

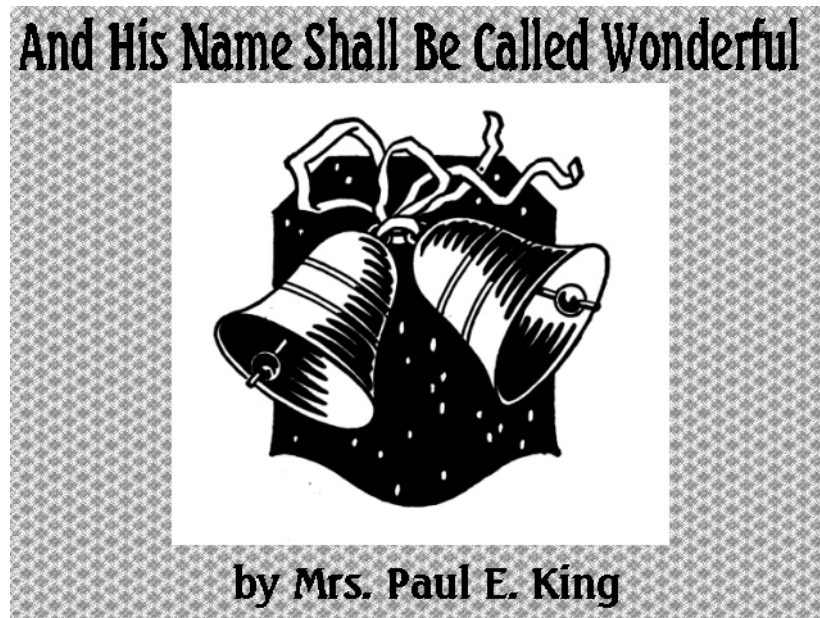
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AND HIS NAME SHALL BE CALLED WONDERFUL
By Mrs. Paul E. King

Priscilla Edgewood stepped into the hall and headed for the elevator, her spirits as low and as cold as the temperature outside. She was soon on the first floor of the tall building and as she stepped out of the elevator into what was an arcade, a flurry of voices floated her way. Happy voices they were, and excited. She looked up in time to see a group of young people floating past the elevator. Their faces were radiant with happiness and joy,

and their cheeks were flushed red from the cold outside. She watched them momentarily, then decided to follow them. They were up to something, she knew; she could feel the excitement.

The arcade was crowded with happy shoppers whose tastes ran more toward the extraordinary and not-so-common gifts, all of which could be found in abundance in the myriad unique little shops located in all directions on the first floor of the mammoth office building. Priscilla wished she could feel what she was sure the shoppers felt and were experiencing. But they had reasons for being happy and reasons to rejoice, she mused in silent bitterness.

The group of smiling, happy, and excited young people stopped abruptly in a crowded area near an exclusive women's shop. Without a word, they grouped themselves together in a semicircle, their red and green sweaters -- in that order -- an eye-catching thing. They were modestly dressed, the olive-skinned girl noticed; the boys all in white, dress shirts and well-pressed, dark gray trousers, the girls in gray, plaid skirts and white blouses with the sweaters over the shirts and blouses. A beautiful sight.

One of their group, a young man not much older than those in the semicircle, stepped in front of the young people, smiled, raised his hand and nodded, and the voices floated through the immediate area of the arcade like the soft sound of bells, Priscilla thought with a tug at her heart.

Carol after carol was sung, each with the message of love. Some were old, others Priscilla had never heard. People paused to listen; shoppers ceased their loud chatter and stood by reverently, aware that this group of joyful singers sang not out of tradition nor habit but from their heart, from something experienced and known. Something realized and real. It was written unmistakably on their countenance and revealed in the shine on each face.

Priscilla felt something damp on her cheek and, taking a kleenex from her purse, she daubed at the tears, allowing them to soak into the soft, absorbent tissue. Whatever was happening to her? she wondered, feeling like shaking herself, the way she had seen her aunt shake her younger sister some years ago. She was overreacting, she told her heart. The music and the songs were getting to her. She must get away. Away from this religious singing!

But she couldn't leave. In spite of her silent resolve to tear herself away, she couldn't. Something seemed to be holding her there. Always a great lover of good music and singing, she decided it was this which was captivating her. The singers' voices, so sweetly harmonizing, seemed as one. It was impossible to say who was singing what, so balanced and synchronized were the voices.

For a long while, the attractive young woman forgot where she was and where she needed to go. Not until someone nudged her and said, "I didn't know you had a religious bent, Priscilla," did she once more become a part of the world moving around her.

She turned scarlet cheeks toward the speaker. "Oh, hi, Steve," she answered, feeling almost like a trapped animal.

Tears shimmered in Steve's eyes. "What do you think of them?" he asked, motioning toward the singers.

"They . . . they're great! Wonderful!"

"Thanks, Priscilla. I think so, too. They're from our church. Know what makes them truly great?" he asked quickly, answering his own question with a jubilant, "They know the Christ of Christmas, that's what. They're born again and sanctified wholly young people. Oh, I'm thankful to see you here . . . listening. Sometimes, at work, you seem so indifferent to spiritual things. I've been praying for you," Steve said, "Very earnestly, Priscilla."

"Please, Steve . . ." she cried, turning and all but running out of the crowded arcade.

Outside, the streets were icy and gray with piles of sooted snow. She trudged through the mess toward the subway, bending against the wind and dreading to go home to the small, dark two-and-a-half-room apartment. When she first came to the city to work, the dingy apartment was the only thing she could find that was anywhere near to what her pocketbook could pay out of its weekly earnings. She had rented it with high hopes of finding something better. But everything that she looked at was either more than she could pay or was equally as drab and dingy and dismal, or more so, than the place she called home, but which she hated and despised.

She moved along at a rapid pace now with the flow of people hurrying to catch the right subway car, her mind in a turmoil. Once inside, the warmth and the motion of the speeding car made her feel drowsy. She squeezed between several other young women in the subway and closed her eyes, wishing she didn't need to go home to the dismal, unfriendly-looking apartment. Life could be so very lonesome, she thought. Yes, so very lonesome. She moved and functioned in and among a sea of people, to be sure, and she was even a part of them, but inside where no one saw or knew she felt like she was alone on an island. The girls in the office where she worked were much too busy and involved in affairs of their own to notice the pain in her heart or to feel her loneliness. Only Steve had been warm and friendly to her. But she was afraid to allow herself a close friendship, afraid the friend or friends might drop in to see her. And the very thought of someone . . . anyone coming into her "home" gave her a sick feeling in the pit of her stomach.

She surfaced from underground and merged into the dotted flow of traffic. The wind bit her cheeks while the gray clouds overhead dropped more snow.

She crossed a wet, slushy street and walked briskly toward a small, corner, grocery store a few blocks away, wanting to buy some necessary food items before going into the apartment for the night. As she crossed a crowded, busy street, soft music floated to her ears. She looked up, wondering where the sweet carols were coming from. And then she saw the church. Strange that she hadn't noticed it before, she thought.

She paused and listened. Then she walked up the stone steps and tried the door. It opened to her touch. She stepped into the dark vestibule, drawn by the beautiful singing and wanting with all her heart to go into the main sanctuary but afraid to do so. The urge became greater than her fear, however, and soon she was sitting on the very last pew in the church. Everything was dark except for the platform, where lights burned dimly over the choir loft.

"Now," the choir director ordered, "I want all the tenors to repeat that last part again. I want it perfect. The cantata's to be presented tomorrow night, God willing. Let's strive for perfection. Remember, your voices are heralding the glad tidings of a Saviour! That's something to get excited about.

Who knows but what someone may be here who is seeking after God, someone who needs our Saviour! Sing it again, with feeling, and in the Spirit. Now, ready . . ."

Priscilla became lost in the singing. She felt teardrops hang momentarily in the corners of her eyes then wash her cold cheeks with their warmth. It was as though angels were singing the glad, good news to her, she thought, as she felt her body relax and the stress and tension of the day melt away in the peace and serenity of the grand, old church.

This was the first time she had entered a church since her parents died, she recalled, putting her head on the back of the pew in front of her and sobbing like she did when she learned of the accident that took the lives of her parents. She and Patience were left to the mercy of cruel relatives, irreligious relatives who made sport of her and her sister for praying and reading the Bible and believing in God. Though younger than she by less than two years, Patience had been the first to run away from their aunt and uncle. And when she herself could stand it no longer, she had followed suit, winding up in New York City as a secretary for Addler and Benson Associates, minus God and the peace and joy which had been hers at an earlier date and time.

"O God!" she sobbed in a half-audible, half-whispered way. "I'm so unhappy. I . . . I'm desolate without Thee! Desolate! Why did I allow them to make me bitter? Please, dear Father, can You help this, another of Thy prodigal children, to be restored and made whole once again. I'm sorry. I've sinned against Thee. Thee only. Forgive me, please. Twice, today, Thou hast sent singing messengers to me. I . . . I'm coming Home. Home, from the devil's husks and his hopen, back to Father's House. Please . . ."

"Pardon me, kind lady . . ."

Priscilla, startled beyond describing, rose to her feet to leave. "I . . . I'm sorry," she apologized. "I should not have presumed to enter where I am not a member. Nor an attender, even. I didn't think anyone would see me . . ."

"And why shouldn't you be found in church?" the kind voice probed gently. "It's the best place in all this city for you to be. You . . . You're having problems, perhaps . . .?"

For the first time since he spoke, Priscilla lifted her eyes to meet those of the speaker. What she saw melted her heart. He was almost white-headed, the speaker; and his eyes were as blue as the morning glories which used to bloom up and down her mother's trellises on the east and west sides of their big front porch.

"I am the pastor of this church," he said kindly. "I am happy that you came inside. It's a perfect place to get one's soul fed; or to get back to a proper relationship with God, if one has strayed from Him."

"I . . . I have," Priscilla confessed, breaking into sobs again. Then, without knowing just why she did it, she told the kind man all about herself and her sister Patience, ending with, "I live in a drab, little apartment not far from here and I long to find my sister and bring her to me. But I wouldn't have the room even if I did locate her. If I only were right with my God, I'm sure He would help me and . . . and things wouldn't seem nearly so bad as they do now. Nothing is ever quite right when one is out of tune and out of touch with Heaven. Oh, I want Him! Desperately so!" she sobbed brokenly.

"And He wants you! This I can assure you. Open your heart to Him as we pray together. You hold the latch-key to your heart.

Pray together! How many years had it been since anyone had prayed with her . . . for her! O God was good. Good! He was concerned about her and interested in her, after all. He had sent this kind pastor into her life to pray for her and with her. There was hope! Yes, for her!

Sobbing brokenly and unashamedly now, Priscilla poured her heart out to God, withholding nothing, and as the choir climaxed with a triumphant note, singing, "And His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father . . ." peace came to the girl's soul. It flooded her entire being, filling her with inexpressible joy and happiness. "And His name shall be called Wonderful!" she exclaimed with radiant face. "My Lord and My God!"

"I'm glad you came in here, young lady," the minister said, wiping tears from his eyes. "Just think what you would have missed by not coming. Now, you haven't told me your name. I am Elias John Bromfelter and, as pastor here, I welcome you to worship with us."

"O thank you, Brother Bromfelter. Thank you. And thank you for praying for me. I am Priscilla Edgewood. I live just four blocks from here."

"I am pleased to meet you, Priscilla. You mentioned about living in a drab apartment. Would you have time to look at a small cottage in back of the church? The church board members and I have been praying for the Lord to send us the right kind of person to live in it and I have a wonderful feeling that you are God's answer."

"Oh, I . . . I . . . why, yes. I'll have time to look at it," Priscilla answered with awe.

"It's a pleasant little cottage, Priscilla," the minister said, "and I hope you will take it. Now, come we will get Mrs. Bromfelter and together, we shall look at the cottage," and the kindly minister led the way down the aisle to the organist. "A new babe, Mrs. Bromfelter," he said, introducing Priscilla and relating her wonderful conversion in the back of the church. "Yes, my dear wife, God has given us a new babe in Christ. And," he added with shining eyes, "He has answered our prayer about His choice for the little cottage. "

Slipping off the organ bench, the mature woman put an arm around Priscilla's shoulders. "I am so happy for you!" she exclaimed. "My husband and I have been pleading with God to give us brand new souls; you are the beginning of Heaven's answering service. Bless His holy name! And, Priscilla, you will like the cottage. It's cheerful and pleasant and is surrounded by a little garden, a garden of bushes and trees and flowers. I hope you will feel inclined to move into it.

Priscilla was too full to reply; without seeing the cottage, she knew her answer. Who could turn away from such love!

They passed silently through a rear exit and Priscilla, lifting her eyes heavenward, exclaimed joyfully, "And His name shall be called Wonderful! Wonderful! My Lord and My God!"