

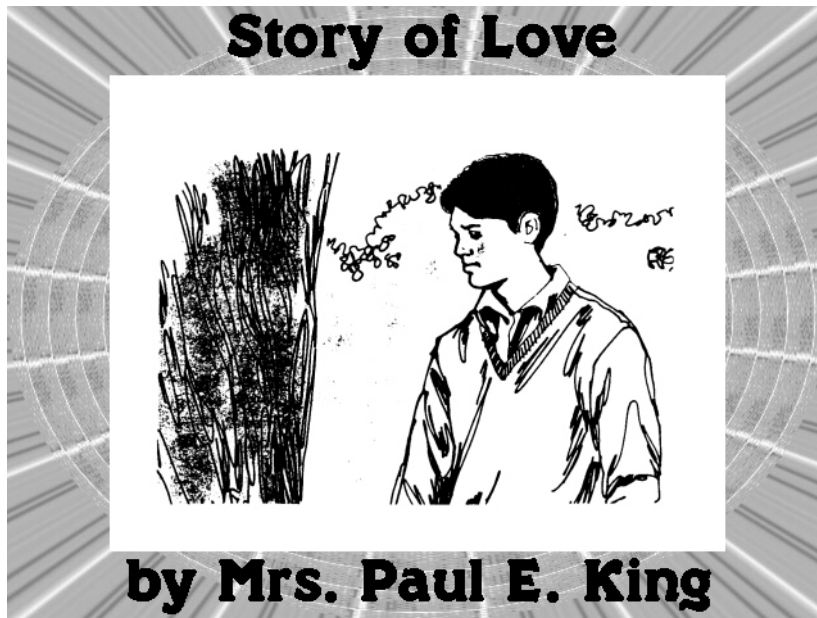
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STORY OF LOVE
By Mrs. Paul E. King

"Donald! Donald! Where are you? Come play a game of ball with us...."

Silence.

"Donald. . . ."

The voice reached him all the way down to the creek. He heard. Yes, he heard. But he sat motionless, watching the ripples in the stream. The ripples, and the minnows as they darted like lightning hither and yon beneath the water's crystal-clear surface. He wanted to be alone with his thoughts. His thoughts, and his sorrow and deep grief, too. He had to be alone. Yes, he had to! He wasn't ready for the noise and the fun. Not yet, he wasn't. No. Not yet.

"Don-ald. . . ."

He dropped his head on his hand-locked knees and wept. He had thought he had no more tears to shed. But he discovered that he was wrong; they came freely again. Oh, would he ever get over the loneliness; the hurting somewhere deep inside his being? he wondered.

"Donald. . . ."

The voice was fading away. He was glad that it was. He preferred the silence. The deep silence and solitude of the woods, the creek. The laughter of the stream didn't bother him; it helped to ease the pain. It seemed to be singing Buster's happiness. This was Buster's favorite retreat. He brought him down here often. Watched him as he skipped tiny pebbles over the water's surface. Taught him how to make the pebbles skip. Listened to the ripple of Buster's merry laughter as it dueted with the stream. Saw the tiredness come over Buster's pallid face like a dark cloud, taking with it the merry laughter and the song and leaving him limp and weak and almost helpless.

He remembered the day when his mother and father had brought his tiny brother home from the hospital. How he had loved him! Yes, they all knew he would be with them for only a little while; the doctors had told them the prognosis. But doctors could be wrong, couldn't they? he had thought, praying fervently for the little bundle that was his brother.

A year passed. Two. He had out-lived the "allotted time," medical-wise. Three. Four. He had taught him his A B C's and his $1 + 1$ equals 2, by now. They were inseparable, except for when he was at school.

His boyfriends had dubbed him "wacky" and the girls had thought him high-brow. Little matter that he had dropped out of the usual whirl of fun and

young adulthood's round of ball games on the vacant lot and ice skating on the pond in winter. He had an obligation. An obligation of love. Doctors could be wrong. Couldn't they?

Five years. He taught him to spell cat. Dog. Cow. How to catch crawfish with a piece of bacon and a string. Buster was the doctor's miracle child. They could be wrong, couldn't they? He continued praying. Fervently so.

"Stay resigned to God's will for Timothy," his father had admonished.

"Keep Timothy in God's hands," his mother repeated.

And he had. Or so he thought! Timothy Blaine was his real name, but he had nicknamed him Buster. It had seemed more inspiring to him when he saw the dark cloud of tiredness sweep over the pallid face and leave the thin body little more than a limp pile of weakness and utter fatigue.

For six years he had marked Buster's height on a place inside the clothes closet, out of sight of all eyes save his own.

"Am I really that tall!" Buster had exclaimed.

"Yes, you're really that tall, Buster! God is allowing you to grow tall."

"If only I was strong, Donald."

"You're the doctors' miracle child, Buster. . . ."

"Sometimes I. . . ."

"Yes?"

"Oh, I don't know if I should say it, Donald. . . ."

Buster's eyes looked beyond the room, it seemed.

"Aren't we buddies?" Donald had prodded.

"Very best buddies!"

"Well, then, don't buddies generally share secrets?"

Buster had laughed then. Merrily. "Oh, OK. But you can't tell Mother and Father, Donald. 'Cause if you do, they'll cry."

"Is it that sad?"

"Not to me. But I'm afraid it will be for Mother and Father."

"And what about me?" Donald had queried.

"You're my buddy, remember? Buddies are strong! Buddies understand."

"Yes, Buster; buddies understand. Now tell me what you were going to say."

"Promise not to tell Father and Mother." His too-bright, too-large eyes had searched his brother's face.

"I promise," came the sought-for reply.

"Sometimes I think I'm soon going to go to Heaven."

"You're the doctors' miracle boy, Buster. What makes you think about dying; about soon going to Heaven?"

"I . . . I can't say, exactly. But I . . . I feel it. I'm so tired and weak all the time anymore. And Donald, it will be wonderful not to be sick anymore, but to be strong and healthy forever. Guess what? I learned how to spell Heaven today. And Jesus, too. I know it isn't necessary that I know how to spell Heaven and Jesus to get inside. But I told Mother I thought it would be nice to know how to spell those two words since I'll be going to Heaven when I die and I'll see Jesus. . . ."

Tears flowed freely down his cheeks now. Again. "Buster! Buster!" He cried. "O Buster!"

Two days after he had confided his thoughts, and had learned to spell the words Heaven and Jesus, Donald had brought him to the creek to skip

pebbles over the crystal-clear surface. To watch the minnows skitter around the rocks in frenzied play. To laugh merrily with the creek's laughter and murmur.

He had watched him carefully. Loving him. Praying for him. Wishing he could pour strength into the wasting-away body. He saw the look of pleasure and delight drain away in the wake of the dark cloud of tiredness that crept over his pallid face. Heard the ripple of merry laughter fade away and give way to an almost indistinguishable plea of, "Please take me home, Donald. I believe I'm going to Heaven . . . today."

In an urgency born out of his love for and observation of his brother, he had picked him up ever so gently in his arms and rushed up the hill toward the house, praying, crying, and calling on God for help as he ran. He had laid him on the sofa, trying to call his mother in from the garden.

"Lay . . . me . . . in . . . my bed, Donald. Please.

Picking him up in his arms, he had carried Buster to his bedroom and put him on his bed.

"Now let . . . me . . . go, Donald." It was almost a petition.

He had felt the blood drain from his face. "Buster!" he cried, dropping on his knees beside the bed and encircling the limp little body with his arms.

"Jesus wants me, Donald." Buster's voice was suddenly strong His eyes were probing. "Will you let God have me? He's ready for me. I want to go. Oh, I do. I do! Please say, 'Lord, Thy will, not mine,' from the bottom of your heart. . . ." Buster's eyes had pled with him.

Suddenly, he found his voice. While his own sobs shook the bed, he said it: "Lord, Thy will, not mine!"

It had come from the very bottom of his broken heart. Love had let go. Love had turned loose.

His mother was bending over the little body. His father was sent for. With a wave of his hand and a smile on his lips, the spirit left the frail, thin

body and took its joyous departure to dwell forever with its Savior and with the redeemed of all the ages.

He should be glad, Donald told himself. And he was. Really. But the loneliness was almost overwhelming at times. He missed the thin hand that clung to his so frequently. He missed the ripples of merry laughter. The hands and arms that wound themselves tightly around his neck when Buster was too weak to walk home and he had carried him home piggy-back style

But he had turned loose. Love had demanded it. And now, the Greater, Higher, Divine Love would sustain him through the period of mourning. Best of all, they would be together again.

He let the tears flow freely, feeling the healing that they brought with them.