

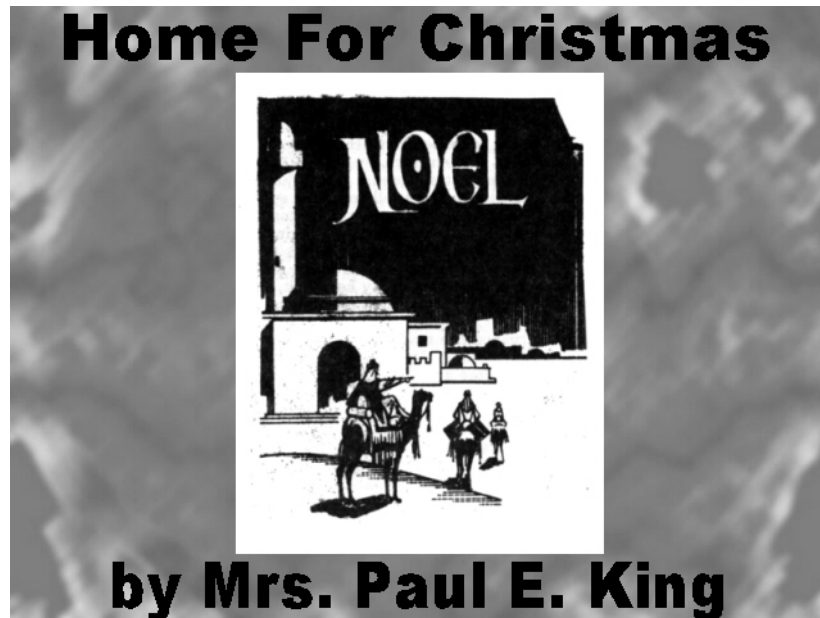
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HOME FOR CHRISTMAS
By Mrs. Paul E. King

The day had been a busy one, going up and down stairs delivering fruit baskets, groceries and toys to those whose meager earnings could not provide such niceties and necessities. I placed the last of my 'gifts' at the door of a poor family whom I had known for many years, knocked gently on the door, then slipped quietly and unobtrusively off the porch and dissolved into the shadows, waiting only long enough to see that the heavy box was

found and carried inside. Then, with a soaring heart, I hurried away, experiencing in great measure the meaning of "more blessed to give than to receive."

With a light heart I turned the key in the door of my home and stepped inside. Emptiness and loneliness greeted me in its now-usual way and for a very brief moment I almost succumbed to it. Then, realizing that although it was human to weep, and mourn the passing of a loved one, I dare not, must not, grieve as those who have no hope.

Pleading the blood of Jesus, and singing a song of praise and adoration to my loving Heavenly Father, I ate a hasty supper then prepared for the journey ahead . . . Christmas with our only child and his family.

The plane was less crowded than I could ever remember it having been when I had flown before. This, I concluded, was due to the fact that, the hour being late and it Christmas Eve, everyone was already at their destination. I smiled, thinking of the choice of seats available to me if the one assigned were not to my liking, then I settled back against the cushion and waited for the plane to lift and us to be air-borne.

In a short time I heard the roar of the motors, then I felt the slow, deliberate backing-up of the giant jet until it moved out of the terminal and started down the long runway.

I looked at the empty seat next to me and my heart constricted in pain. Ordinarily, Rebecca would have occupied it, her small dainty hand resting gently on mine and her eyes alight and aglow with a child-like joy and eagerness. She never lost the wonder of flying. It never became "ordinary" to her, not in all the years of our ministry. Always, the thrill of another take-off, the joy of another flight was evidenced in her eyes, on her face, and in her soft laughter. She was such a lovely person; beautiful in her simplicity and gentleness, and Godlike in her daily living, her kindness and in her willingness to help.

I thought of the years behind us then; 41 years we had shared together. Golden years, they were. (Almost, I thought I felt the gentle pressure of her hand on mine). Sudden, unbidden tears fell from my eyes. It was the first time I had been alone on Christmas Eve in forty-two years; forty one of those years having been married to Rebecca, while the year previous to our

marriage had been spent at her parents' home making plans for our February wedding. My heart felt a void and a vacancy of such indescribable proportion as to leave me weak.

Quickly I brushed the tears away, realizing that unless I pulled myself together I would be overcome with the grief of my loss and God could in no way get glory out of my life. He had promised grace sufficient for me as I stood by her casket and He had proven Himself and His promises true from that hour to this. I must not doubt His grace; I would look up and trust. In a soft whisper, I quoted the words from the pen of the saintly George Matheson:

O Love that wilt not let me go, I rest my weary soul in Thee; I give Thee back the life I owe, That in Thine ocean depths its flow May richer, fuller be.

O Joy that seekest me thro' pain, I cannot close my heart to Thee; I trace the rainbow thro' the rain, And feel the promise is not vain That morn shall tearless be.

I felt the gloom and depression melt away then like fog burning itself out under the white light of a hot sun. Calmly, I recalled the Christmases of the past: last-minute preparations at home, after the work for "others" was fully completed; Rebecca and I munching popcorn by a blazing fire, discussing the excitement and joy of our sleeping son when he awoke in the morning to discover the longed-for ice skates beneath the tree; the turkey in the refrigerator, plump and ready for roasting, a gift from the Caldwells for the past fifteen years; the cup of hot chocolate and, finally, the pleasant "goodnight" before sleep overtook our tired bodies.

I recalled these, and so many more, lovely experiences as I sat there. They unfolded like the petals of a lovely, fragrant, opening flower and suddenly I found myself thanking God for memories. Beautiful and pleasant memories. Not everyone could lay claim to my good fortune of these, I mused silently, thinking of the bitterness and hatred that seethed in many a heart.

I leaned my head back against the seat and tried to sleep but the body-restoring, mind-relaxing sleep eluded me. I thought of our last Christmas Eve together, Rebecca and myself. She, bustling about excitedly in the kitchen baking pies, stollens and cookies for our son and his family; me, helping to

decorate the cookie stars, birds and trees with frosting and colored sugars. It had been a wonderful evening; especially so after a full and busy day of delivering fruit baskets, grocery orders and toys provided by the people of our church for the poor.

We were tired but extremely happy, and totally content in each other's presence. Candles glowed from each window, their warm yellow light a testimony to passersby that Christ was still the Light of the world; gifts were wrapped beautifully and put in the living room, awaiting the arrival of little ones; the dining room smelled of fragrant pine and holly boughs and the long table was set with the best of our many-years'-old dishes and silverware. In a still-young teasing way, Rebecca had grabbed me and kissed me beneath a sprig of mistletoe which she had fastened to the door between our kitchen and dining room and which, I had to admit, I hadn't known was there or I would have performed the act-deed first. We went to bed laughing like a pair of newly-weds.

This year I hadn't even put the candles in the window: I would be away and she was gone . . . Home, to God's Eternal City.

I sat bolt upright and reached for a magazine. "Going Home for Christmas," the title stated in beautiful lettering. Captivated, I began reading the article. Amid scenes of snow-covered roads and farmhouses, the families gathered "home" in horse drawn sleighs, singing and shouting greetings to neighbors and friends as they traveled, finally reaching their destination and tumbling out in a flurry of excitement and joy and glee. "A great American custom," the writer stated.

I was leaving my home and going to my son's home. Then I realized the truth of the article when the writer said, "You may not be going home, but if there is love where you are going, you are going home. For where love is, that is home." A house of brick and mortar can be extremely silent, very empty and forbidding; only love can build a home. Soon I would be with those who loved me. They would do everything possible to make this beautiful Christmas season enjoyable for me.

I put the magazine in the seat pocket in front of me and leaned my head against the window. Then I saw it; a brilliant star in the indigo-blue sky. How mammoth it was and how brightly it shone! Immediately I thought of another night and another star. Centuries and centuries ago, it was; The Star

guided wise men from the east to the Christ-child. It was as though the Lord was telling me that He who guided men by His star those long-ago days, was still in His Heaven and that everything was going to be all right in my future days. He was guiding me; leading me down this strangely-unfamiliar path by His own nail-scarred hands.

My soul felt a wave of Divine Love and glory surge through it and I was blest and happy. I felt the All-Powerful, supportive and comforting arms of my Saviour encircle my entire being and all I could do was offer praise and thanksgiving.

The lights of the airport came into full view and soon I was with my family. Running towards me with outstretched arms, the grandchildren cried happily "Grandpa! Grandpa! I love you, Grandpa!" Immediately, I knew that I had come home for Christmas, for where love is, that is home.