

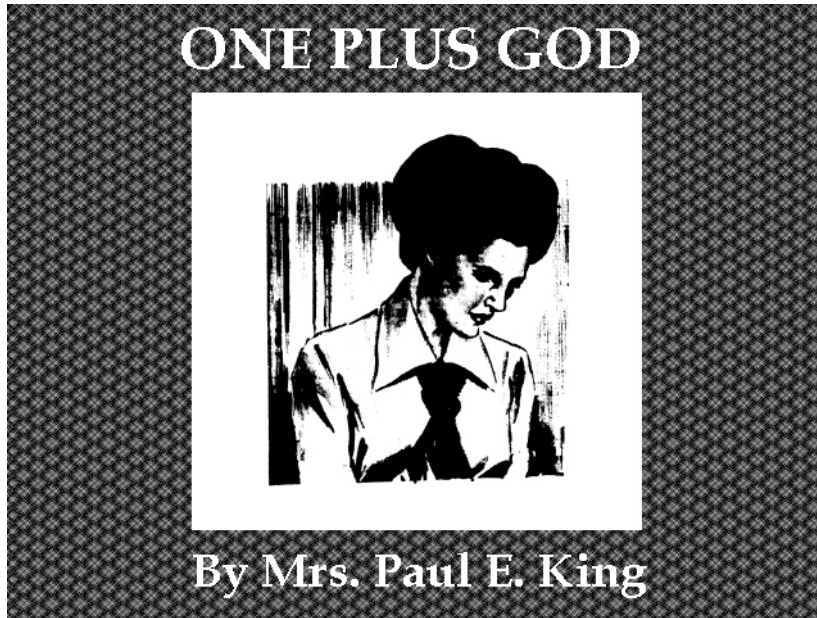
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ONE PLUS GOD
By Mrs. Paul E. King

Lana Stoner donned the pretty and clean apron which her employers provided for her, still marveling -- after five days of work -- how the Lord had seemed to put the job in her lap. It was no mistake, when she made the wrong turn two weeks ago and, instead of taking the usual road into the town eighteen miles away, she had taken the more heavily traveled road, which went by Mom's Restaurant. She was almost past the neat restaurant when

she saw someone put the "Help Wanted" sign in the enormous front window. Braking, she had pulled the car into a parking space and went inside. The Wilkersons hired her immediately.

"We had hoped to get a more mature woman," Edyth Wilkerson told her when Lana told them she was looking for work. "And you are just what Ralph and I've been wanting. So many of the younger set call in sick," she added, "and it leaves us short of help."

Lana busied herself now with cutting pies and making fresh coffee. She loved every single minute of work in the extremely busy eating place. And it was busy; what with truckers spreading the "good food" news around to their fellow drivers on the road.

Mrs. Wilkerson was a cook "par excellence." Everything she made seemed to be seasoned just right, and she was as generous with her portions of food as she was with her compliments. Lana liked her. Best of all, the Wilkersons had graciously complied with her "no Sunday work" request.

Tears warmed Lana's cheeks as she thought again of God's goodness to her in having her be in front of the restaurant when the "Help Wanted" sign was being placed in the window. How perfect God's timing was and how marvelous His Divine leadership! To Lana, it was a miracle of no little proportion: she had been praying for work. Oh, how she had prayed! And fasted, too. Widowed less than a year ago at the age of fifty-two, and with William's lingering illness eating up most of their savings, necessity compelled her to seek employment.

Never having worked before in a public place, she was terrified over the prospect until she turned everything over to the Lord and peace then filled her soul. Always, she had felt that woman's place was in the home. And she had fulfilled that noble and high calling with love and happiness and pleasure. How overjoyed and thrilled she was, being William's wife and bearing and caring for his five children, all of them now grown and established in homes of their own. And now, with the dire necessity of having enough money to keep her bills paid, the Lord had sent her the good paying job in the Wilkersons' popular and thriving restaurant. She felt blest indeed.

The morning went by at its usual fast pace of activity and bustling business. Mom's Restaurant served more pies and coffee, it was said, than

any other restaurant for miles and miles around, and Lana was convinced of the statement. Pies seemed to vanish from their shelves and glass-enclosed cases. And not by piece only but whole pies were bought and carried home: Mrs. Wilkerson's pie crust melted in one's mouth. It was the most flaky-rich pastry Lana felt she had ever eaten or tasted. The woman kept a sort of smorgasbord of pies; each one a work of art.

The rush hour at noon was busier than ever, it seemed, and Lana hurried to the cash register to a man waiting to pay for his meal. He seemed to be in a hurry.

"I'm sorry to keep you waiting," she stated with a smile as she took the proffered bill.

"Add a Playboy Magazine on to the bill," the man said without smiling.

"We don't sell things like that in here," Lana replied sweetly.

"Don't try to kid me, lady. Get me a Playboy." Lana rang the ticket up and handed the man his change, saying, "This is a restaurant, Sir. There are no Pl. . . ."

Before she could finish her sentence, one of the other waitresses broke in with, "Here, Roy, I'll get it for you." Immediately Merlene reached far back under one of the counters and handed the now irate man the magazine, apologizing with, "She's new here. Sorry to have kept you waiting."

Lana's strength seemed to drain from her body. She stood like a statue, numb with shock.

"They should have told you where to find the magazines," Merlene said near Lana's ear. "They must have forgotten to tell you. Look, they're down here," she stated, pointing to the far corner of one of the counters. "There are lots of magazines -- more than just Playboy. There's real juicy stuff under here."

Grabbing a dishcloth, Lana began cleaning furiously on the counter top. "I don't care to look," she said, feeling sad and like she'd been betrayed.

The Wilkersons hadn't forgotten to tell her, she was sure; they didn't want her to know, because of the stand she had taken against working on Sunday, she felt. She had told them that she was born again and a sanctified wholly Christian and that she couldn't conscientiously violate God's holy mandate to "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy." They knew she was a religious woman. A God-fearing woman. They had not had the courage to inform her of the "juicy" smut.

Lana went home from work that day with a broken and a heavy heart. She felt sure that her job was in jeopardy. Little matter; she would not forfeit her relationship with her God for filth and smut! The Lord was more to her than anything: He was not only her Savior and her sanctifier but He was her constantly abiding Companion and Friend as well. She prayed into the night, asking for help and guidance.

Lana found Edyth Wilkerson finishing up her pie baking when she arrived early the following morning. "I can't work here," she said softly, "if I must sell those filthy, trashy magazines."

Touching Lana's sleeve with a floury hand, Edyth said, "I don't like them either. I'm ashamed of them. Ralph insisted on selling them; said they'd bring in more money."

"But Mrs. Wilkerson, what's money, compared to a man's soul?"

"I've thought about it. And Lana, you don't have to sell them. I'll take care of them or have one of the other girls do it."

"Thank you," Lana replied, grateful to be relieved of that duty.

The days that followed were days of revelation to Lana as young and old men, some from her own neighborhood, came in and bought the filthy trash. She saw dads, young men, and grandpas, many whom she recognized, and Mr. Wilkerson was supplying these, his friends with smut and vulgarity and trash: Trash that was defiling their soul and body and mind and destroying their soul. Like a giant erosion it was taking away everything that was once sacred and pure and good, and marking, forever, their mind with moral filth and smut and decadence, making them more like animals than humans.

It was too much for Lana. True, she wasn't selling it, but she was seeing it sold. Those men who were buying it were someone's fathers, grandfathers, and brothers, and their baser, lower instincts were being fed on moral filth that could drive them to incest, rape, perversion and, yes, even murder.

Going to Mrs. Wilkerson, Lana said, "Edyth, I'm sorry, but I can't work here any longer if you continue to sell those morally degrading magazines."

"Don't be hasty, Lana," Edyth replied. "I'll talk to Ralph about it. I don't like it either."

The following morning, Mrs. Wilkerson greeted Lana with a broad smile. "I talked to Ralph. He said he'll cancel all orders for those magazines, and have these in here removed."

"Oh, thank God! Thank God!" Lana cried, giving the kind, soft-spoken woman a quick hug before donning a clean, freshly-laundered apron and getting busy with the many jobs needing to be done.

Three days later, the magazines were still beneath the counter and a new supply had come in. Lana groaned in her spirit. Her mind was made up: she and moral filth could not coexist.

"I'll finish my six-day week out, Edyth," she said, "but that is all. There is no way I can work here, knowing what is being sold. I'm sorry, but this is final unless the filth and smut is cleaned out beneath the counter."

Mrs. Wilkerson sighed tiredly. "Ralph's such a stubborn man," she said softly. Then she cried, "Oh, Lana, I don't want you to leave. You . . . you're doing something for me. In my heart, I mean. I . . . I'm praying again, Lana. I used to know how. I loved the Lord. That was years ago. And now I'm coming back. I've never stood up to Ralph before: you gave me the courage to confront him about the thing that has nearly torn the heart out of me. I hate these magazines, Lana. Hate them with perfect hatred." Tears were shining in Edyth's eyes.

Lana threw her arms around the woman, who was only four years her senior. "I love you," she said. "And I have been praying for you and for Mr. Wilkerson."

"I was sure you were, Lana. For, ever since you came here to work, I have felt the pull on my heart to come back to the Lord. Even Ralph is changing, though you are not aware of it. But I live with him; I know."

"Thanks be unto God!" Lana cried, as she hurried to the cash register to ring up the price of a meal.

Friday came and went in the usual way, with the abominable magazines still in their under-the-counter hiding place. But when she arrived for work Saturday morning, she saw a big vacant, gaping hole beneath the counter. The magazines were gone; every single one of them. Lana felt like shouting. Silently, she began to praise and thank the Lord. Then she began scrubbing the vacant place furiously. She wanted it clean. Clean!

Edyth came over and said softly, "God answered your prayers, Lana. They're gone. Gone! I feel so good. Now continue to pray for Ralph and me. I'm coming back -- even if I must come without Ralph. But I believe he's going to come, too, Lana: he's listening to what I tell him about God."

Lana felt all choked up inside. All she could say was, "Thank God! Thank God!" Her overflowing heart, however, was singing, and the victorious refrain was, "One plus God is a majority. One plus God is a majority. One, with God, can make a difference!"