

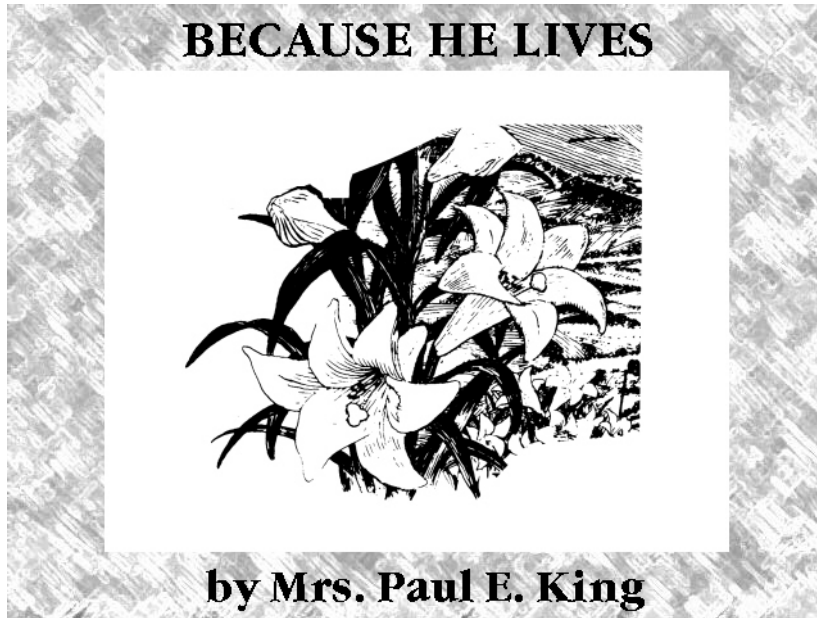
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BECAUSE HE LIVES
By Mrs. Paul E. King

For a moment Marilyn wondered where she was and whether it was the alarm clock that had awakened her or just what had awakened her. Then, with a sudden start, she sat bolt upright in bed as the loud and persistent ringing of the telephone penetrated through her tired and dazed mind. In another moment she was out of bed and running down the hallway to answer the phone.

"Hello," she cried breathlessly into the mouthpiece. "Marilyn Crowell speaking."

"Marilyn, this is Sandra Hoff from the ICU. . . ."

"Yes? Is he worse? I mean. . . ."

"I know. It's been less than two hours since you left the hospital," Mrs. Hoff was saying softly. "But you need to get over here as fast as you can."

"Is . . . is Daddy worse?" Marilyn felt her body go limp as she asked the question.

"Come over as quickly as you can." Mrs. Hoff's voice sounded urgent. "He's taken a turn for the worse. He's very low"

"Thank you, Mrs. Hoff." Marilyn waited to hear no more. Placing the receiver back into place, she dashed into the bathroom for a quick shower before once again getting into her clothes, then hurrying toward the hospital.

Driving along the familiar stretch of highway, Marilyn felt numb; mechanical, even. For three weeks she had spent almost every hour at the hospital with her father. Last night had been the first night she went to bed in all those weeks, and then only at the insistence of the nurses and doctors who told her that her father's vital signs were stable and looked good, and that they would get in touch with her should there be a change. And now. . . .

She checked the car's speedometer to make sure she was driving the speed limit but not exceeding it, then she put it on cruise control and allowed her thoughts to go back across the events of the past four years since her mother's death and sudden homegoing.

Her father and mother had been so happy and contented together. All her growing up years, it had been this way. One by one the nest was emptied and the children left home to pursue careers of their own.

Thad was the oldest and the first to leave. The parents smiled and wept and praised God simultaneously and joyously as their first-born and his bride of two years, with their newborn son, left for the foreign land to work as a

doctor-nurse team in a primitive hospital among a primitive and sometimes-hostile people.

Next it was Matthew and his bride. They too went abroad. Matthew was making a career in the Air Force. She alone, of the three children, remained at home, studying, and finally becoming a full-fledged teacher and loving every minute of it; especially so since having become a teacher for a bunch of active but courteous and polite fourth-graders in a Christian Day School.

So many things had happened since her mother took her flight to God's Eternal City. First, there was her father, whose sun seemed to have set with the passing of his wife of fifty-eight years. She, Marilyn, had had to finally give up the apartment in which she was living and move back to the dear home place to be near her physically weakening father. It meant farther driving to the school for her, but she did it willingly and gladly: she had ever and always honored her parents and loved them deeply and dearly.

His condition had worsened with each successive year and, finally, his heart had weakened and he was rushed to the hospital where he had been placed in ICU immediately. And she had remained in the waiting room just around the corner from where he was placed, for three weeks, dozing and nodding, praying and crying, and leaving only long enough to dash home for a quick shower and an equally quick change of clothing every few days. She felt she dare not leave him long, like her presence with him -- the few minutes each hour -- would give him the will and the courage to fight to live.

Looking back now, however, she realized that his will to live had died when her mother had died. Tears filled her eyes with the revelation. He had been resigned to God's will for him for so long as she could remember; and she was sure that even in the death of his beloved companion, he had been resigned. Still, it seemed he had no desire to live after her mother had passed away. Their lives were so very much intertwined; beautifully so. Lovingly and trustingly so.

Marilyn's thoughts wandered for a while from her father to Glenn Fetters. Glenn and she had dated for over a year. He had even wanted to marry her. She had consented to become his bride under the condition that she be allowed to look after and care for her father until it would no longer be necessary to do so. Glenn had insisted upon putting him in a nursing care center, a thing totally inconceivable and unthinkable to her.

She had told him, kindly, that she would never even so much as think of doing a thing like that, not ever, unless she couldn't possibly give him the care he needed. Glenn had told her to forget about his proposal for marriage, stating that he had no intentions whatever to help care for an old, senile man.

Marilyn realized again, as she had done numerous other times, how kind and good and gracious the Lord had been to her to allow the discussion to come up. Through it, she saw a side of Glenn which she hadn't seen previously. It was a selfish side; exceedingly selfish. Her marriage to him would never have been like her father's and mother's had been: neither had ever been selfish with the other, nor with their children or anybody. Always, they were willing and ready to give and do and help, in whatever capacity they were able.

She pulled into the parking lot at the hospital and rushed inside, catching the elevator up just before the automatic door closed silently and noiselessly. Mrs. Hoff saw her as she came through the doors of the ICU and, leaving her place at the nurses' station, she hurried to meet her.

"How . . . is he?" Marilyn asked.

"Come," Sandra Hoff said, placing an arm around Marilyn's shoulders. "He passed away. It was such a peaceful passing. He called out two names before he died; one was Jesus, the other was Esther."

"That was Mother and, of course, we know who Jesus is."

"He raised himself slightly upward as he said their names, then, smiling, he fell back and was gone."

"Daddy! Daddy!" Marilyn cried, seeing the smile that lingered on his dear face. "You're Home now. I will miss you so much," and she buried her face on the pillow and wept.

Sandra Hoff pushed a chair up behind her. "Sit down," she said gently. "You must be exhausted. Stay for a while, if you care to, even though he is no longer here."

Marilyn raised her tear-filled eyes to gaze into the face of the kind supervisor. "Thank you, Mrs. Hoff," she said softly. "You all have been so kind and good to Father and me. I appreciate it greatly. I will be leaving soon, however, since there is nothing any of us can do for Daddy, and I must try to get in touch with my oldest brother and his wife who are missionaries abroad. Matthew and his wife and two children will be in tomorrow on an afternoon flight, God willing."

"Take your time," Mrs. Hoff said. "Good-byes are generally never easy."

"But this isn't good-bye, Mrs. Hoff; not with Daddy. He was a Christian. Jesus said, 'I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live:

"And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die.'

"Daddy has just now begun to live -- eternally."

"I understand, Marilyn. There is quite a difference in the passing of one who is ready to meet his Maker and the one who is not. Yes, quite a difference," and Mrs. Hoff left the slender woman alone for a while.

Marilyn bent over her father's still form and kissed his cheeks. Then she picked up his hand and stroked it gently, recalling how ready to help his hands always were. "I love you, Daddy," she whispered softly above his pillowed head, "and I'll meet you in the morning."

Kissing him one last time, she pulled the sheet up to his chin and tucked it around him, saying, "Goodnight, Daddy. Goodnight, until the morning." Then she turned and walked over to the busy nurses. "Mother was cared for nicely by Brill and Sons; I want them to bury Father also, please."

"We'll call them immediately," Mrs. Hoff stated, asking quickly, "Shall I have someone take you home? You're exhausted, I'm sure."

"Thank you, Mrs. Hoff. I'll be able to make it, with the Lord's help. And again, thank you for your excellent care of my father and for being so good to both of us. . . ."

The drive home found Marilyn wide awake and feeling strangely rested in spite of much loss of sleep. Dead? Her father? Ah, no. No! He was very much alive and he was well.

"Thank You, Lord," she said softly. And the words of Jesus rushed back to her with healing balm for her soul, "I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live."