house,' the slip should read," he said, smiling pleasantly down at Gwen's petite figure.

"Oh-h! Thanks, Mr. Deming!"

"A little remembrance from all of us for a very special person!" He flashed Gwen a radiant smile.

Gwen's eyes filled with tears. "Thank you so kindly. My dinner was superb! You... you'll still... give me away.., if..." Her voice broke.

"With great delight; and feel really honored to do it, little girl. I'll not let you down. You may be surprised though! Your father just may show up. We're all praying."

Walking leisurely back to her apartment, Gwen's heart leaped at the slim possibility of seeing her dear father again. She had written him, asking him to fill a

father's place and give her away, but she had had no reply. "Thy will, dear Lord!" she said.

Sudden tears stung her eyes again as she thought of her father and mother. How happy they had been at one time! Gwen found it almost impossible to reconcile herself to the fact that they were separated. After her conversion and glorious experience of entire sanctification, her parents quarreled frequently. Her mother, a vain, proud, worldly woman, insisted that Gwen give up her 'foolishness,' (as she termed salvation) or leave home. Her father, meanwhile, took sides with his daughter.

At her mother's continual insistence and perpetual nagging that she either relinquish her faith in God and forsake her new standards of modesty of dress and godly behaviour or leave home, Gwen chose the latter and moved to the city.

She prayed fervently for the conversion of her parents ere she retired for the night and when she lay down she finally had the assurance that God was working out His purpose, though how she didn't know. It was pelting down rain when she awoke the following morning. What a day for a wedding, she laughed. But with the stroke of noon by the city clock, a golden sunbeam sped from the edge of the heavy cloud and poured itself through the living room window and lightly caressed the pretty bride-to-be who was busy with last minute preparations.

A gentle knock on the door sent Gwen scurrying across the room. Certainly that couldn't be Sue already! She wasn't due at the apartment for another hour or two.

Opening the door, Gwen stepped back with a gasp. The next instant she flung herself into the woman's arms. "Mother! Mother!" she cried.

"I'm here," Eleanor Barrister said rather awkwardly.

"I'm so glad you've come, Mother dear," Gwen said softly, her tears falling freely on to her mother's fine, exquisite dress.

"I'll hire a limousine to drive us to the church," Mrs. Barrister said, drawing away from Gwen and reaching for the telephone directory.

"That won't be necessary, Mother dear. Sue Deming and her fiance are coming by for me. Sue's my maid of honor and Bryan is David's best man. You'll love Sue and Bryan, Mother."

Mrs. Barrister stiffened a bit. "Very well. Have it your way, Gwen," she said petulantly.

Realizing that her mother had not changed since she had last seen her and knowing that further talk would only produce a spirit of argumentation, Gwen changed the

subject abruptly. "Could I prepare something for you to eat?" she asked sweetly. "You must be hungry."

"I have eaten. Thank you."

"Then we shall just visit," Gwen suggested sweetly. "It's been over two years since I saw you. Tell me all about yourself and what you've been doing."

Eleanor Barrister spoke little and Gwen was glad when it was time for her to begin dressing. First, she let her long, silky-black hair down and gave it a thorough but gentle brushing before arranging it neatly on her head.

"You... you..., mean..., you're not having a hair-stylist do your hair, Gwen? You're going to be married..., like that? ? ?" Eleanor Barrister asked in exasperation.

A gay ripple of laughter filled the room as Gwen replied, "That won't be necessary, dear. I always take care of my hair and wear it this same way.

"But it's so long and plain-looking."

"The Lord has been good, to bless me with such long and lovely thick hair after so many years of having cut it off."

Mrs. Barrister made no comment. As Sue helped Gwen into her dress and with her veil, Eleanor stood back and surveyed her daughter. She was beautiful, her heart told her. The image of her father!

"Now you are all ready except for your necklace!" Eleanor exclaimed. "And I have taken care of that. Here," she said, stepping over to Gwen and holding a double strand of pearls against the white gown. "These pearls will go beautifully with your satin gown."

With a gentle hand Gwen pushed the expensive pearls toward her mother. "Thanks, dear mother. I don't wear jewelry of any kind. God's woman adorns herself with 'salvation and a meek and quiet spirit' which, in the sight of God, is of great price. You must not feel badly, dear. I hold the same convictions today as I did while I was living at home."

Eleanor Barrister was offended. It showed plainly in her eyes. Offended and angry, just as she had been when Gwen announced that she was converted that night some few years back. Gwen tried to put her arms around her Mother's neck but the older woman pushed her away.

It was after the usher had seated her mother in the church that Mr. Deming approached Gwen. "Come with me to the young people's room," he whispered.

Laughing softly, Gwen followed. "It must be terribly important!" she teased.

"It is!" he exclaimed, tears sliding out of his blue-gray eyes.

He pushed the door open. "Enter, dear girl," he said, closing the door as soon as she was inside.

Standing inside the door was John Barrister. Gwen gave a squeal of delight and with a single bound she flung herself into the open, waiting arms. "Daddy! Dear, dear Daddy. You've come! You've come!"

"Gwen! My precious daughter! Of course I've come!"

Their happy tears mingled freely.

"You'll give me away, father dear?"

John Barrister laughed hoarsely. "You'll always belong to me, little lady," he said brokenly, "But of course I shall give you away in the ceremony. Come! Hadn't we better be making our way up-stairs."

Walking down the aisle on the arm of her beloved father, Gwen's heart felt light. Her feelings were plainly mirrored on her radiant face. She pressed his arm warmly. Her joy knew no bounds when she heard his dear voice answer the minister's question of, "Who giveth this woman away?" with a clear, steady, "I do."

John Barrister then stepped back and seated himself beside his estranged wife. Her face was pale and drawn-looking. She had aged considerably, he noticed, since their separation. His heart went out in pity, and, yea, love, for her. He loved her still. He always would.

He smiled at her. Tears filled her eyes. John saw the glint of tears and knew they were more than the usual emotional tears of a mother at the wedding of her child.

Sitting next to John, the sweet old emotions and stirrings of love possessed Eleanor as in earlier years. She had missed her husband and missed him dreadfully. To herself, she admitted that for a long time now her independence had gone stale. No longer did she see herself as the fashionable owner of a smart salon., the thriving little shop having been left her by an aunt recently deceased. Rather, she saw herself as an extremely lonely middle-aged woman who had always to be on the alert to sell her stock of clothes before they became too outmoded. With the fashion world in a seething continuous change of moods, lengths, designs, and patterns, Eleanor found that operating and owning the shop was both harassing and frustrating. She longed to be known, not as "Eleanor's" in silver letters over the shop frontage, but as plain Mrs. John

Barrister. Above all, she longed to have John back and to know the peace Gwen possessed. It would mean swallowing her pride, she knew.

As Gwen repeated the vows after the minister, John's hand slid across the pew to where Eleanor's gloved one rested. He touched it lightly at first and when Eleanor made no resistance to draw it away, he gently, tenderly folded her hand in his.

He smiled into her face which was turned toward him. Eleanor answered the smile, her eyes revealing the feelings of her heart.

As David and Gwen knelt for prayer John whispered to Eleanor, "Why not begin a new life today, dear? The new life in Christ... like Gwen? We could be so happy together."

Eleanor's eyes were wet with tears. "Yes, John dearest! Please, let's begin again... God's way and Gwen's way."

As the happy bride and groom were being driven to the reception hall, John and Eleanor lingered behind with the minister.

Kneeling at the altar, close to where David and Gwen had knelt only minutes before, John and Eleanor wept their way through to the throne of mercy and were gloriously converted.

Sitting close to her husband as he drove to the reception, Eleanor, her hand encased lovingly in his, whispered, "I've missed you dreadfully, John dearest and I love you so. My life has been miserable without you."

Reaching over, John drew Eleanor in his arm. "I love you dearly, Eleanor: Ah-h but I have missed you!"

Eleanor looked up into her husband's handsome face. "All these years have been wasted because of my pride and stubbornness! O John, I'm so sorry! Forgive me! Forgive me!"

For answer, John Barrister pulled his wife more closely to him. It was a good thing that Eleanor's elegant coffee-colored silk dress was crease resistant. Feeling as if she had at last come home, she lay her head on John's shoulder. It was almost as if she and John had just repeated the lovely, binding wedding vows.

It was a miracle -- a Wedding Miracle -- at their daughter's wedding!

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**THE END**