

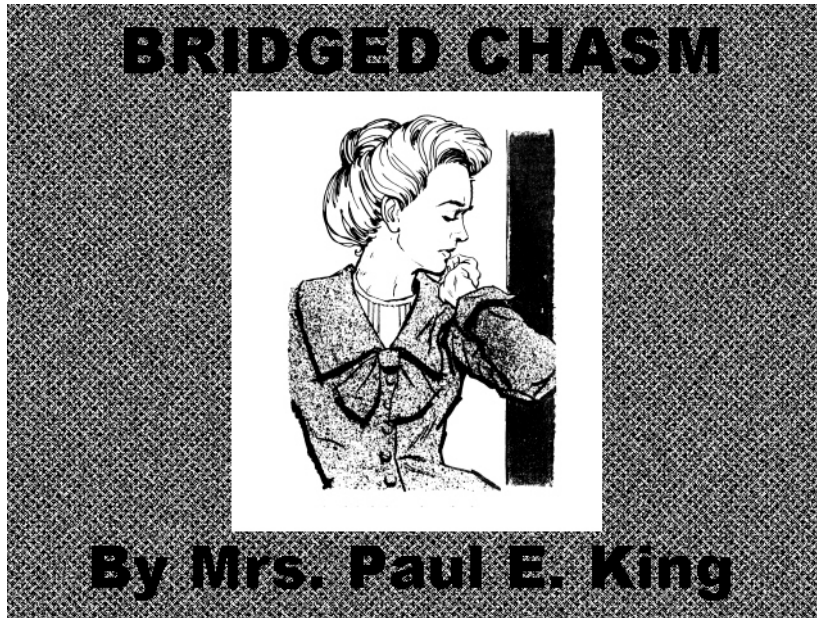
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BRIDGED CHASM
By Mrs. Paul E. King

Ruth closed the bedroom door silently, almost reverently, and weeping softly, she ran down the thickly carpeted hallway and stairs to the patio beyond the sliding glass doors on the back side of the house. She must get out. Somehow, the once beloved house seemed to haunt her and mock her with its emptiness and loneliness; its oppressive silence and death-like stillness.

She settled herself on the edge of one of the colorful chaise lounges and stared with unseeing eyes at the gorgeous array of flowers that bloomed and blossomed. She inhaled deeply of the sweet pine-scented air, filling her lungs full and trying to forget.

Mechanically, she walked to the fountain Bert had rigged up in the gold fish pond and stood staring down at the dozens and dozens of brightly colored spritely fish. A hurt, too deep for expression, went through her and she rushed quickly away from the once beloved spot.

"Time's a great healer," Rev. Montag had told her that day. But nearly five months had gone by and not one day did she feel any of the healing to which he alluded. If anything, the house was becoming more and more intolerable and just like bare, empty, hollow walls. Oh, the furniture was all there . . . the way Bert liked it best, too! The pictures were all in their proper places on the walls and the flowers never ceased their blooming nor the birds their singing, yet the sun had gone out of her life . . . buried, the day Bert died!

Korby Cue, the big blue-gray-brown Siamese cat, rubbed lightly past her leg, swishing his tail in a quick jerky way.

"You hungry again, Korby?" she asked, bending over and stroking his sleek fur lightly between her hands. "Come, come," she urged, "I'll put some food in your dish."

As she went back to the emptiness of the big elegantly furnished house an old longing again took possession of her. She tried to busy herself by cleaning where there was no sign of dirt. Always, it was like that, even when Bert was still alive.

She settled down to baking -- a pie for Mrs. Clarke and a big, rich, homemade chocolate cake for the Eggbert family. She was sure they'd enjoy it, for hadn't she seen them on various occasions looking hungrily in through her picket fence to the coziness of her lawn surrounded with its gifts of plenty! More and more she was learning how difficult life can be without friends. She and Bert had lived only for each other . . . no thought of anyone else . . . just each other! After Bert's death there was no one to drop in and offer words of condolence and sympathy: no one to help comfort her bleeding, aching heart, for she had never made friends with even her closest

neighbors nor had she notified her own immediate relationship. The chasm between them was too wide . . . on her part!

She slid the pans of chocolaty batter in the oven then washed her hands and, involuntarily, she reached for the phone and dialed 0.

"Number, please," a soft feminine voice called into the phone.

"Operator, I'd like to call a Mrs. Ralph Lankford in Aspenwood, Colorado, please."

She was trembling from head to foot and a cold sweat broke out all over her body. Quickly she dried her face on the apron then waited with bated breath as she heard the operator ask for Mrs. Ralph Lankford. What if she no longer lived there or . . . or . . . what if she had died? Again she trembled violently and mopped more perspiration from her brow as she heard a faint "hello," on the other end of the line.

"Mrs. Lankford?" the operator asked softly, "Mrs. Ralph Lankford?"

"This is she, Operator."

"I have your party. Go ahead, please."

"Hello, Mom?"

"Who?" the puzzled voice on the other end of the line asked. "I can hardly hear you. Who is this?"

"Mother!" and Ruth was crying, sobbing. "Mom, this is Ruth."

"Where are you, honey?"

"At home . . . where I always am. Mom, can you forgive me, please? Can you?"

"Why, honey, you've long ago been forgiven. I've never held anything against you, dear. I love you, Ruth."

"Oh, Mom, I love you, too. I've been living in such a selfish world -- really, a little, isolated world! Bert and I never would make friends with anybody: always choosing to be alone and keep a meticulously clean and tidy house. But, Mom, he's gone and I'm alone. I mean alone . . . no friends, no relation or anybody to fall back on. I'm to blame for all this, though. Bert died nearly five months ago. I . . . I'm . . . sorry I never let any of you know. But you know how bitter I got after Dad died and you married Ralph. I'm sorry, Mother. I never realized how torturous loneliness can be until Bert died. Oh, I feel so mean: to think I held that against you. You, with three small children to be raised and struggling alone for nearly eight years after dear Daddy was taken. I'm sorry, Mother, and I want you to forgive me for all my bitterness toward you, and for deserting you like I did when you told me you were going to marry Ralph. I have no intentions of remarriage but it took this to . . . to . . . bridge . . . the chasm that separated me from you for nearly ten years. I see my sin and selfishness and I'd like to make it up to you for the heartaches I've caused you and the grief I brought to your heart. Why don't you and Ralph and the girls come and live with me? The house is spacious and I'd do the cleaning, cooking, washing, ironing and. . . ."

"Wait a minute, Ruth," the mother interrupted sweetly, weeping tears of joy and thankfulness, "I'd not let you make a slave of yourself for us. I'm still able to work and Jeannine's quite a good little helper . . . she's nearly fourteen, you know. Jacqueline's married and Evonne's finishing college this year. They'll be so happy to know you called. We have never ceased praying for you, dearest Ruth."

"Oh, Mother, if ever you've prayed please pray hard for me now. I want the Lord! I need Him, and I want the peace and love and joy that I once knew and felt as a child."

"We will, Ruth, every day; until we hear that you have been born again. Oh, my dear, dear child, it's so good to hear your voice again!"

"I'll have to hang up, Mother. I have a chocolate cake in the oven that looks like it's finished. I know some hungry children who'll enjoy it. It doesn't pay to live in a little world all to one's self. Bye, dearest Mother, I'll be writing. Give everybody my love and I love you, Mom, with all my heart."

As the mouthpiece clicked softly down in the receiver a new, warm kind of feeling stole sweetly over the young woman's heart . . . kind of like ice

melting by a ray of warm sunlight. Quickly she removed the cake from the oven then fell to her knees where she sobbed all the bitterness and hatred out to God in penitential prayers and tears. Peace, like a great calm after a tempestuous storm, flooded her happy heart and filled her lonely moments with a holy, unseen but keenly-felt Presence.

"Thank You, dearest Lord," she smiled heavenward through her tears of joy. "Thank You for bridging the chasm. Never again will I be critical and censorious of another."

Just then a comforting voice seemed to whisper in her ear, "My presence shall go with thee; and I will give thee rest."

"I can do all things through Christ that strengtheneth me," she said prayerfully and, for the first time in nearly five months she noticed the beauty of the flowers and the blue of the sky. As she stood inside the sliding glass doors the Unseen Presence spoke softly, "And behold, all things are become new!"

With a smile of victory on her face she picked up the pen and began a letter . . . long since overdue: "Dearest Mother,

"Thought you'd be happy to know that I just prayed clear through to real victory. "I'm now converted -- a new creature in Christ Jesus. Praise His wonderful name! Everything's so wondrously changed and so beautiful again.

"Tell the girls how much I love them and thanks so much for all the prayers you prayed for me and the tears you shed over me. I shall make it all up to you. . . ."

Korby Cue let out a soft "Meow" just then and a bright red cardinal landed in the big blue spruce on the lawn and began shouting happily, "Bless God! Bless God! Bless God."