

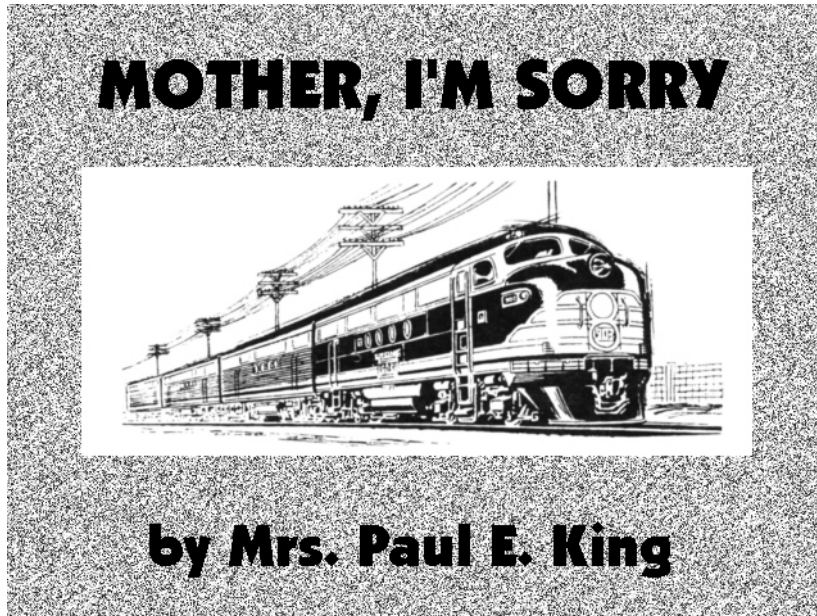
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MOTHER, I'M SORRY
By Mrs. Paul E. King

Erin pressed her head hard against the cushioned seat of the train and closed her eyes. Mother dying! It . . . it couldn't be! she thought miserably recalling the many lost years between them. Years that could have been so pleasant and lovely and blessed had it not been for her willfulness and stubbornness. She had wanted to go home. Oh how she had wanted to go! But her stubborn pride had built a wall so high and so deep and wide that she

couldn't seem to get above it nor around it. What a dreadfully devastating thing pride was, she thought miserably and forlornly now.

She leaned her head against the window, hoping the cool pane might help to assuage and lighten the throbbing pain she felt in her temples. Rain slanted across the pane and prickled like gravel against the glass. With furious gusts the wind drove the water in sheets. The noise of it only added to the throbbing in her head. Quickly she repositioned herself then dropped her head into the palms of her hands. "Mother! Oh Mother!" she sobbed.

The more she cried the greater the throbbing pain became. Already she had taken two headache tablets. She knew she dare not take more for the present; they served only to aggravate her stomach ulcer and to make her nervous. Jittery, shaky nervous. She despised the feeling.

She thought of Jenny's letter then. Dear, sweet Jenny. She was the ideal sister in every way. They had been so close, she and Jenny, until . . .

A stab of pain shot through Erin's heart. It was both physical and spiritual. Mental too. She could see Jenny's tears and hear her earnest prayers for her as plainly now as when it all happened six years ago. Tears of love and concern; prayers of compassion and concern. And her mother's deep, pitiful groans of agonizing pleas and petitions to God on her behalf! Oh, how they haunted her these six years. If only she had listened to her mother, had heeded her godly admonition and wise counsel.

"Honey," her mother had told her one day shortly after she had met the tall, dark, handsome, personable businessman who moved into their prosperous town, "I wish you wouldn't go out with this Marvin Miner. Something's wrong. I feel it every time I pray. Please, Erin, don't become infatuated with him."

"O Mom, you're just prejudiced. He's a Christian. He said he was."

"Not all that say Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of Heaven, Erin. There's something about him that frightens me when you go out with him. What's wrong with Bill? He's a real Christian, honey, and he'll make the best possible husband."

"Don't pick my husband, Mother. I'm sure you did your own deciding when you met Daddy. Grant me this freedom of choice. Please!" Erin remembered having said.

"I'm not picking your husband, my dear Erin; you know I'm not. It's just that I feel you're making a lifetime mistake by giving Marvin your time. I feel this very strongly."

"And what if I love him and he loves me . . . ?"

"Love him! Why you've only known him a month. "

"But we do, Mother. We love each other. Very much. He wants me to marry him."

Erin remembered the look on her mother's face. (Would she ever be able to forget it?) The tears too. Tears that ran like miniature streams down her cheeks. Giving her a look of such pain and sadness as to lower Erin's defiant eyes, she turned and walked from the room, moaning like she had been enduring the most excruciating pain.

Weeks later Erin noticed the thin body of her mother; the hollow, sallow cheeks; the red eyes. Her mother had gone on a fast for her, she knew. A fast that encompassed many hours of intercessory prayer and long night vigils. But her mind was made up! No amount of talking . . . or praying . . . she told her long-agobackslidden-heart, would alter her decision to marry the dashing young business tycoon, who was fast climbing the ladder to fame and success.

The night she told her mother and Jenny that Marvin and she were getting married, she thought her mother would have a heart attack. So much like her beloved, deceased father did her mother act. Jenny had put her to bed and called the doctor, who advised and insisted upon total bed rest for no less than a week. Erin remembered the reproachful glance he cast her way as he hurried from the house.

The week before her wedding, her mother had pleaded and remonstrated with her not to marry Marvin. "You'll be sorry, Erin. You'll be sorry!" she had cried. "There's something dark and sinister in his life; in his

heart. Please, honey, don't marry him. Marriage is for keeps. For life. That's a long, long time when one is married to the wrong man."

Erin remembered now what next took place with such vividness and heartbreak that it started a fresh stream of tears flowing down her cheeks. With passionate anger she cried, "I'm marrying him, Mother, and that's that! You won't stop me. I love him. He loves me. I'm fed up with all this anti-Marvin talk and to prove how sick I am of hearing this don't, don't bit, I'm moving out."

Amid her mother's loving entreaties and her soft, gentle words of, "Don't do it, honey; you'll be sorry. Come back to Jesus and get your heart fixed up again," she had packed her clothes and moved in with one of her girlfriends until the day of the wedding. She had left without saying good-bye to her dear, kind mother and lovely sister. In a fit of rage she had gone. And Marvin had then transferred to a distant city, taking her with him as his bride.

And now she was returning home . . . to her dying mother. Oh, how she wished she had listened to that saintly parent, had heeded her words and taken her wise counsel to heart. But that was in the past. So many things were in the past now. If only . . .

She shuddered, recalling her married years to the dashing charmer. One and one-half years. That was all. And what a life! Too late she learned to know the real man, too late to change the course she had taken, to undo the "What-God-hath-joined-together-let-no-man-put-asunder" binding vows. Too late to right the error which she saw with perfect clarity and painful awareness after her second month of marriage. She felt like she was in a web that was binding her and almost suffocating her. If only she had not gone over those long hours of prayer, those sacrificial fastings by Mother and Jenny. But she had. Oh, how she had! And what a price she had paid already by taking her way instead of God's.

How could she ever tell Jenny and her mother, if God in His mercy spared her to them, that Marvin did have something "dark and sinister" about him? Very, very dark and sinful. And how could she tell them that for four and one-half years she had been husbandless; that Marvin had breezed out of her life in precisely the same way that he had breezed into their town and into her life? That he had left no hint as to where he could be found or located. Nothing, except a short note which stated simply that the furniture and small

bungalow was hers. That she was free to do what she chose; he would not be back. "I set you free," the note had read. "I want my freedom also."

"Oh Mother! Mother!" she cried in a muffled tone into her hands. "You were so right. So right."

She realized afresh and anew what a mess she had allowed Satan to make of her life. And all because, way back in her past, she had never fully paid the price and "gone to the bottom" with God. Always, there had been a part of her which had wanted the world and worldly things, and her own willful way. "Free," her husband had written . . . "I set you free." Ah, if only he knew; she would never be free. Not until death loosed her from the sacred, God-heard vow which she had made and taken. And she was still so very young too.

She looked through the pane to the pouring rain outside and listened to the ceaseless clack, clack, clacking of the wheels speeding over the rails, wishing the engineer would double the speed. Her mother was dying; every minute counted.

She thought of Jenny's letter then and opened her purse and drew it out. Pressing it to her heart, she wept. It was through the aid of the girlfriend with whom she had stayed the week prior to her wedding, that Jenny had secured the address and written her. The letter had come as a balm to her heart, a treasure beyond any describing, until she had read about her mother's physical status. Then she had fallen over the bed and sobbed until there were no more tears to shed.

In a short while, she had called the airport as to airfare home. Then she called the railroad station. Finding a difference of \$300.00 in fare, she chose the train. Her slim budget wouldn't allow for the speedier but more expensive plane fare home. And she had no credit cards to use either.

She checked her watch. Would the hour never come when she could step onto the hometown railroad station platform? she wondered anxiously and nervously as she leaned her head back against the cushioned seat.

She must have slept, for when she next opened her eyes she heard the conductor calling out the name of her town. Getting quickly to her feet, she

gathered her few personal belongings together then walked briskly down the long aisle to the exit.

Once outside, she hailed a cab, and was soon on her way to the hospital. Shivers of mingled fear and excitement raced through her being. Memories of the past flooded her with pleasant and beautiful pictures of her happy childhood and growing-up years. Then a dark curtain fell as she remembered Marvin and his deceit. She had been blinded by his charm and winsomeness; by his handsome physical features, she realized suddenly as her mother's oft-repeated words of "All that glitters is not gold" came back to her to mock her. Laugh at her.

At the hospital, she paid the cabbie then hurried inside to the desk to locate her mother's room number.

Like one in a daze, she walked down the shiny clean hospital corridor and pushed the door open quietly, tears of thankfulness flowing that her mother was still alive. Jenny was in a chair beside the bed, her hand holding the frail one of their mother. Her eyes were closed. Erin recognized it as a sleep from sheer exhaustion.

She wanted to rush over to Jenny, to fling her arms around her and tell her how happy she was to see her. She wanted to caress her beloved mother and shower her with kisses; wanted to get on her knees and tell her how sorry she was for all the heartache and sorrow she had caused her; wanted to beg her forgiveness. But all she could do was stand, statue-like and deathly still, and look at the two of them.

She saw the life-sustaining tubes connected to her mother, the oxygen making her breathing easier, the catheter. How much of this had she brought on? she wondered as silent tears trickled down her cheeks.

She stepped to the side of the bed and took her mother's limp, almost limpid-looking, hand in hers. Squeezing it gently and leaning over her thin form, she whispered in her ear, "Mother! Dear, dear Mother, I love you. I'm sorry, Mother. Sorry. Can you forgive me? Please! Do you hear me? Mother, this is Erin. I've come home to you."

She watched the face with an eagle eye. No response. Waited for a movement. Nothing but the steady drip, drip, drip of the IV solutions.

"Mother, this is Erin," she said again. "Can you hear me? Can you? I love you. And Mother, I'm sorry. "

Again Erin watched the face. The eyes especially. Nothing. No sign of either having recognized or heard.

Bowing her head, she cried softly, "Oh God, let her hear! Please let her hear. I must make things right with her. I must. Please God . . . "

Tears flowed freely now. She had prayed! Yes, she had. A thing she hadn't done for almost the full six years that she had been gone.

Leaning closer to her mother, she sobbed. Then she was praying earnestly. Not only for her mother but for herself. For her forgiveness; her restoration of soul.

When she opened her eyes with God's peace and glory in her heart and shining on her face, she saw Jenny staring at her in almost disbelief. Then in an instant they were in each other's arms, crying for joy. And sadness.

"How is Mother? Erin asked her younger sister then.

"She's stable now, thanks be to God. Still critical, the doctor said, but nothing at all like she was."

"I believe God's going to allow her to live until I can tell her how sorry I am for the way I treated her and disregarded her admonition and her earnest prayers and fastings. Yours too, Jenny. I'm sorry. I want you to forgive me."

"Oh, Erin, you know you are forgiven. And I wouldn't be surprised to see our dear mother begin to recover, now that you are home. She has carried a tremendous burden for you since you left. It was too much on that weak heart of hers. Where is Marvin; didn't he come?"

"O Jen, Mother was right; I was wrong. Marvin? I have no idea where he is. He left me four and a half years ago."

Jenny gasped. "You . . . you . . . mean . . . ?"

Erin nodded her head. "I'll tell you about it sometime, Jen," she said. "Now why don't you get more sleep and let me take over watching mother?"

"I'd rather just stay awake and look at you. It's been such a long time, Erin. And we've missed you awfully, Mother and I."

"Does Mother ever get awake, Jenny?"

"For short periods of time. See! She's opening her eyes now. She must hear us talking."

Erin was beside the bed in an instant. "Mother!" she cried. "It's me, Erin. I'm home. Mother I'm sorry . . . "

The limpid eyes opened wide in glad recognition and surprise. The lips were moving, trying to say something. Erin put her ear near. Then she showered her mother's face with kisses, murmuring softly, "I love you, Mother. O I love you. I want you to forgive me for the way I treated you, for hurting you so. I'm back in God's fold again. Tonight, beside your bed, the kind Shepherd forgave me and took me back into His fold. Mother, I'm sorry for.."

The lips moved again. Erin, bending low heard the healing word, "Forgiven."

She squeezed the thin hand and received a gentle, weak pressure in return. And a smile. It was like a benediction.

"She'll make it now," Jenny said. "Yes, by God's grace, she'll make it. With you converted the burden's lifted. Now her heart can heal." Erin wept.