

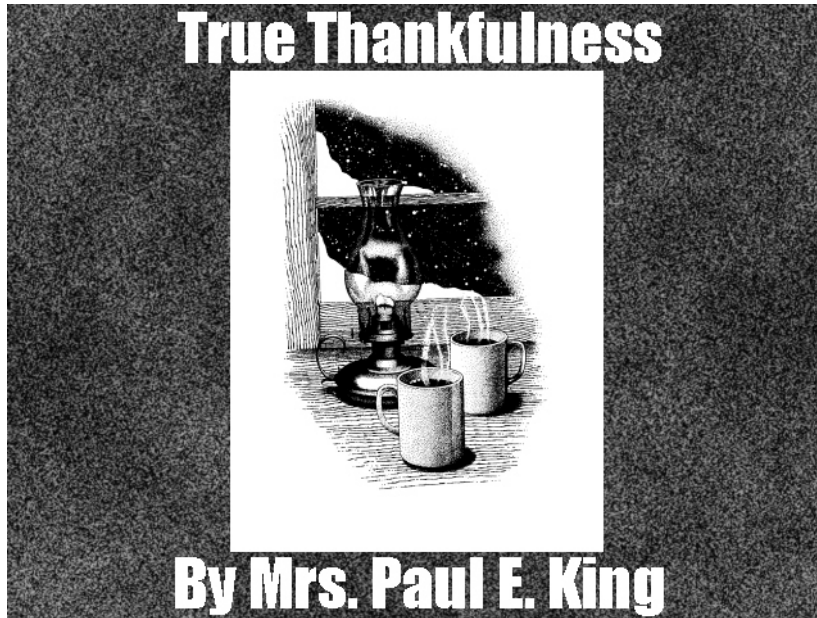
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**TRUE THANKFULNESS**  
**By Mrs. Paul E. King**

Lana sat on the wide window sill inside the sitting room of Maplewood Hall and peered into the early, gathering darkness of an eerie snow/sleet but mainly ice storm. Her spirits sank lower and lower as the sleet pelted the windows with merciless furor. Mingled with the freezing rain, which turned everything on campus into a sheet of shiny ice, she knew her trip home would be at least a day later than planned. Maybe, even, more than a day.

She leaned her head against the window and closed her eyes, trying desperately to ward off the tears that threatened to squeeze out beneath her honey-blond eye lashes. She had been so homesick since coming to Bible school in late August that she felt like she would die unless she could see her parents and be back in the dear home place again. From the time she arrived at school, she had looked forward to going home for Thanksgiving. She had even counted out the days, silently and secretly. And now this!

She closed her eyes and leaned her head against the window pane: It was icy-cold. A shiver raced up and down her spine. What if she didn't get to go home at all? It was possible, she knew. And what if she had left for home late yesterday afternoon, like most of the students had done; would she have missed the storm? Or gotten caught in it?

The last question-thought startled her to instant alertness. She opened her eyes and got to her feet and stared beyond the window to the bending, drooping, ice-laden branches of the trees. Already, the entire campus was transformed into a thing of beautiful but treacherous shining silver-white. Everywhere she looked, she saw ice. Worse still, it seemed like there was no let up in sight, nor of it slackening, even.

Lana didn't realize, until now, just how much she missed hearing the noise and chatter of her schoolmates. With most of them gone, however, the silence and the stillness of Maplewood Hall was oppressive. True, Mrs. Oliver, their dorm supervisor, was still in her apartment. But Mrs. Oliver went about her business and her duties on feet that were as noiseless and quiet as an Indian stalking an animal. And even when Mrs. Oliver spoke, it was with such softness as to make one strain to hear what she was saying, all of which only added to the deadly silence of Maplewood Hall.

JerriLee Bandage and Nicole Hayes were the only other two girls who hadn't left for home. They, like herself, had their luggage packed and were ready to leave as soon as possible after they got through with their part-time job for the day. But with the storm, Lana wondered if either girl would even make it back to the dorm after her work was finished. She felt sure they wouldn't; the roads were too slick and slippery for a car to travel on. And the wind was rising, too.

Lana walked away from the sitting room. She felt so alone. If only Kara or Leslie or Shana were here to talk to! she thought. But by now all three of the girls should have been to their respective homes. She was glad and thankful that their schedules had permitted them to leave early enough to have missed the storm. Shana's mother was a widow whose only other child, a son, was a missionary abroad. Leslie's parents needed her support and love during the brief holiday, for Patty's high chair would be empty -- and absent -- from around the table -- double pneumonia had silenced her lisping tongue forever less than two months after Bible school had begun for the fall semester. Kara's father had a serious heart condition and was in and out of the hospital frequently, and Kara's presence brought cheer to both parents as well as to her two brothers and three sisters.

Lana walked back to her room and took the Bible out of her packed-to-leave overnight suitcase and, seating herself in the chair near the window, she began reading from the well-worn pages. Whenever she needed strength or encouragement or a spiritual uplift, she resorted to her never-failing source -- the Bible. She had learned early in her Christian experience to lean heavily upon God's never-failing, ever-present promises for her every crisis and need.

She hugged the Bible close to her heart then leaned her forehead down upon it and closed her eyes. "Thank You for the storm, kind Heavenly Father," she said softly through falling tears. "Thy Word tells me to give thanks in all things. Thou knowest what is best and Thou doest all things well. Thank You for allowing Leslie and Shana and Kara -- and all the other students -- to leave before this ice storm arrived. Please take care of JerriLee and Nicole; they'll soon be getting off work. Protect them and. . . ."

"Looks like we'll have the dorm to ourselves for the night," Mrs. Oliver stated softly as she laid a hand on Lana's arm. Then, in a hasty apology, she said, "I'm sorry I disturbed you, Lana. I didn't realize you were praying; I thought you were crying."

"Both, Mrs. Oliver," Lana said, smiling through her tears and reaching for a tissue from the Kleenex box on the dresser.

"I'm so sorry you couldn't leave early, Lana. I know how badly you wanted to get home for Thanksgiving. This is a keen disappointment for you.

It can hurt dreadfully; especially, when one has been as homesick as you have been."

Lana dried her tears "Ho . . . how did you know? I . . . I didn't want anybody to know. I'm sorry if this has caused you concern and worry, Mrs. Oliver. I thought I had kept it pretty well to myself. . . ."

"You did, my dear," the dorm supervisor said consolingly. "Except in the prayer room late at night. More than once I have stood outside the door and wept with you and for you, as you poured your soul out to the Lord, asking Him for grace and comfort to get you over your homesickness."

"Oh, I am sorry, Mrs. Oliver. I didn't mean to cause you grief or concern, nor to place a burden on you."

"Are we not commanded to 'weep with them that weep,' Lana? Furthermore, I know what you have been going through."

"You?" Lana gasped. "Certainly not you, Mrs. Oliver!"

"I thought I'd die when I went to Bible school; I was that homesick. Only I couldn't conceal my feelings like you do. I'm afraid I made life quite miserable for my roommate as well as the girls in the dorm. I cried myself to sleep almost every night for weeks and weeks. It was awful. I was so ashamed of myself."

"It's kind of stupid, Mrs. Oliver," Lana remarked. "I too am ashamed of myself. After all, I'm not a mere child anymore. But how to get over it is quite a problem. I miss my mother especially much. She and I have always been so very close. All my life, Mother has been my best earthly friend."

Mrs. Oliver sat down in the only other chair in the room, saying softly, "My heart always rejoices when I hear of a good and close mother-daughter relationship. Few are the daughters who go astray when love ties bind them to their mother. All three of my daughters were close to me. The middle one, Ellene, especially so. She actually became ill from her intense homesickness when she first left for Bible school. She begged to come home. Her father and I told her to try to make it through until the Christmas break and then we'd discuss it further. By then she had become adjusted to her new and different surroundings and she wanted to go back to complete her studies."

"Really?" Lana asked in surprise.

"For a fact, Lana, she did. And if you can make it through the initial adjustment here, you'll do the same thing."

Lana tried to smile. "Oh, I hope you are right, Mrs. Oliver. I feel like I'm being such a baby, carrying this dreadful homesick feeling with me all the time. And honestly, I feel like I'll die if I can't get to see my folks for Thanksgiving."

"My dear, dear Lana, take my word for it when I tell you that you won't die and that you will be getting over this. As for getting home to be with your dear ones, I have a feeling that you and JerriLee and Nicole and I will be having a cozy Thanksgiving together right here."

Lana gasped. She felt weak. "What makes you say this?" she asked in a barely whispered questioning way.

Mrs. Oliver got to her feet and stood in front of the window. "Look outside, Lana," she requested. "Did you ever see an ice storm like this?" Lana shook her head no.

"I have never seen anything like it," Mrs. Oliver stated frankly. "And I'm sure if my husband were still living he'd say the same thing; Mr. Johns called me a short while ago. . . ."

"The school president? Does he know that Nicole and JerriLee and I are still here?" Lana asked.

"He knows it, Lana. And he has given strict orders that we are to stay right here. He's going to check in with the store manager where JerriLee and Nicole work to see if someone can't get them here -some way. He said we dare not leave; it's too dangerous and treacherous. And this storm is to continue all night, after which a blizzard will be right on its heels. You know what this will mean, Lana -- ice covered by snow!"

"It means that . . . that. . . . Oh no, Mrs. Oliver! I won't get home at all!" Lana burst into tears. "And what is Thanksgiving without being with those one loves!"

Mrs. Oliver turned away from the window and stood in front of Lana's chair. "Tell me something, will you, Lana?" she asked.

Brushing the tears away, Lana said, "If I can, yes."

"What, really, is thanksgiving?"

Lana grabbed a tissue from the box and dried her tears. "Well, if you mean Thanksgiving Day, it's being with those we love and having turkey and stuffing and all the trimmings -- and extras. It's sharing joys and. . ."

"What is thanksgiving?" Mrs. Oliver asked quickly. "Thanksgiving," she repeated softly.

Lana was silent. She knew that the word -- thanksgiving -- was an act of rendering thanks. It could also mean that it was a service held as an expression of thanks for Divine goodness.

"Thanks for helping me, Mrs. Oliver," Lana said as she got to her feet. "I needed that question. Oh, how I needed it! This year, God helping me, my Thanksgiving Day will be a day of true thanksgiving. From the bottom of my heart, I will render thanks to God for His goodness to me. And since we'll not be going anywhere, tell me what to begin preparing for our foursome Thanksgiving dinner. Fortunately for us, the kitchen's beneath our dorm and we'll not have ice to skate or slide on to get there. So what shall I get out of the freezer?"

"Mr. Johns said we are to prepare anything we want to, Lana. He said they'll try to stay in touch with us. But we are not to worry if they don't get through; already, many phone lines are down. He contacted your folks and JerriLee's and Nicole's, and told them you are all still here and that you are safe and warm and fine, but that you would perhaps not be getting home at all."

"What a caring, thoughtful school president!" Lana exclaimed. "I am so thankful my parents know, and won't need to worry. Well, what shall I get out of the freezer, Mrs. Oliver?"

Laughing like a young college coed, Mrs. Oliver said, "Come, we'll go down to the kitchen together and see what's there for us to make. I've been so hungry for homemade bread and cinnamon rolls, and that's one of the things we're going to have, God willing."

"And I'm hungry for apple pie and a good chicken salad."

Mrs. Oliver's bread was ready to go into the pans for a second rising and Lana's apple and peach pies were cooling on the counter top when squeals of laughter came from the stair leading from the dorm to the kitchen and Nicole and JerriLee came bounding into the dining room area with rosy cheeks and smiling faces.

"Talk about excitement!" JerriLee exclaimed. "We were brought home in one of the city's salt trucks!"

"We skidded and slid and even turned around a time or two," Nicole added. "I was scared stiff. Then I remembered the promise the Lord had given me this morning and that sustained me. Um-m, something smells scrumptious. What's cooking?"

"Anything you're hungry for," Mrs. Oliver said, shaping the loaves to go into the pans.

"Homemade bread!" the girls exclaimed in glad surprise. "And freshly baked pies! Um-m!"

"This will be a wonderful Thanksgiving, even though I didn't get to go home," Nicole stated as she headed for the walk-in cooler to find meat and cheese to make herself a sandwich.

"It's going to be my best ever Thanksgiving," Lana told the girls. "You see, I have discovered the true meaning of thanksgiving. And from my very innermost part, I will render unto God the thanks and the praise due Him for His goodness to me. Thanks to our wonderful dorm supervisor for helping to open my eyes."

"You know something?" JerriLee asked as she sipped milk from her glass. "I'm kinda' glad we're iced in like this. We'll have a Thanksgiving Day

that we'll never forget. We'll treasure this Thanksgiving forever. It will always be special to us."

"Amen," Lana said. "And best of all, God is with us. His Presence will bless our day. My heart magnifies Him."

JerriLee burst out singing, "I will praise Him."