

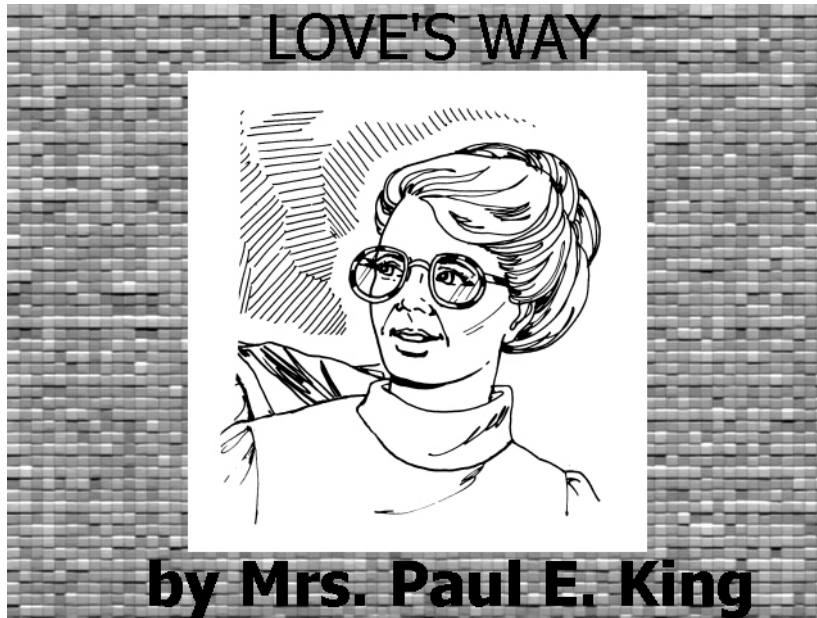
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Digital Edition 10/22/2001
By Holiness Data Ministry

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The Sunday School Beacon
February 12, 1989



LOVE'S WAY
By Mrs. Paul E. King

The school bus wheezed to a halt on the gravel road and Merrilee stepped on, saying a cheery good morning to Mr. Penny, the bus driver, and greeting her many friends who were already on the bus.

She moved gracefully down the aisle of the bus, hoping .to sit down before Mr. Penny started the vehicle moving again. She was almost to the

vacant seat when Kathy Ryan shoved her foot out in the aisle. In an instant, Merrilee tripped over Kathy's foot and fell to the floor.

Kathy thought it was hilarious, and laughed uncontrollably. "You should see yourself!" she cried between loud spurts of laughter. "What a pretty sight you are now!"

"I don't think it's funny!" Kenneth Seamands declared, jumping to his feet and helping Merrilee to her feet and, finally, to the vacant seat.

"Neither do I," came a chorus of voices from the bus. "What's wrong with having some fun?" Kathy asked, gazing around the bus. "Besides, it's a nice change to see Miss Perfect looking a bit ruffled and untidy."

"You're downright jealous of her," Rochelle Ames said, facing Kathy.

"Ho. Ho! Now isn't that the statement of the year!" Kathy retorted. "Only it's in the accusative case."

"Well, it's true, and you know it is." Rochelle held her ground. "You owe Merrilee an apology. That was positively mean and hateful of you; doing what you did."

"You're looking at the wrong person, if you expect an apology," Kathy answered quickly and firmly. "She should have watched where she was walking; it's that simple."

Mr. Penny demanded order and the bus rolled down the lane.

"Are you hurt?" Kenneth asked, searching Merrilee's face for signs of pain.

"I'll be all right, Kenneth. Thank you for helping me. I appreciate it so much."

"That smart alec needs to be taught a lesson or two," he replied. "It's obvious she's had her stubborn way all her life. I wish she had my father and mother for a week: she'd learn a few things. Good things."

"We must pray for her, and be kind to her, Kenneth."

"That's a hard order for me to fill, I must confess. Especially right now. The easiest thing in the world to do would be to wring her neck."

Merrilee registered shock. And disappointment, too.

"I'm sorry, Merrilee," Kenneth apologized. "But I can't help it. I know I've shocked you. But since nothing is hidden nor concealed from God, I may as well tell you how I feel. And that's how I feel."

Tears swam in Merrilee's blue eyes. "Can't you see your need of a wholly sanctified heart now, Ken?" she asked softly and quickly.

Ken hung his head. When he lifted his eyes to meet Merrilee's, he nodded in the affirmative. "She bugs me," he admitted truthfully. "She's a trial to me. Especially today. Why, she could have caused you to injure yourself. And I believe she'd have been happy about it. This is hard for me to take, Merrilee."

"I want you to think about it. The mere fact that you felt like wringing Kathy's neck bespeaks of the hatred you have for the girl. And we know that hatred will never enter the Celestial City; nor will the one who had the hatred in his heart."

"You are so right, Merrilee. And I do want to be rid of every bit of this hatred and anger that I feel toward Kathy. But it won't be an easy thing to do, believe me."

"God knows how to deal the death blow to the old nature of sin, Ken. You can't do it; He can. And He will; if you get serious and really want to be entirely sanctified."

The bus pulled into the school driveway and, in a little while, the students were hurrying down the hallways to their classrooms. Merrilee stopped by the restroom and washed the blood off her knees, where they were cut when she fell in the bus. Her hosiery was ruined, but she hoped the runs would remain intact where they were until she got home that afternoon. Her dress, which was always well below her knees, would conceal the damage caused by the fall.

Between classes and in study hall, Merrilee prayed for Kathy. She wanted to help her. But how could she, when Kathy avoided her? God knew how to open the door; He knew how to work and to move, and when. Feeling a calmness enfold her, Merrilee turned Kathy over to God. Completely so. She would watch and wait, for His timing. It would come, she knew. She wanted only to be available, and ready, for it.

And come, it did. Merrilee was standing near the large doors leading into and out of the school building some weeks later, waiting for the bus to come. Kathy had just gone outside and was starting down the steps to the sidewalk when Melvin Brose tore out of the door like a cyclone. In a single stride, he was even with Kathy. And before anyone knew too much what had happened, Kathy was tumbling down the steps toward the sidewalk, blood spurting out of her nose.

Merrilee saw what had happened: She saw Melvin deliberately trip Kathy. In an instant, she was running down the steps, crying, "O Kathy dear, are you all right? Are you? Here, let me help you," and pulling the scarf from around her neck, she used it to wipe the blood off Kathy's face.

"You're hurt, aren't you?" she asked softly, putting an arm around Kathy's trembling body and trying to steady her as she struggled to get to her feet.

"I . . . I'm all right, I guess. I believe it's just my nose that's bleeding. Or is it my head?" she asked.

"Both, Kathy. But mainly, I believe it's your nose that's doing the profuse bleeding. Try to be real still while I go inside and bring out some cold, wet paper towels to put over the bridge of your nose and on the back of your neck. Cold compresses usually stop the flow of blood."

"That mean old bully!" Kathy exclaimed. "I'll" Then she stopped short. She watched the retreating figure of Merrilee disappear quickly inside the school doors. This was unreal. Or was it? The one whom she had humiliated and done evil to on many a different occasion was the very one who was now helping her. In fact, Merrilee was the only one who cared enough to help her. All the other students went their way as though nothing had happened. Oh, they gave her a casual glance, but that was the extent of it, No one offered to help her; none but Merrilee.

Kathy felt suddenly all mixed up. She wanted to feel the old anger and jealousy towards Merrilee but somehow she couldn't. How could one be hateful and mean to someone when that someone was there to help you; and when that someone had called you "Kathy dear," and you saw the true love and compassion and pity in her eyes and on her face? It was impossible, Kathy realized suddenly, for her to act, or react, in the old way so familiar to her. She felt something inside her begin to crumble and sway, leaving her defenseless and making her vulnerable to the love that was on display, working feverishly, trying to stanch the flow of blood and to alleviate her pain and suffering.

"Why are you doing this?" Kathy asked, feeling she had to know Merrilee's reason.

"Because I love you, Kathy. Very deeply."

"But . . . I . . . I don't understand, Merrilee. You should hate me."

"Christians don't hate, my dear Kathy; they love."

"But I don't deserve your love. Nor your kindness and . . . and your help. I've treated you utterly shameful. And where are those whom I thought were my friends? Gone! Not one of them has come to help me. If it were not for you, I could stay here and bleed to death. Oh, Merrilee, I'm so ashamed of myself. Why don't you just leave me to my own misery and pain? I deserve what's happened to me."

"I'm here to help you, Kathy, and until I know you are all right, I'll stay here."

"But I don't deserve your love. . . ."

"Neither did I deserve the Lord's love when I was living in sin, Kathy dear; yet Jesus kept right on loving me, bidding me to come to Him and to find the peace and joy for which my poor heart was crying. I yielded myself to Him and, through His precious shed blood, I was converted, or made new in Christ. Immediately, God put a love in my heart for others. I wish you knew Jesus, Kathy. He wants to save you and to forgive you of all your sins. . . ."

"Even though He knows how hateful and contemptible I've been?" Kathy asked quickly. "Why, Merrilee, I've said some truly nasty things about you, and not one of them was true. So you mean to tell me that Jesus will forgive me?"

"He will, Kathy. He is just waiting to make you new in Him: to forgive you and to make you His child. He loves you very much. So much, in fact, that He died for you. Your greatest sin is not talking, about me but in rejecting Jesus. This is the greatest sin a man can commit, and be guilty of."

"No one ever talked like this to me before. I didn't realize that God loved me; nor even that He cared about me. If He's anything like you, He must be wonderful. I can't get over this . . . your kindness and love to me."

"Jesus makes all the difference in one's life; in his attitudes, his conduct, his speech, his actions and/or reactions. He'll do the same for you, Kathy."

"You've convinced me, Merrilee. Steady me, if you can; I feel all wobbly in my legs, and I'm dizzy, too."

"Shall I call a doctor?" Merrilee felt sudden fear for Kathy.

"Thanks, no. I'll be all right, I'm sure, even though it was a nasty fall. The bleeding's almost stopped now.

We'd better hurry or we'll miss the bus."

"Kathy," Merrilee said, as she helped the young woman to the bus, "come with me to church on Sunday, the Lord willing. I'd be so happy to have you with me in our class, and I know you'd love it."

"I planned on coming, even before you asked me," came the quick reply. "And Merrilee, if you have an extra Bible I could borrow until I can buy one for myself, I'd appreciate it greatly. I want to learn more about God. His light and His love shine in you and through you. I want whatever you have. I'm tired of being nasty, mean and catty. Especially to you. I still can't fully comprehend or understand why it is that the one whom I treated the meanest and the worst is the one who stopped and helped me. The only one, in fact. Some friends, I had! Phonies! Every one of them!"

Merrilee steadied Kathy until she was on her feet, then she supported her to the bus. Once inside, Kathy slumped into the seat and heaved a great sigh of relief.

"Mind if I come by your house this evening for that Bible?" she asked Merrilee, who sat down beside her.

"I'll be happy to have you, Kathy. Anytime it's convenient for you. Or, if you prefer, I could have Daddy drop it off on his way to a board meeting the church is having this evening."

"I'll come by, Merrilee; I'm not sure I can wait much longer to change. In my heart, I mean. . . ."

"By all means, come!" Merrilee exclaimed joyously. Glancing at Kathy, she saw shining streams of tears flowing. Kathy was not far from the kingdom, she knew. She patted her hand affectionately, feeling like shouting for joy. God was faithful; soon there would be a new name written down in glory. It would be Kathy's!