

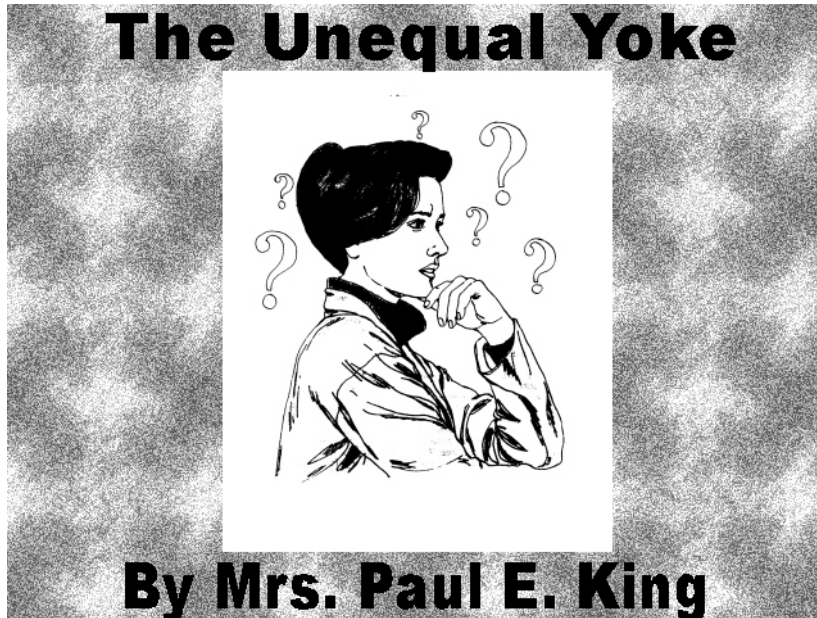
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**THE UNEQUAL YOKE**  
**By Mrs. Paul E. King**

Sharla Clemmons raced up the steps of Millie's porch, taking them two at a time. She was breathless with excitement. Millie was her best friend; she couldn't wait to share the news with her.

"Millie," she called, as she pushed the doorbell and laid on it longer than usual. "Millie. Oh, Millie."

The echo of the doorbell sounded in the big hallway inside the house but Millie didn't appear at the door. Undaunted, Sharla bounded down the porch steps like a rubber ball and raced along side the big three-story house until she reached the back yard. "Millie," she called. "Where are you, Millie?"

"Somebody call me?" came a cheerfully-bubbly voice from somewhere at the far end of the sprawling yard.

"Guess who," Sharla cried, racing across the lawn to the far end of the yard where she found Millie knee-deep in her herb garden; the tall shrubs and bushes making a "screen" for the herbs which grew in profusion and abundance directly behind and beyond the tall, blooming bushes.

"Oh, Millie, you dear, dear, woman! You very definitely must be the ultimate creature when it comes to homespun, common and ordinary things. But I should have remembered this from when we grew up together and played together those many years ago."

"Wait a minute, Sharla," Millie teased as she tied a bunch of sage together for drying inside the summer house, which was below the big main house. "We're not old, you and I. What do you mean by, 'those many, many years ago'?"

Sharla sat down on a huge rock. "Of course we're not old, my dear. But it does seem like eons ago since we were little children. And seeing you here among your herb garden, suddenly makes me realize that you get your wish."

"It's a gift from God, Sharla."

"You even got that big old house you always said you hoped the Lord would someday bless you with."

"It pays to let Him lead and to order the affairs of one's life," Millie replied as she laid down her garden shears and sat down on the cool, damp earth near her long-time friend. "you know, Sharla, John and I never cease to be amazed over this property: it still seems like a dream sometimes. It's old, but we love it. It has 'character' to it and it was built to last and last."

"It really does have character," Sharla remarked. "And I don't know of two more worthy or deserving -nor more thankful -- people than John and you. And without a doubt, God was behind the transaction and in that old man's offer to sell the place to you at the very, very modest price which he did. It 'fits' you, Millie. It 'looks' like you."

"Wait a minute, my dear; I'm not exactly sprawling-yet."

They laughed together over Millie's remark.

"Oh, Mill, you know what I mean -- the flowers, the plants, the bushes, the trees, the wrap-around porch -- it's you, Millie. And John. But say; I didn't come here to discuss plants and gardens and houses; I came to tell you that I met a fabulously wonderful fellow. . . ."

"Is he a Christian, Sharla? Does he love the Lord and will he lead your household in the way of righteousness and uprightness? You know that you and I always said we wouldn't settle for anything less. Never!"

"He isn't a Christian, such as you and John and I are, Millie. But he's a great guy. He went to church with me a couple of times and he seemed to enjoy it. He said he wasn't brought up like I was."

"But Sharla. . . ."

"Oh, I know, Millie. But Lem said that after we are married he may come regularly with me."

"Married?" Millie leaned over and looked Sharla full in the face. "Sharla, please, please, break it off. The Bible is very clear on its position of a Christian regarding long-term unions and partnerships. Need I quote it? Here goes anyhow, 'Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness?'" (II Cor. 6:14).

"Oh, Millie dear, don't worry about it. Lem said he'll maybe go to church with me after we're married."

"That one word alone makes me tremble, Sharla: Lem doesn't sound exactly sincere by saying 'maybe.' For your own good, as well as for your

spiritual welfare, break it off, Sharla. Don't be in haste; wait for God's timing. You're only in your mid-twenties."

"But Millie, if I can lead Lem to Christ. . . ."

"Better wait until he's born again, Sharla, and until he has given unmistakable evidence and proof of it before you venture out on the sea of matrimony with him."

"Lem's different from anyone I've ever met, Millie. He appreciates me as a person, and he's always complimenting me about my hair and my modest dressing. So I think he'll come around to my way of thinking."

"But it will be an unequal yoke, Sharla. You have Christ. Lem is in spiritual darkness; he's in the hands of Satan. Christ and Satan -- can't you see it, my dear friend? The comparison has no equal. Again, quoting from the Bible, 'Can two walk together, except they be agreed?' (Amos 3:3). You'll be walking against light if you marry him."

"I believe he'll change, Millie. He's intelligent and brilliant. He'll know what he needs to do. Frankly, he's the most handsome man I've ever met. I love him. . . ."

Millie prayed much for Sharla. She married Lem. They had their beautiful new home and their flourishing careers. Seldom did the two friends see each other anymore. Over a year later, at the mall on the outskirts of the city where Lem and Sharla built their home, Millie saw the dear familiar face.

"Sharla! Sharla!" she cried, as she saw her longtime friend come from a small specialty shop and start down the long mall.

Sharla turned quickly. Seeing Millie, she rushed to her and threw her arms around her neck. "Oh, Mill," she exclaimed amidst her falling tears, "you're just the person I need to see. I'm feeling low this morning. Low low, if you know what that means. But what brings you here?" she asked. "You're quite a distance from home, aren't you?"

"John, bless him! treats me to an outing just every little once in a while. He's the kindest, dearest, sweetest, most wonderful husband in all the world. He lives up to God's measurement-standard of the Biblical husband who is to

love his wife as he loves his own body. He had to come into the city on business for the company, so he brought me along. We'll have supper together then head back home, God willing. But what's this about being so low? Aren't you working in the hospital as a pathologist anymore? Did Lem take the shingle off his door and quit G. P.-ing?" Millie laughed as she asked the questions, trying to extract a smile, once so ever-present and instant from her dear friend's face.

"Oh, Millie, you dear, dear friend. I'm sure you know that Lem would never think of giving up his medical practice. And of course I'm still as busy as ever at the hospital. But, well. . . ."

"Well, what?" Millie asked pointedly. "You know we vowed, as little girl friends, to never keep secrets from each other."

Sharla laughed. Millie rejoiced; it was ever so much like the Sharla she had known from childhood's carefree days. The smile and the laughter faded as quickly as it had emerged, however.

"Let's sit down somewhere; can we, please? Do you have the time?" Sharla asked.

"I have all day," Millie answered. "And I'd like nothing better than to spend as much of this day with you as is possible. Aren't you working at all today?"

"It's my day off. Let's go over by those tall plants near the smaller fountain. We'll be more to ourselves and I like those pretty benches. It's peaceful and restful there, too."

Once seated, Sharla said sadly, "Life has its disappointments, doesn't it, Millie? Lem's good to me, and we have a beautiful home with very beautiful furnishings, but. . . . "Tears began to fall.

Millie reached for her friend's hands. "You don't need to tell me, Sharla," she said. "Not if it's too painful to talk about. I was only teasing about those little, long-ago commitments we made so lightly and so glibly. But it was fun, back then, wasn't it? I always felt like you and I had some things going for us that no other person in all our great wide world knew anything

about. Even if it was only something so simple and so childish as to know where that brightly-colored garden spider had his beautiful web."

"Between your mother's tallest tomato plants in the corner of her garden," Sharla remarked, recalling that childish little secret and laughing freely as she revealed it. Then the sadness took over again. Millie felt like crying.

"I . . . I . . ." Sharla seemed to be searching for words. After a while, she said softly, "Oh, Millie, sometimes I wish I could be a child again. I was so happy back then."

Millie gave her friend's hands a tight little squeeze. "God is still the same today as He was back then, Sharla."

"I know that, Millie dear. But He seemed so much closer to me then. Like I said, Lem's really good to me. But Millie, he . . . he . . . well, he refuses to go to church with me. And since our money is all in one account, he positively forbids me to give anything to my church. Do you remember how I took on the support of a missionary family after I started working in the hospital?"

Millie nodded in the affirmative.

"Oh, Millie, Millie, their support has all been cut off." By now Sharla was sobbing. "I wrote my monthly support check out to them and mailed it, right after we were married, like I did consistently and regularly each and every month. While going over the canceled checks, Lem pushed that check over to me and said there would be no more going over to them, stating it had to be the last check he wanted, ever, to find again in among those that were canceled each month.

"I cried, and I pleaded with him to change his mind, telling him that I had taken them on as their sole support for the year. He told me that, as of that check, their support was ended. Oh, Millie, how could he have changed so much? And so quickly?"

"Sharla dear," Millie said kindly and tenderly, "Lem didn't change at all."

"But he did, Mill. Can't you see?"

"Honey, what actually happened is that the real Lem just surfaced."

Sharla looked up at her friend. Her eyes were filled with pain and disappointment.

"Millie! O Millie!" she exclaimed amid a fresh shower of tears. "The unequal yoke! Oh, if I had only looked away from the handsome face, away from the title -- Doctor -- away from the prestige and the promise of earth's finest material things, and would have heeded the Biblical injunction, 'And be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers. . . .' But it's too late now. Too late. Oh, Millie! Millie! Why was I so blind?"

"Sharla, it's true, you can't undo what you have done by marrying Lem. But God's Word tells us something encouraging when it says, 'And the vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter: so he made it again another vessel, as seemed good to the potter to make it' (Jeremiah 18:3). God hasn't cast you aside, my dear. He loves you very much. You'll have to live with your error and your mistake. But. . . ."

"I sinned, Millie, by disobeying and disregarding God's Word," Sharla cut in. "I've repented of this and I know I'm fully and freely forgiven. Also, I know I am sanctified wholly. But oh, this unequal yoke! It's so binding. So constricting. I need prayer, Millie; prayer to continue on, steadfast in the faith. Will you please pray for me now? It's so hard to go one direction while your mate is pulling in the opposite way."

"I'm sure it is, Sharla. But never forget that God's eyes are constantly looking down upon you. He's waiting, even now, to make you into another vessel. He can still use you."

"I'm willing, Millie, and I'm ready. Please pray for me."

It was peacefully-quiet as the two joined their hearts and their voices in prayer in the mall. And the One who is an ever-present Help in time of trouble bent the heavens low and filled the little alcove with a downpour from the glory land, giving strength and courage to the one wearing the unequal yoke to be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might.