

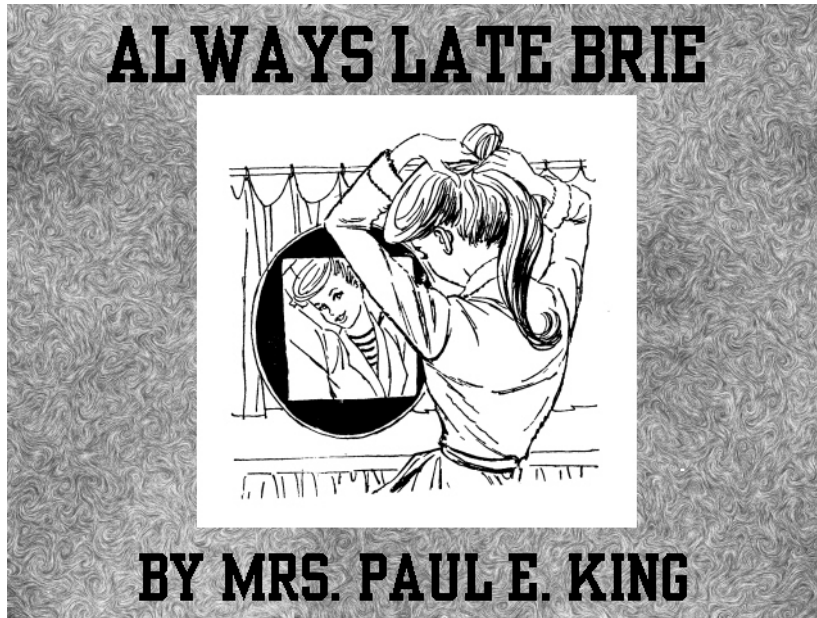
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**ALWAYS LATE BRIE**  
**By Mrs. Paul E. King**

Brie Snow leafed through the catalog for the fifth time that morning, pausing every now and then to glance at the articles of clothing shown on the pages she'd turned down at the corners. Then she slammed the thick book shut and sat cross-legged on the bed, twirling a long strand of hair around and around on her index finger.

"Brie, do you realize what time it is?" her mother asked anxiously, on her way from the laundry room to the bathroom with a load of folded towels and washcloths.

"I have plenty of time, Mom. Plenty of time," and the tall, slender girl got off the bed and hurried to the clothes closet, where she took out a skirt and sweater set and hung it on the door knob.

"Since you have so much time," Mrs. Snow said on her way back to the laundry room, "you may finish folding the towels and the blankets that I washed."

"Oh, Mom, I'm not sure I'll have enough time to do that."

"Come, Brie, get busy. You could have had everything folded and put away in the time you spent leafing through that catalog."

"But Mom, my hair's not combed and I'm not dressed, and I'm to be at Brother Bracken's house by ten-thirty. I won't have enough time to fold the blankets; I know I won't."

"Look Brie, you've been up for two full hours and fifteen minutes and since you've done nothing but fritter your time away, when you should have been combing your hair and getting yourself ready for this little church venture, I now expect you to help out with some of the day's work. Now hurry, my dear; you'll still have time to comb your hair and get ready for the Help-Out."

"Aw, Mom!" But Brie knew that her mother meant what she said, so she shuffled along the hallway to the laundry room and began to fold. How she hated folding anything; blankets, sheets and quilts especially!

The hallway clock chimed out nine musically sweet notes.

"Mom, it's nine o'clock!" Brie squealed. "I'm going to be late; I just know I am."

"Not if you work instead of grumble and complain and fritter your time away," came Mrs. Snow's kindly patient voice from the kitchen, where she was putting the breakfast dishes away.

Brie worked; but she also grumbled. In an undertone, to be sure; but oh how she did grumble and complain!

"How are you doing?" Mrs. Snow asked when the last dish was put away.

"I'm almost finished."

"Good. Now take the towels and washcloths to the bathroom and put them where they belong on the shelf. And take the blankets to each room where they belong, then get busy and comb your hair and brush your teeth. You must learn how to properly budget your time, Brie. You have the same amount of hours in your day as each of us has and yet you. . . ."

"I know. I know. Don't say it, Mom!"

Mrs. Snow looked sad; much like she did before she'd cry. "If only you'd learn!" she remarked before she walked away.

Brie felt anything but happy. She didn't like being told that she frittered her time away even though she knew it was true. Still, she just wasn't a "morning person" like her good friend Jenny Carson was. Jenny seemed to "bloom" in the morning; much like the morning glories did -- they were at their brightest-best in the early morning hours. This was Jenny. But, truthfully, (Brie had to admit) Jenny "bloomed: best all day long, it seemed. And into the night hours, too. Jenny said she always committed her days to the Lord, asking Him to "order them according to His will and His plan and design" for her life, so His name might be glorified in her and through her. But, Brie reasoned, she wasn't Jenny. And she never would be like Jenny. She, Brie Lynn Snow, was none other than Brie Lynn Snow; and no matter what others did, she would always be herself.

She put the folded laundry away then dressed for the Help-Out -- in a casual skirt and sweater. She combed her hair and brushed her teeth then sat down in a chair in her bedroom and began leafing through the catalog again. There were so many pretty things on the pages, and since she earned money by baby-sitting for Mrs. James' twins, she enjoyed buying her own clothes. In a little while, she was totally absorbed in the catalog.

"Brie! Brie, it's twenty minutes after ten. You were to be at the Bracken's house by ten-thirty. You'll never make it."

Shrugging her shoulders, Brie replied with, "Oh they'll wait. Maybe you'll run me over, Mom. . . ."

"No way, Brie. Bud took my car to the shop for repairs, and your father has his car at work with him. Furthermore, you told Jenny and the girls you'd meet them at Jenny's house -- on your bicycle and you'd all go together to Brother and Sister Bracken's house. Now go, young lady, and no more looking at the catalog. I hope you had your private devotions. . . ."

Brie cringed; she knew she should have read her Bible and prayed before looking through the catalog. Yes, she knew.

It was exactly ten thirty-three when she pulled out of the driveway and started for Jenny's house. Dear Jenny, she'd be waiting for her, she felt sure. She always waited for her.

Fifteen minutes later, she pedaled into Jenny's driveway. She was expecting to hear the old familiar chorus of, "Well, it's about time, Brie! You're only forty-five minutes late this time!" (She was to be at Jenny's house by ten o'clock sharp!)

Instead of a chorus of excited -- and frustrated -voices, however, she was greeted by total silence: the girls were nowhere around. Worse still, Jenny's mother was nowhere to be found. On the back screen door, in big, bold letters, she read, "Gone to the Brackens'. Left at ten sharp. Jenny and friends."

Brie walked along the side of the house till she reached her bike. Then she pedaled away toward the Brackens'. Surely -- surely -- they wouldn't leave without her! This Help-Out was for all the young people who were willing to help those less fortunate than they -- the elderly who were no longer able to keep their house's painted and the windows washed or lawns mowed, especially.

The young peoples' group from the church had decided this would be an especially wonderful way in which to have an outreach in their community and thereby make a spiritual impact upon those who didn't know the Lord.

She Wanted so much to be a part of this new and exciting venture, even though she knew that for her, and all the other girls, it would mean long hours of both inside and outside cleaning and maybe, even, lawn mowing. Still, it would be fun, she knew, working with all the other young people. And, at the end of the hard work, a wiener roast and a corn-on-the-cob feast at the park.

She pedaled furiously, hoping to cut the usual half-hour drive to the Brackens' house down to twenty minutes, at least.

But the minute she got there she knew all her furious pedaling was for nothing: Everybody was gone! The Bracken house was as lonely and as silent as Jenny's house was.

Brie parked the bicycle beneath a sugar maple near the front of the house then she sat down on the porch swing to rest a while. And then she spied the note as it fluttered from the front screen door, with these words, "Sorry you weren't here, Brie. We left at 10:30 sharp, as prearranged and announced. Hope you have a lovely day."

"A lovely day!" she exclaimed aloud, feeling as though everybody had let her down. She was excluded from this great new venture; and by her own church group at that!

Something somewhere inside her being began to boil and seethe.

"If they don't want me, I'll not go to church again. Not ever!" she declared defiantly. "They could have waited!"

She fumed as she got on the bicycle and started homeward.

Forty-five minutes later she drove into her driveway and the garage. She hoped to avoid seeing her mother but such was not the case: Mrs. Snow was on the front porch peeling apples for canning and for pies.

"They left without you this time, huh Brie?" She never even lifted her eyes from the pan of apples when she asked the question.

"I'm through with all of them" Brie stormed. "I'm never going back to church again. They could have waited."

"Hold it! Hold it!" Mrs. Snow cried, getting to her feet and taking Brie by her shoulders. "Your father and I are responsible, for what you do or don't do. So, yes, you will be going back to church. And on the usual and very normal regular basis too. And now, since that issue is settled, you got what you deserved. I'm glad that, for once, they didn't wait on you. Do you realize that every time there is anything going on with your youth group they always have to wait on Brie Snow? You've made Jenny late so many times until she has talked to me about it; asked me would I please, please try to make you change. And I've tried. Oh, how I've tried! But you seem to think they can wait on you-always.

"It's like you're robbing other people of their time, Brie. This is wrong. Very wrong! They've been patient with you far too long. It's time you change. And for sure, with your present attitude, you won't be going up in the rapture. Carnality will not enter Heaven. Romans 8:7 tells us, 'Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.' Anything that is an enemy of God will be excluded from that sinless, holy and pure City. The choice is yours, Brie: It's either Heaven or hell."

Mrs. Snow got back to peeling the apples and a sobered Brie went inside to her bedroom. Closing the door quietly, she picked up the Bible from her night stand. She didn't want to miss Heaven. Oh, no. No! She couldn't afford to miss it.

Tears fell freely as she dropped to her knees beside the bed. She must repent, she knew, and do her first works over. Ah, yes, a beginning -- repentance! Only after she was forgiven could she be sanctified wholly.

Holding nothing back, Brie began praying in earnest.