

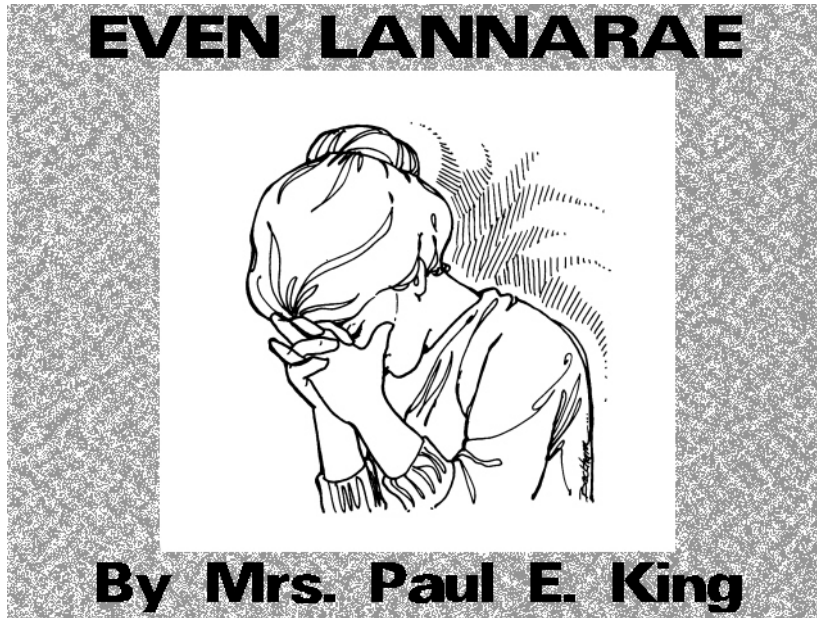
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EVEN LANNARAE
By Mrs. Paul E. King

Abigail put her books on the desk in her room then threw herself across the bed and cried. It was useless to try to make friends when there was no cooperation or reciprocation on the other end, she thought despairingly.

"Lord, You know I've tried," she said out loud. "I really have. But LannaRae puts her guard up every time I go near her. I don't know what else to do. Show me, Lord; please show me."

What could she do, she wondered, to let LannaRae know that the friendship and love she was extending and offering to her was genuinely real and not feigned at all?

She felt completely defeated in her attempt to reach out and take the new girl into her circle of friends. Never before had she encountered anyone like LannaRae. Some had been shy and reticent at first, to be sure; but at least they hadn't rebuffed her and been rude to her.

It was almost like the dark eyed, dark haired girl had erected a barrier or wall so thick and so impenetrable that she dared anyone to attempt, even, to break through it. That her defense was up -- and guarded carefully -- was obvious. And Abigail felt profound sorrow for her. Everybody needed friends. Everybody. Even LannaRae. Yes, especially LannaRae!

Abigail felt a sense of defeat. She knew, however, that she dare not nurture or give in to the feeling. Those who knew Christ and kept Him in the center of their lives were more than conquerors, according to the scripture. Also, in some cases and instances, when defeat looked obvious, quite the reverse was happening. The devil was the instigator-perpetrator of the spirit of defeat and discouragement, was he not? Indeed he was. How often their pastor had warned them about the wiles and the cunning craftiness of the devil.

"Abigail." Mrs. Brinkley came down the hallway with an armload of freshly folded towels to put into the bathroom closet. "Are you home, honey?" she asked.

"Yes, Mother."

Mrs. Brinkley paused in the open doorway and saw Abigail sprawled across the bed. "Are you sick?" she asked anxiously.

Abigail raised her head. "Just kind of heartsick, I guess," she replied as she reached for a tissue.

"Why Abby dear, you're crying! What's the matter?" And Mrs. Brinkley took the towels into the bathroom then hurried back to her daughter.

"It isn't like you, to come home from school and not let me know you're home," the mother declared as she sat down on the bed. "Now tell me what's bothering you."

Abigail took a long, deep breath. Then she cried, "Honestly, Mother, I feel I've reached an impasse where LannaRae is concerned. I'm on a dead end street at end corner. I am!"

"The new girl, huh?"

"Right. And she's like no one I've ever met or known before; not in all of my natural life. I've tried to be her friend but she refuses to allow me."

"There must be a reason for this, Abby. In fact, I'm sure there's a reason. There always is, you know."

"But what? Oh, if only she'd let me get behind that wall she built, or inside the tall fence behind which she hides. Or whatever. But she won't. I've prayed and prayed, and cried, and asked the Lord to please show me how to reach her and help her, and still the wall remains and the heart of her seems hard and cold and steely; clamped tight."

Mrs. Brinkley was silent for a long while. Then she said, "The Bible tells us that some things come about only through prayer and fasting, honey. I'm going to begin fasting, along with the praying I've been doing, and if you care to join me, I'll be happy. I don't expect you to fast as many meals as I, since I believe an active school girl needs to eat something wholesome for her lunch; but perhaps you could think of some way to join me occasionally."

"Oh, Mother, that's wonderful. And I don't see how skipping my lunch a couple times a week could hurt me. I'll fast with you, at least twice a week, God willing. Like you said, there's got to be a reason for LannaRae's 'wall.' And God knows just how to crumble it, and to help me say the right thing at the right time. She looks miserably unhappy. And so very lonesome, too."

"I would imagine that she's even more unhappy than she looks, Abby. Living within one's self makes for unhappiness and loneliness. She may be

using that 'wall' as a cover-up for something she's trying to hide or conceal; or it may be that she's embarrassed about something in her home and is resisting the development of a close friendship lest her friends want to come to her home and then discover the embarrassing situation or circumstance. And, again, it may be none of these things. We'll pray for her, and leave the judging to God, Who knows what the real reason is. You continue to love her, and try to win her confidence and her friendship."

If only her mother knew how hard she had tried, Abigail thought, when she was once more alone in the room.

Maybe that was part of the problem, she reasoned, sitting suddenly upright: maybe she tried too hard in her own strength and way, instead of turning LannaRae over to God completely. She had heard several wonderful saints testify how God moved and began to work mightily after they had prayerfully placed the soul over which they were burdened and concerned into the hands of Jesus and had taken their hands off completely and entirely.

Feeling that she may have been hindering God from moving the way He'd like, Abigail fell on her knees beside the bed and, weeping, she said, "Forgive me, Lord, if I have been hindering You from working in LannaRae's heart as You see best. Here and now, I place her in Your hands. Please, let me be an instrument to be used only in Your timing and by Your plan, not mine. May I wait for Your instructions and Your Divine guidance. Amen."

Sensing that the Holy Spirit had helped her to pray the short but from-the-heart prayer, she got to her feet. Her soul was instantly calm and at rest. She knew the case of LannaRae was now resting in God's hands. She had the sweet and calm assurance that she had committed her to God, to move as He saw best. Her job was to pray. And pray. And pray. And pray some more.

The following days, Abigail merely waved and smiled warmly in LannaRae's direction whenever she saw her at school. She felt no compulsion to speak to the girl, however. She was waiting patiently for the Spirit to direct her every action, knowing that when she followed and obeyed His specific orders and directions there would be results. And all the while, she and her mother continued to pray and fast.

Nearly two weeks went by and one day, en route to the school library, Abigail saw LannaRae standing beneath a stairwell. It looked like she was crying. Quickly, she rushed over to where the girl had apparently been hiding, or trying to hide.

"LannaRae," she called, rushing up to her. "LannaRae, what's wrong?" she asked, throwing her arms around the shoulders of the sobbing girl and drawing her to herself. "Tell me what's wrong," she pleaded. "Please."

For a long while the black eyed LannaRae continued to sob, saying nothing. But neither did she try to pull away from the loving arms that held her so gently and patiently.

"What's wrong?" Abigail asked softly again. "Please tell me," she urged. "I love you, and I'm your friend."

A great and heavy sigh came from LannaRae's lips. "Say it again, Abby. Please say it again," she cried, as she lifted her beautiful but now-swollen eyes to meet those of Abigail's. "Tell me you're my friend. Please. . . ."

It came out as a plea for help; a call for rescue.

"I am your friend, LannaRae, and I do love you. So does Jesus, my best and truest and dearest Friend," Abigail said warmly and reassuringly.

And then, like a dam breaking past its boundary and bursting through its strong barriers, LannaRae said, "The kids think I'm a snob; a stuck-up peacock. And I'm not. I'm not! Just a little while ago one of the girls said something horrible to me. I . . . I've been afraid to . . . to make friends, Abigail. So afraid. I wanted to respond to your friendship. Oh, how I wanted to! But I... I'm scared."

"But why, LannaRae? We all need friends; everyone of us does."

LannaRae's shoulders shook with sobs again. "I'm not cold and stuck up, Abby; believe me when I tell you this. At heart, I'm warm and friendly. And I . . . I'm dying to have friends. But Abby, my mother. . . . Oh-h!"

It was almost like an agonizing moan, and Abigail discovered that her tears were now mingling with those of LannaRae's. "Jesus cares," she said, tearfully. "Whatever the trouble, Jesus cares, honey."

"I'm so ashamed," LannaRae cried. "And I've kept this thing inside so long until I found myself on an island -- friendless and alone. It will help me to get it out, Abby, so please listen to me. I feel I can trust you; I know you won't go circulating or spreading what I'm going to tell you around town nor in the school. But, simply stated, my mother forbids me to bring friends home."

Abigail gasped. She couldn't imagine her mother being like that. "Oh, LannaRae!" she exclaimed, shocked. "No. No!"

"She doesn't much like the idea of my having friends, period! But there's a reason for this. You see, I once was popular; I had many friends: both in school and out of school. I worked after school in a small, home-owned deli shop. The manager-owner, a young woman, and very attractive, took a liking to me. She was teaching and training me to some day become her assistant. She planned to open another deli in an adjoining town.

"She met my parents and took an immediate liking to them and, often, she took me home after work. Frequently, Mother and Dad invited her to take meals with us, since she was not married and had no family in the immediate area. She was good to me, and I really enjoyed working for her. The little shop did a tremendous business, for she was a wonderful cook and knew how to put the right combination of foods together -- and so attractively and with great eye appeal. It was sheer joy to work in her clean little place.

"I was blind to the fact, however, that more and more she didn't come in to the shop after six o'clock and left the eight o'clock closing up time to me. I suppose it was because I thought she was busy at home and she knew she could trust me, a thing she had frequently told me.

"One day I received a call from her at school, telling me that I wouldn't need to work for a while and that I should mail my key to her post office box, which I did. And then, a few days later, when my father didn't come home from work and the little deli shop was closed up tight, we discovered what had happened.

"My mother blamed me for everything, saying that if I hadn't gone to work there and hadn't had her as a friend, my father would not have met her and they would not have run away together. From that time on, she has forbidden me to bring anybody home. She's so bitter. She moved here to get away from all who knew her and all who wanted to help her."

"Oh, LannaRae, that's dreadful! You're not responsible for what they did. I'm sure you're hurting as deeply as your mother is, only in a different way."

"If you only knew how deeply, Abby! I loved my father very much. And he loved us. I know he did. I keep hoping, hoping, hoping that, even yet, he'll come back to me."

"LannaRae, have you ever known Jesus? I mean, have you ever been a Christian?" Abigail asked. "He cares about what has happened."

"No. I . . . I . . . well, I'm not a heathen; if this is what you mean, Abby."

"We were all born in sin, the Bible tells us," Abigail began. "So this means, then, that we were all sinners. But Jesus came from Heaven to earth to redeem sinful mankind, LannaRae. His sacrificial blood, as He died on the cross for our sins -- yours, mine, and for everybody -- was the supreme sacrifice-price He paid for our redemption."

"We don't need to remain a sinner; we can become converted; new, in Christ, by repenting of and confessing and forsaking our sins and asking Jesus to come into our heart. Oh, LannaRae, Mother and I have been praying earnestly for you. If you were converted, the Lord Jesus Christ would come and live in your heart. He'd bear this terrible burden that's on your heart and He'd lift the load off you. You need Him, honey. Oh, you do. He'll be an unfailing, Always-present Friend: One whom you can go to and talk to anytime and any-where. And, always, He'll help you through any and all the trials that you may go through."

LannaRae looked at Abigail for a long while. Then she said, "Now I know why you are so different from the others here at school; and I know why I always see a light on your face -- Jesus! You have Jesus in you, Abby. Oh, this is too wonderful for me to comprehend or fully take in! But Abby, I want to know Him like you know Him. Now, Abby. Now!"

Tears spilled from beneath the long, jet-black eyelashes. "Now!" she whispered tearfully as Abigail began to pray.