

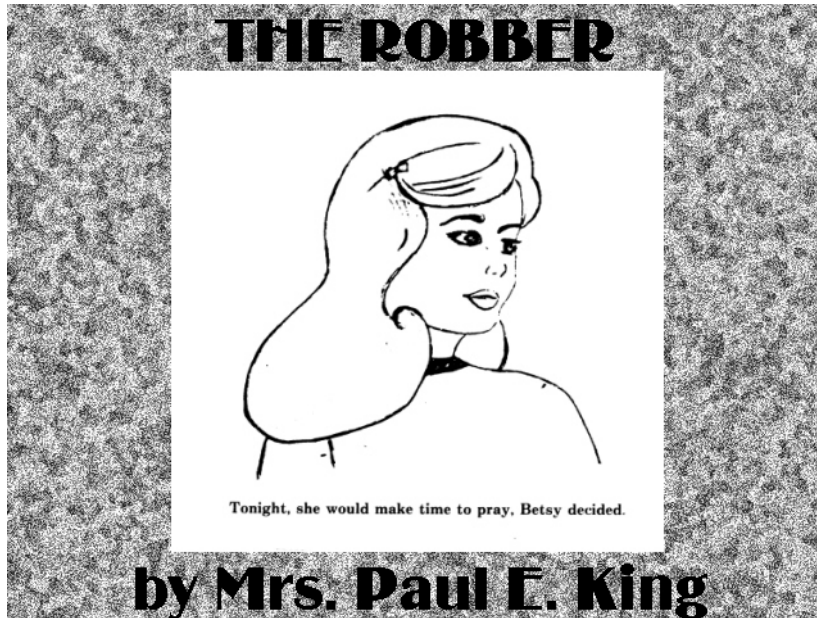
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**THE ROBBER**  
**By Mrs. Paul E. King**

Betsy rushed into the lavatory and set her armload of books on the counter top below the big wall-length mirror. Taking a comb from her purse she put her hair in neat order before grabbing her books and hurrying down the hallway to the heavy doors of the school's main entrance and exit.

Checking her watch, she bounded down the six wide marble steps and was soon at the parking lot and inside Faithful Girl, as her brother Bob had christened the old but excellent running car he allowed Betsy to use.

Faithful Girl's motor hummed softly and smoothly with the first turn of the ignition key. Betsy smiled indulgently, pleased to tell her brother that the car lived up perfectly to its name and reputation.

Leaving Summer Hills High, with its breathtaking view of valleys and mountains in the distance, she wound her way down the scenic road to the small village-town nestled snugly in the very heart of Sunshine Valley where she worked half days, six days a week, in Shank's Department Store. The working program was a part of the school's curriculum for the seniors.

Betsy liked her work: she enjoyed waiting on the customers; more importantly, she had golden opportunities to witness for the Lord and to let her light shine for Jesus.

She parked her car at the rear of the store, then hurried inside.

"Hi, Betsy," Sylvia Potter said cheerily. "Am I ever glad to see you!" she added emphatically.

Betsy smiled. "Hello to you, Sylvia, and you, too, Mrs. Conray. From the tenor of your speech, I take it you've been busy -very busy! Right?"

"Wrong!" Sylvia corrected. "It's been dull -- with a capital D and U and LL! But now that you're here business is bound to pick up."

Betsy laughed softly. Grimacing teasingly at Sylvia, she said, "you certainly can't be serious! Remember what I told you once before about flattery?" She laughed, bubbly and pleasantly. "It's still the same: flattery will get you nowhere! And I do not believe in 'plain luck,' as some phrase certain happenings, nor do I believe in 'charms' -- supposed to bring one good luck; and now that I'm nearly out of breath, I'll get down to business and work, work, work!" Betsy mimicked, laughing softly.

"Well, neither Mr. or Mrs. Conray nor I wear 'charms,' I can assure you, Betsy, but in all seriousness, you have been the best thing that happened to Shank's Department Store in many a year."

"O flatterer, hold thy peace!" Betsy said, covering her ears with her hands and hurrying toward her favorite department in the store, children's and infants' ready-to-wear.

It was wonderful to work for the Conrays and Sylvia Potter, owners of the quaintly remodeled store, Betsy soliloquized silently. Employer-employee rapport was at its best; and clean, good-humored banter seemed to be an integral part of the owners.

"Wait a minute, Betsy; what Sylvia said is true." Mrs. Conray's voice sliced into Betsy's pleasant thoughts and her hurried footsteps.

"We should have told you long ago," Sylvia said soberly.

Betsy turned around quickly. Her face took on a look of intense seriousness. "Did . . . did . . . I do something . . . I . . . I shouldn't have done? Something other than the way you told me to do when you hired me?" she asked quickly.

"Of course not, Betsy," Mrs. Conray said softly. Motherly. "You're the most careful and perfect salesgirl we've ever had. Everything's been going beautifully in the store since you came. That's what Sylvia meant. Sales are up in every department and our customers tell us how very delightful it is to come in and have you wait on them. We hear all kinds of nice things about you, my dear. You . . . you're different, Betsy; in a beautiful way."

Tears glistened in the aging woman's eyes as she finished.

"Th . . . thank you, Mrs. Conray. Like I told you before, I'm a Christian and. . . ."

Sylvia's voice interrupted Betsy's unfinished sentence. "The Conrays and I decided that business has picked up because you brought God with you when you came here to work," she said. "Remember how you told us that you prayed earnestly for us, and for the store's success? Well, from the time you came, Shanks has set a new record: the cash register's been ringing up sales in quite a steady way and we've witnessed an almost phenomenal upward surge. We just wanted you to know. . . ."

Sylvia hurried away to wait on a customer.

As she walked back to the children's ready-to-wear, Betsy's heart smote her; she hadn't had a really good season of prayer for several days. Oh, she prayed -- said words almost like a parrot that's taught to talk! -- but to say she pushed through and knew that God had given her new infillings each morning. . . . Well, she couldn't say that truthfully. She felt weak and anemic spiritually, too.

A tear glistened in her eye. "O God, forgive me!" she cried out of the anguish of her heart. "I've been too busy. . . ."

Quickly she recounted all the areas in which she worked -- the activities in which she was involved. Analyzing them now, she realized that each was commendable and legitimate and even "profitable to godliness" - had they been divided among three people instead of her trying to do them all, as she was voted into each position.

First, there were the two youth services -- on Tuesday night the Nursing Home (and one of her favorite times), then the door to door tract distribution and personal witnessing on Thursday night, plus the Sunday night services. As president of the active and fast-growing group, she sought to always keep the meetings very much alive spiritually.

Besides this, she worked at Shanks and she was valedictorian of her class. As such, she was busy compiling her speech for the graduation exercises.

Betsy hung her head in shame. Activities and positions were stimulating and challenging, she saw clearly now, but when one became overloaded with these and neglected private prayer and Bible reading, then they became sinful.

Legitimate things could become robbers! the girl soliloquized silently. Spiritual robbers: taking the time for necessary communion and fellowship with God and heaping it on to their demands. Wasn't this the very thing -- the cause and reason -- of Chip Aaron's downfall? He got too busy with school and church activities. Failing to make time to pray and study God's word, he backslid.

Betsy shuddered as she recalled the struggle Chip had had; the battle he fought to get back to God. It seemed as though all the demons of hell were pitted against him at the altar. The struggle was on; the battle raged fiercely; ultimately Chip, with his determined spirit, triumphed gloriously. After he was sanctified wholly he led the young people of the church on to doing exploits for God, taking the devil's territory and claiming it for God. Even now, Chip and his lovely wife Ruth were blazing trails for God on the mission field.

Suddenly, and with clear vision and new insight and understanding, Betsy knew what Jesus meant when He told His disciples to "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation . . ." Matt. 26:41.

Tears rolled down her cheeks as she recalled other Scriptures. David declared emphatically, "It is God that girdeth me with strength, and maketh my way perfect" Ps. 18:32.

"Unto Thee, O Lord, do I lift up my soul.

"O my God, I trust in Thee: let me not be ashamed, let not mine enemies triumph over me.

"Yea, let none that wait on Thee be ashamed . . ." Ps. 25:1-3.

As she meditated upon the precious Scripture portions, something inside Betsy called to her -- drew her -- telling her to "Come ye apart, and pray."

Betsy could scarcely wait for the closing hour to arrive. Tonight, she would make time to pray, if her lessons were finished or unfinished. And she would remain on her face before God until she felt the Holy Fire of fresh, live, hot coals burning on the altar of her heart again!

Matthew 6:33 came suddenly before her; she saw it as clearly as though it had been hung in big bold letters in front of her eyes: "but seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.

"Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself."

Joy surged up inside Betsy's heart. God had had the answer for her busy-hess all along: by seeking first after God, and things spiritual, He had promised that everything else would be taken care of.

She looked at her watch, anxious to get home to her prayer closet.