

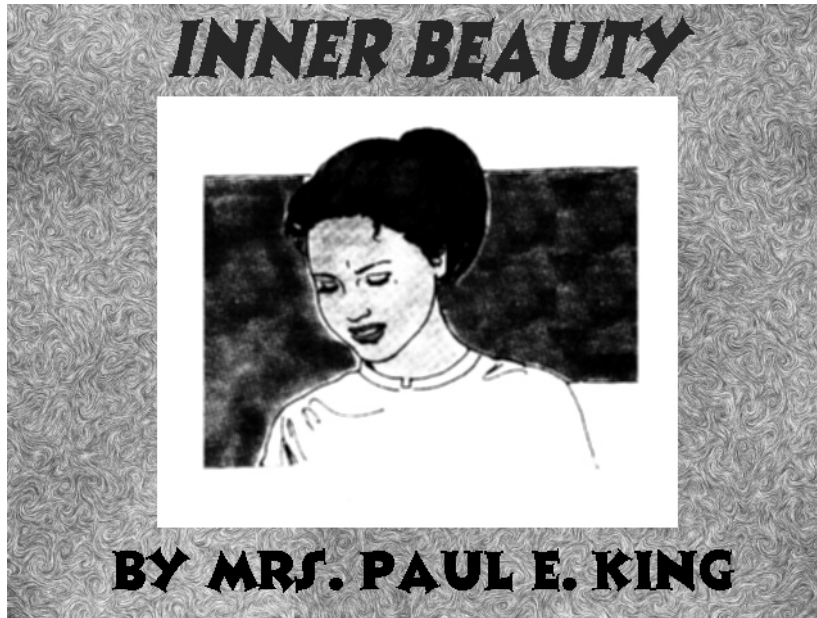
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**INNER BEAUTY**  
**By Mrs. Paul E. King**

Charlotte Lang paused in front of the big mirror one final time before walking out of the ladies' lounge in the Archibold Building where she worked. Her beauty was exquisite. She knew it. Shiny, true-blond hair, slender figure, and a complexion that was flawless and beautiful; fair and creamy white skin and eyes as blue as a morning glory.

Smiling, she walked down the hallway toward the office where she worked, fully aware of the admiring glances and the lingering stares that followed her every step.

"Hey, Beautiful, not so fast," Ramon Danbury called as he fell in step with her. "Hm," he said, touching the flowered silk scarf around her neck. "Becoming. Very becoming to you. New too, huh?"

Charlotte felt the color rise up in her cheeks. She didn't like being reminded of all the new things she bought. "It's paid for with my money," she replied with a hint of irritation registering in her voice.

"I'm sure it is. And, hey, I didn't mean to offend you, Char."

Smiling, she said, "Who said I was offended?"

Ramon stared at her. Then he answered with two questions of his own, "Well, aren't you? Weren't you?"

"Oh, Ramon, it's just that I don't like to hear people say, 'New, huh?' and, 'Say, you got another new outfit, didn't you? You have the most new clothing I've ever seen on a woman. Your closets must be full, huh?'"

"Sorry, Charlotte. Accept my humble apology, please. I like the way you've tied the scarf, and the way a part of it falls over your shoulder."

"Thanks, Ramon. I found a book in one of the stores recently, showing and telling how to fold and tie scarfs. It's amazing how many different ways one can wear a scarf. I thought this particular way was so attractive."

"It is; very attractive. But everything you wear looks beautiful on you. Say, did you know you'll be working with a new girl?"

Charlotte stood still. "New girl? No. When?"

"Today. Your department is so busy the boss decided you needed another helper in there."

Charlotte looked stunned; she was shocked. "Where will we fit another desk in our room?" she asked, incredulous.

"Come and see," Ramon answered as he opened the door and ushered her inside. "Not bad at all, huh?" he said as he waved his hand toward the new arrangement.

Charlotte was silent for a long while. Back to back the two lovely office desks stood, where once only hers had been. And worst of all -- her desk was stationed so that when she was working her back would be turned toward any and all who entered the big office. Always, she had been able to see and be seen, face forward, toward the people. Now, however, the new girl would have that privilege and honor.

"Well, what do you think?"

She had forgotten completely about Ramon standing nearby and watching her.

"I . . . I guess it doesn't matter what I think," she answered feebly. "I only hope the new girl will be nice. After all, Ramon, we'll be 'eyeing' each other all day long."

"I hear she's a super-nice person. I don't know her; but the talk that's buzzing around in our department is that she's a lovely person."

"Well, that will be nice," Charlotte said lamely as she walked over to her desk and began checking in on her work.

"I'll be seeing you, Charlotte," Ramon said as he hurried away to the department in which he worked.

"Thanks." Charlotte pulled a small mirror from her desk drawer and did a quick check on her hair and the scarf, then, carefully, she slid the mirror beneath some papers inside.

"Good morning," a pleasantly-soft, well modulated voice said as Charlotte closed the drawer. "I'm Ellandra Cox. You must be Charlotte Lang. Mr. Lounsberry said I'd be working with you. I'm glad to meet you," she added, standing beside the desk and smiling down into Charlotte's blue eyes.

"I . . . I'm glad to meet you, Ellandra. This has taken me by surprise, though, I must confess."

"What has come as a surprise to you, Charlotte?" and Mr. Lounsberry stood beside Ellandra and looked down at Charlotte.

"I didn't know . . . I mean, well. . . ."

"Every time I was able to get away from my office long enough to come in here to see you, so I could tell you what Mr. Puffenberger and I decided, you were gone. To the ladies' lounge, I believe I was told."

Charlotte felt her cheeks burn hot beneath the meaningful remark.

"Ellandra and you will be working together," the boss continued. "You will help her in any way she may need help, Charlotte, until she is accustomed to this department. She has worked elsewhere before, so office work is not new to her. You will find her extremely capable and also extremely quick to learn and achieve a status of perfection. Have a good day." Smiling down at Ellandra, he walked away.

Charlotte struggled to regain her composure. Never could she have imagined that Mr. Lounsberry or Mr. Puffenberger would hire someone like the woman before her; the woman who would be sitting across from her eight hours a day five days a week.

Aware that she was staring, "sizing" the new girl up from head to foot and back up to her head again, Charlotte got to her feet, apologizing with, "Oh, excuse me, please. This is all so different for me. Oh, yes, I see you have work on your desk. Calvin Minter will see to it that you stay busy. He nearly inundates one with work. But, of course, this is what he gets paid for--to see that I stay busy. I mean, that we stay busy. You are familiar with a computer and software, I would imagine."

"I am," Ellandra replied, smiling, as she seated herself behind the big desk and began looking over the work that was placed on her desk. She scanned it briefly, leafing through the papers, then she went over each page carefully and seriously. Soon she was working away, busily, thoroughly and seriously. Like a pro.

"I'm as near as your voice if you need me," Charlotte said, settling herself behind her desk and beginning her work.

"Thank you, Charlotte. Will do," Ellandra remarked with a smile, continuing to work as she replied.

All morning, Charlotte glanced surreptitiously at the new girl, trying to figure out why the boss(es) would hire someone like Ellandra for their firm. Every woman and girl in the office had "class" and dressed beautifully; almost elegantly, really. They were extremely attractive women, for the most part. Ellandra had neither class nor beauty. Another stealthy glance in her direction revealed to Charlotte that she may have had a semblance of beauty at some time or other in her life. But if she did, it was no longer there. Not exactly. Her hands and arms were scarred looking; not a single attractive or beautiful thing about them. Even her face, on one side, looked a mite disfigured.

Charlotte looked down at her own long, slender, beautiful fingers and her hands and arms, all so lady-like looking; creamy white and fair, and she wondered how the new girl could endure being around and working with a group of refined and cultured women; women who had "class." She felt humiliated, having to work with such a common, almost homely looking person.

A quick glance at Ellandra again revealed the scarred looking fingers and hands working rapidly and quickly away, like they were enjoying keeping pace with the messages the brain behind them was sending and giving to them. And suddenly Charlotte realized that, already, Ellandra was far ahead of her with her work. She stopped staring and got down to business.

The weeks passed into a month and Ramon, walking down the hall one morning to the office with Charlotte, said, "Hey, try to be nicer to Ellandra. Please."

Charlotte turned on her heel and faced him, saying, "I'm not ugly to her."

"But you're not exactly nice to her either."

"Who says? Talk about office gossip!"

"Come on, Charlotte, lay off the I-don't-know-what-you're-talking-about act. It's common knowledge that you don't care for Ellandra. In fact, it's obvious. So obvious, to be truthful, that the women and girls in your department are getting disgusted with you. Ellandra is a jewel, they have discovered. She talks about no one, unless it's to say something nice and good about them. In other words, plain words, she doesn't gossip. And she's always doing something helpful and nice to any and all who need her help. And her love."

"Oh come off it, Ramon. Just because she's a computer whiz and an everything-about-office-work whiz doesn't mean you need to put me down and try to belittle me."

"Charlotte! Nobody's trying to 'put you down' or to 'belittle' you. Nobody. It's just that I'd like to help you. You have the outward beauty; Ellandra has inner beauty. And really, Charlotte, I guess I'll have to admit that I'm confused."

"Confused? why should you be confused?"

"You told me a number of times that you're a Christian. Remember? And you've even invited me to come to your church."

"So-o?"

"Truthfully, Charlotte, since Ellandra has begun working here, I . . . I . . . well, stated plainly and candidly and frankly, she's genuine. She's real. That girl is a for real Christian. She lives what she professes. Everybody sees it."

"And I don't?"

"I didn't say that."

"Only in inference, Ramon."

Like one who didn't hear her reply, he added, "I'm beginning to see that what really counts is what's within one's heart. The outward beauty can be so deceiving. It's the inner beauty that endures and lasts. Did you know that Ellandra is Mr. Lounsberry's niece?" Charlotte gasped.

"Ellandra's mother and our boss were brother and sister."

"How did you find this out?" Charlotte asked weakly.

"The boss himself told us recently at one of the meetings we had. Ellandra has a little boy two years old. Her husband was killed in an automobile accident and her mother nearly so. When the car burst into flames, Ellandra rolled over their little son, protecting him with her own body - a miracle in itself, how she managed to do this with her body pinned down by a piece of the wreckage, so Mr. Lounsberry said. She was badly burned on her hands and one side of her face and head. But she saved the boy's life by her bravery and love. Ellandra stayed by her mother's side until she passed away recently. She's had quite a few surgeries -- skin grafts, et cetera -- to get her back into shape and give her a semblance of her former self. And wouldn't you know it, the drunk that hit them head on had hardly a scratch, the boss said!

"I asked Mr. Lounsberry if Ellandra didn't get bitter after her husband was killed and when her mother finally died, months later due to the accident, and she was burned so badly. He said, 'No. No. Not Ellandra. She has an unshakable and an unmovable faith in the Lord whom she loves and serves. She's a wonderful niece. You'll see how wonderful as she walks among us and works with us. I've never seen anyone like her,' he said with tears as he finished telling us. Oh, Charlotte, she radiates Christ. It's beautiful."

Charlotte felt weak. The color drained from her face. "Thanks for telling me, Ramon," she said. "I'm a farce. A real farce. I'm a good professor; but to . . . say . . . that I live like you said the boss says his niece lives, I can't say this truthfully, Ramon. No, I can't say this. I've been putting all the emphasis on my facial beauty -- the outward beauty -- and my heart has been neglected woefully. Excuse me, please, I want to see Ellandra. I have some serious settling up to do and many amends to make," and Charlotte hurried away in search of the month-old new girl; the noble young woman with the inner beauty and the shining face.