

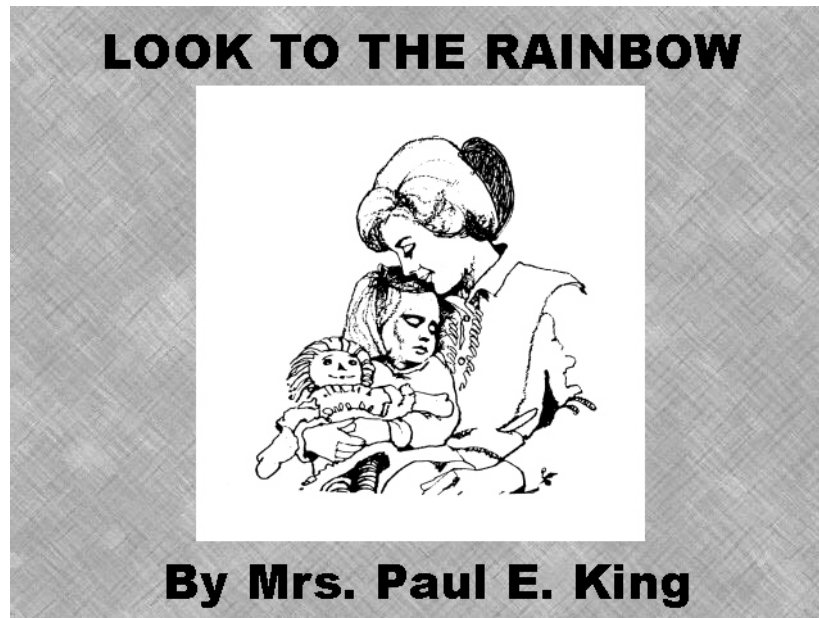
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LOOK TO THE RAINBOW
By Mrs. Paul E. King

Helen Manus dropped the small hand of her daughter and walked away from the hospital bed and over to the window that looked out upon the city. Her eyes were brimming with tears. Her body was tired -- so very tired. Her mind felt dull and numb. The reality of Doctor Todd's diagnosis and prognosis had suddenly caught up with her. For five months she had struggled with the doctor's diagnostic report, not able to believe it. Not that she was skeptical;

not at all; it was simply that she could not believe that the Lord would allow yet another tragedy to come into her life. And so soon after the first one, too.

She leaned her head against the steel framework of the long windows and closed her eyes, allowing the tears to have free course now, praying silently but earnestly for needed grace and strength. This child -- Robert's and her gift from God, after ten years of marriage and apparent barrenness on her part -- was all she had left of her happy marriage. Oh, to be sure she had memories. Lots of memories. Lovely memories. Beautiful memories. Sacred memories. But Elizabeth Marie -- named thus after both her grandmothers -- was the embodiment of her father. In miniature form, of course. The child's eyes were the same shade of blue as her father's: they resembled a summer sky on a cloudless day, deep blue and beautiful. Her hair, too, was the color of his, and when she smiled, her lips parted in the same sweet way as Robert's did.

Helen opened her eyes and looked down upon the city. Lights blinked and twinkled and winked from towering skyscraper buildings and cars flowed in an incessant stream along the boulevards and streets and roads, their occupants totally and completely oblivious and unmindful of the fact that, standing inside hospital windows and doors, there was a host of hurting and extremely sad people.

"Robert! Robert!" Helen cried to the silent night. "Oh, Robert!" she exclaimed again, not uttering what her entire being missed -- his manly, strong, supportive self. She dare not wish him back, she mused tearfully and silently. It would be both selfish and wrong to wish one back from the glory world. But oh, how she missed him and longed to hear his words of comfort and consolation.

Tears flowed uncontrollably again as Helen recalled the afternoon when her phone rang, less than ten months ago, and she received the word that Robert had been crushed to death in a freak accident as he worked at the plant. She became an instant widow. She thought she would die; her world crashed in around her. But always, there was the Lord. And Elizabeth Marie.

The Lord's all-sufficiency became her sufficiency as, moment by moment, she drew upon His grace and His strength. Slowly, her appetite took on a semblance of hunger and her physical being grew stronger also. And,

always, in the back of her mind was the lovely thought and knowledge that Elizabeth Marie needed her -- more than ever, now that her father was in Heaven. And then came the doctor's report.

Helen cast a quick glance to the bed. The six-year-old was still in a deep sleep, it was obvious. She trembled slightly, more with grief than anything else, realizing that soon this loving and precious daughter of hers would enter into her final deep sleep to never again awaken here on earth. Would she, Helen, be able to bear this? she wondered brokenly as she turned from the window and once more took her vigil by the bed.

She sat down in the chair and, very gently, she picked up the little hand nearest her, dropping a kiss into the warm palm. She watched the rising and falling of her daughter's chest, scarcely able to assimilate and accept the hard, cold, and frightening fact that this once active, laughing, bouncy, bubbling-with-life girl would never run again on earth.

Leukemia. The word sent cold chills through her and filled her with a nameless dread. She hadn't given it too much thought at first when Elizabeth Marie said she was "so tired," and would then leave her playing in the yard and retire to her bedroom or the davenport with a book. Often, the mother now recalled, as she looked in upon the obedient and gentle-mannered child, she had found her asleep with the book reposing, where she had left off looking or reading it, on her chest. And now, with but a short time to live, the mother rarely left the hospital room. Her parents, and Robert's, were so good and faithful to help while she, Helen, slept on a cot in the room.

The night vigil was ever so long, but she treasured each precious and priceless moment with her child. She wanted to hold her and keep her forever, but she knew this was impossible. God knew what He was doing even if she couldn't understand the reason for it. Like her own life, and like Robert's had been, Elizabeth's life was in God's hands. David declared, "My times are in thy hand. . . ." This was an irrefutable, indisputable fact, she knew.

Helen laid her head on the bed, keeping hold of the little hand. She listened to her daughter's breathing and drew the hand across her lips, kissing it tenderly and lovingly, praying all the while.

She heard a hurried but soft footfall coming toward the door and knew that one of the night nurses was making her oft-repeated visit to the room to check Elizabeth's vital signs and see how she was doing. They had all been so kind and good to her daughter. And to her, too, she thought, as she greeted the busy nurse.

"Any change?" Helen asked in a whispered tone, with anxiety and concern.

"Very little."

"For better or . . . or . . .?" Helen couldn't say the word. The nurse supplied it for her.

"Worse," she answered softly as she slipped an arm around Helen's shoulder. "You're a brave woman," she added kindly.

"I only wish I were!" Helen exclaimed as she caressed the dear little hand. "It hurts so deeply to see someone you love dying and not be able to do anything to help them."

"You have been doing the most important and helpful thing of all, Mrs. Manus," the nurse said sincerely. "I have seen you on your knees in prayer more times than I can count on my hands, as I came into this room; that is more important than anything. Even your little daughter realized the value of your prayers: over and over she would tell me how that, when you would get awake and pray for her, she would always feel better and stronger. She had faith in your prayers. And so do those of us out at the desk. Yes, Mrs. Manus, you have done much to help; not only Elizabeth Marie, but those of us who have been observing you as you carry your heavy cross, bravely, sweetly, resignedly and with never a single murmur or complaint. We are impressed; convinced, too, that God is real. He will help you through this ordeal; through this night of sorrow. . . ."

The nurse checked the I. V. tubes then, patting Helen on the shoulder, she slipped away and, again, Helen was left alone with Elizabeth Marie.

She put her head on the bed and prayed, knowing that with each hour that passed her child was getting closer and closer to the river that would

finally separate them, bearing the angel spirit of Elizabeth safely Home to her Heavenly Father, and leaving her, Helen, on the earth-side alone.

Great heaving sobs shook her frame. Alone. Alone! The word -- and the thought -- seemed to suffocate her momentarily. Then she remembered His words, "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." And in that moment, the gloom and the fear took flight. She wasn't alone. Never! He was not only with her, He indwelt her: His Holy Spirit comforted her.

She dozed off momentarily, rallying to full wakefulness when Elizabeth's voice broke through her tiredness.

"Mommie. Mommie," the girl cried joyously, sitting suddenly erect in bed. "Oh, Mommie, Mommie, I saw Jesus! Just a little while ago, I saw Him. He was sitting on a shining throne and there was a beautiful rainbow around the throne. It was the prettiest rainbow I ever saw. Oh, Mommie, Heaven's be-au-ti-ful! Jesus smiled on me. It was a smile I saw and felt. He's going to make me well. Tonight, I'm going to be well again. And Mommie, you mustn't cry for me; because I'm so happy.

"Daddy saw me and I saw him, and I ran into his arms. Oh, Mommie, Daddy's so happy. He was dressed all in white. Oh, he's so happy. No one cries in Heaven. At least I didn't see any tears. Everybody's so happy. And Mommie, I heard singing, singing, singing; all over Heaven, it seemed! Oh, it was beautiful. You'll hear it when you go There. Now I must go, for I see Jesus and some shining angels coming for me. His arms are open, waiting for me to come. I love you, dearest Mommie.

Soon I'll see you again. Till then, don't cry for me. I . . love . . . you."

How long Helen stood by the bed holding Elizabeth Marie in her arms she had no idea; nor, even, when she had gathered the child in her embrace. She only knew that when she became aware that Elizabeth had died in her arms and she looked around the hospital room, she became instantly conscious of the Lord's presence. As surely as she knew that the Lord had come to escort her child to Heaven, so sure was she of His presence with her in the room. She was not alone; He was with her. And He would remain with her--unto the end of the world.

Laying Elizabeth Marie's head gently back on the pillow, she turned the light on for the nurse to come.

Her mind was suddenly alert; her body felt rejuvenated and alive That rainbow Elizabeth saw around the throne -- why, that was just what she needed to hear! It was a sign of God's eternal covenant with man; it was the surety of His never-ceasing care over His creation and a seal of His sanctifying love to her heart.

Victorious in her sorrow, she lifted her head and heart in praise to the Lord, her ever-present Friend and her help in time of trouble and grief.