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This Way I Choose

By Mrs. Paul E. King

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Jean buried her head in the pillow, trying to drown out the angry voices. The Sterlings next door were fighting again.

She shuddered. What would it be like to live in a home like that? She contrasted her own life to Eileen Sterling's. Poor girl, she never had had a chance. Both her father and mother were now known and well-confirmed alcoholics. O they wouldn't acknowledge it. But then, that seemed to be the usual pattern of the alcoholic., he refused to admit that he was "hooked" on the "fire-water" that superficially and momentarily transformed problems into things of beauty and nothingness.



"I wonder if Daddy and Mother will remember that I graduate this year!" Eileen said.

"I'm leaving you, Harry Sterling, and I'm never coming back!" Jean shuddered as Mrs. Sterling's loud angry words rose on the still night air and floated through the open bedroom window to her ears. She heard a door slam loudly and fiercely, then deathly silence.

For a long while she lay still, breathing hard, her heart thumping with fright; then, trembling all over, she slipped out of bed and dropped to her knees, hoping desperately that the noise had not disturbed nor awakened her parents.

She prayed until the burden left her heart then she crawled back beneath the sheet, confident that God would take care of Eileen.

Like herself, Eileen was seventeen. A pretty girl she was, with long flaxen-blond hair and eyes as blue-green as the ocean. Eileen was sensitive. Extremely sensitive. Jean attributed her over-sensitiveness to her home-life. The girl was insecure. Jean's heart ached for her friend. She yearned to help her. Praying, she fell asleep.

She was awakened early by a loud insistent knock on the back door. Donning a robe, she hurried down the hallway to the door. Her mother was just coming out of her bedroom. "I wonder who that might be!" Mrs. Mattheson exclaimed sleepily, tying the belt of her robe securely about her slender waist.

"I wonder if it's not Eileen!" Jean half whispered. "The Sterlings had a big fight last night. I heard Eileen's mother shout that she was leaving Mr. Sterling and never coming back..."

Mrs. Mattheson sighed. "That dear, dear girl!" she exclaimed, unlocking the door and discovering that indeed it was Eileen.

"O Mrs. Mattheson! Jean!" the blonde-haired girl said brokenly, rushing into Jean's open arms. "O it's terrible! Dreadful! What am I going to do? Mother left for good this time. And this morning when I went to the kitchen for a glass of milk . . . my stomach ulcer's acting up fiercely again," she explained, "I found a note on the table. It was from daddy. He... he left, too. He told me not to worry about him and never to look for him. Said he'd made one grand mess out of both mother's and his life and he couldn't bear the thought of ruining mine any more than he and mother have already done. He left on the early morning freight. Just like a hobo, mind you! Whatever am I going to do? I have no relatives who'd take me in and the rent will be due on the house in a few days and I . . . I have no money with which to pay it. O Jean, I hate whiskey and... and . . . beer! It broke up our home!" She was weeping bitterly, her shoulders shaking convulsively.

Mrs. Mattheson placed loving arms around the slender shoulders. "Eileen," she spoke gently, motherly, "you'll always have a home right here with us. You must not worry. Worry is not trusting God; and since your recent conversion and sanctification God has guided and cared for you in a marvelous way. Has He not?"

"O yes, Yes! But this seems so ... big and so... so insurmountable. I love my mother and father and I . . . I want them back." She dropped her face in her hands and wept uncontrollably.

"We'll all make it a matter of special prayer that God will some day grant you your heart's desire, Eileen dear. Who knows, it may take this to save them! The road they are taking won't be easy for either of them..., especially when they love you!"

"But do they love me? This question keeps nagging me constantly. I can't understand how they could leave me like this if they did." She was wringing her dainty hands frantically and nervously.

"Sin drives the best of parents to extremes they never dreamed possible. It is a cruel, brutal, hard task-master. Eileen. You remember the Bible account of the prodigal son?"

Eileen nodded assent.

"Well, the Bible says, "And when he came to himself..." So you see, before the prodigal son could be helped, he had to see and realize that he needed help. He had to come to himself. It may take this to bring your parents to this very real realization. There's a joyous ending to that account, as you will remember. Since you are now alone, why not move your belongings over here? We shall all be happy to have you. You may have the spare bedroom as your own or if you prefer, you may move in with Jean."

Eileen's eyes grew wide with wonder and thankfulness. "O thank you, Mrs. Mattheson, you are so kind! But I can't be a burden on you..."

"It is never a burden to do something nice for someone you love dearly," Mrs. Mattheson said softly and meaningfully... "It will be pure joy to have you."

Brokenly, Eileen whispered, "You have been so good to me! Why, if it hadn't been for Jean's love and her patience with me and concern over me, I'd still be a lost sinner on my way to hell..., like my parents. O you've been good to me!"

"Then grant us the great pleasure of having you as one of us until things change. It will make it lighter on you, too, to have someone to pray with you. Since the house your folks rented was furnished, you'll have no worry there. We can call the landlord and let him know that he can be on the lookout for other renters . . . if your folks don't return before the date the rent is up."

Eileen's answer was quick and earnest. "They won't be returning. Mrs. Mattheson. I know they won't! Mother was more angry than I have ever known her to be. O, I was so embarrassed! What must the neighbors think! I know they couldn't help but hear." Then, as if the spring had found an outlet and refused any longer to be dammed up, Eileen's words gushed out like the mighty Niagara with force: "Mother resented my arrival into the family. She told me as much, over and over again and again. I was considered a nuisance and a burden. Seldom ever have I felt the affection and gentleness of her arms around me. She loved partying too well for me to have arrived. Father, bless him! ... while he needs God badly, was far more like a mother to me than my own mother. I truly believe my daddy wanted me and loved me -- and did. You know that my father's mother, my grandmother, was a real saint of God?"

Jean gasped in happy surprise as she threw her arms about her friend's slender shoulders "O Eileen, God undoubtedly answered your grandmother's many prayers then

and saved your soul. And I believe He'll save your daddy, too!" she exclaimed. "Where is your grandmother Sterling? She should know . . ."

"She's in heaven. All my grandparents are gone. Grandmother Sterling was genuine! She practically raised me till I was nearly seven, when she died. I cried for days after she was gone. As my punishment, and when father was at work, I got whipped or shut up in my room a whole day at a time for it. But as a little girl, I decided that if I ever grew up, I was going to live like Grandmother. Then in my Freshman year, God sent you to me, Jean. Well, that was all I needed. O I'm sorry I said all this! It won't help unravel the tangles . . ."

"I think it may, Eileen," Mrs. Mattheson said kindly, "and I think your father will some day become converted. The Apostle James said, 'The prayer of a righteous man availeth much,' and I believe it!"

"We've proven it, haven't we dear mother?" Jean asked with shining eyes.

"Many times, dear. Furthermore, in St. John's gospel, 14:14, Jesus said, 'If ye shall ask anything in My name, I will do it.' "

A light brightened Eileen's face. It was as if she had suddenly grasped hold of a great treasure all her own . . . a treasure she would not, could not, relinquish.

Her move into the Mattheson home proved a blessing both to herself and her kind benefactors.

The loneliness of her heart and the longing to see her parents... her father especially . . . only served as a powerful and mighty magnet, drawing her out much in deep intercessory prayer. This, in turn, had a spiritually deepening and enriching effect upon her soul. Eileen grew by leaps and bounds in the grace of God and the knowledge of His will and His leadings.

She and Jean, now both seniors, excelled in their studies and were more and more like sisters. It was no surprise then, when the announcement was made, that Eileen was valedictorian of her class and Jean salutatorian.

The girls hurried home from school with the news.

"I wonder if either mother or daddy will remember that I graduate this year," Eileen said, a far-away dreamy look in her eyes. "It would be so wonderful to have them here for commencement."

" 'With God all things are possible,' " Jean quoted. "But never you worry about people being there to see you graduate, Eileen dearest; mother and father and the church people will more than fill the spaces allowed to us. We're all so proud of you,

Eileen! You have been living proof and a living testimony to dozens of other young people that God not only saves and sanctifies but that He keeps, under all circumstances!

This wicked and awful divorce and separation scourge has hit a staggering blow to many of our school friends, and God has used you to show them that they need not take the road of gloom and despair and utter dejection and defeat; but that, through tremendous heartache and heart-break, one can, through Christ, live more than a conqueror."

Eileen's eyes filled with tears. "I have been fortunate though, Jean; not all the students from broken homes have a Christian family who will help them and take them in like you folks did. And only those who are in the middle of it . . . meaning the children, of course... know the feeling of utter despair and helplessness one feels and experiences. Many feel life's not worth living any longer..."

"Like Susan Bannoi, for instance," Jean interrupted. "She disappeared. No one knows where she is."

A sad pensive look replaced Eileen's ordinarily sunny face. "Maybe," she said brokenly, "if God hadn't sent you along when He did I . . . I . . . might have been dead! I couldn't have stood up under this in myself. O Jean, if I hadn't known the Lord, and you and your folks, where might I be?"

"But you did, Eileen; and He has helped you. Praise the Lord!" Jean said thankfully.

"And by God's grace I'll do all I can to help rescue others from sin, Jean. This has given me an insight into hearts that have been broken just as mine has been. But back to commencements; I... I'm going to miss Stanton High. Terribly!"

"I too," Jean confided, misty-eyed. "When I think how close we are to graduation night . . . well,... I... I feel all weepy!"

The weeks sped by quickly. Stanton High was all a bustle and a flurry with excitement and activity. The seniors, dressed in their gowns, marched proudly down the long aisle of the gymnasium-auditorium to the time of a familiar tune played by the school orchestra. Heads turned and cameras flashed as, two by two, the youthful looking graduates entered and walked with erect shoulders to the spacious platform and sat down only after the last student was stationed in front of the seat designated to him.

During the invocation, a lone figure passed through the doorway and, finding a single seat vacant near the rear of the auditorium, sat down in it. He hoped he was not conspicuous. A tear slipped out from beneath drooping lashes, then another and still another. Taking a bronzed hand he brushed them quickly away.

During her speech . . . a God-honoring and God-glorifying speech, Eileen saw the man. Her heart thumped wildly and seemed to skip beats. It was with great difficulty that she controlled her emotions. She wanted to run to him. To fly into his arms. But no, she had a duty to perform. She would fulfill her obligation to her fullest and best. "As most of you here tonight know," she was saying, "I am a joyful follower of the Lord Jesus Christ. He has filled my heart and life with His blessed presence and His constant and abiding love, giving me peace for unrest and turmoil, love for hate, and joy for sadness. For many months I have claimed St. John 14:14, 'If ye shall ask anything in my name, I will do it.' Today He has answered my prayer. Christ can do as much for you, my dear audience and listeners.

"Tonight I bid Stanton High a fond but sad farewell. I pray God that in the future, Stanton and the world will be blessed by some small contribution I shall be able to make..."

Loud applause filled the auditorium as Eileen sat down but she didn't notice it. Her heart was overflowing with thankfulness and praise to God. She must get back to the man and make no delay. She must: He must not go out of her life again!

It was during the closing prayer that she tip-toed from her seat to a side exit. Holding her diploma tightly, she hurried through a side door and ran down a hallway then stood, panting, in the doorway through which the man must pass..

The audience had risen to their feet and begun moving, some toward the graduates, others toward the exits. Eileen pushed her way through the masses of people. Now! Now was her time.., when everyone was hurrying, either to get outside or up to the graduates. "Pardon me!" she kept exclaiming as, little by little, with her object in view, she pushed forward toward the man who stood transfixed, his eyes searching the platform, the audience for a face!

"Daddy! Daddy!" Eileen cried, rushing forward into the new opened arms of her father, "O Daddy, I love you so!" she was sobbing like a little girl in his arms. "I'm so happy you came. I knew you would! I knew you would! The Lord gave me the assurance some few weeks ago that you would come."

The man's tears wet the tasseled cap on the girl's head but she didn't care. He was holding her gently to his manly bosom like he used to do so long, long ago when she had dropped her doll or had a loose tooth that needed pulling but hurt too much to pun. "Eileen! My little girl! I... I'm home... to stay; if you..., aren't ashamed of me."

Eileen was suddenly laughing. The tears spilled copiously from her beautiful eyes but they were happy tears. Such happy tears! "O Daddy, no! I'm not ashamed of you. You are going to change. You are going to get converted. I love you and I'm so happy you came back!"

The big man held his daughter at arm's length then and looked her full in the face. "I am converted, Eileen. I prayed my way back into God's fold. He has freely forgiven me. For the first time in years, I am truly happy."

Eileen was too overjoyed to make comment. She merely faced her, father and wept and laughed at the same time. "Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord!" she finally exclaimed toward the skies. "Wait till the Matthesons hear about it! O Daddy, we've all been praying so hard for you and mother!"

"Where is she, Eileen? Mother? I mean. Have you heard from her?" There was a look of deep concern, and love and pity in his eyes and on his face.

"No, father; not a word."

The great frame of the man shook violently as he broke out in sobs. "... I love her, Eileen. I love your mother and I miss her so. I was a foolish man to have started drinking when I couldn't change her. But with you and me both Christians we'll not give God any rest., day nor night... until we hear something of her and know your mother is converted. If I hadn't backslid and would have been true to the Lord, things would not be as they are. But we'll pray and pray until she is converted..."

"And sanctified wholly, Daddy. You need to have your heart cleansed from the inbred sin, too. When the Holy Ghost sanctifies you, that 'bent to backsliding' is taken out. Sanctification is a 'second benefit', a 'second' anchor to the soul."

"Anything to be more like the Saviour, dear girl. But come, you must be starved. Shall we invite the Matthesons? They're looking for you."

Eileen turned then and caught Jean's eye. Her face shone like some angelic being and a diamond-jewel tear dangled from her eyes. Proudly, Eileen led her father toward the Matthesons. The wonderful Matthesons! Her thankful heart seemed to be shouting: 'This way I choose! This way I choose!! It was the only way of true happiness and lasting joy and peace. She was thankful to God for having found 'The Way'. And now, her father too!

"I have a gift in the car for you, Eileen," her father was saying as they walked toward the Matthesons.

"I have all the gift I want or care for, dear father!" Eileen exclaimed happily, sliding her small hand into the big palm of her father and squeezing it affectionately and tightly.

Mr. Sterling beamed down proudly upon his daughter. "It's wonderful to be home again!" He sighed happily and contentedly.

"And isn't it wonderful, Daddy? Now Brother and Sister Mattheson and Jean can call you 'Brother,' too!"

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THE END