

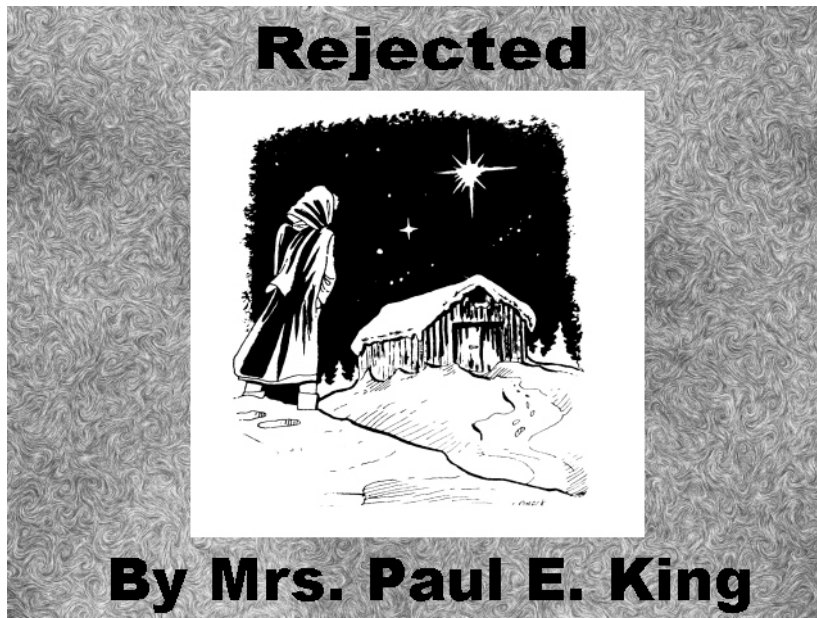
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REJECTED
By Mrs. Paul E. King

The wind moaned from the eaves of the house then tore around its gabled roof like a wild beast, whistling shrilly as it whipped around the corners and chased the heavy snowfall in all directions. It was a wild night, Betty Prentiss decided; a wild night indeed. And she was alone.

She walked to the southeast kitchen window and peered into the darkness. A few stars were shining, she noticed, feeling her spirit lift a mite. At least the storm was over. And what a storm it was!

She looked at the world beyond her windows in wonder and amazement. It was a world of white. Stark white. Never in all her life had she seen so much snow. It seemed to have covered every single bush and shrub around the house. And now, with the wind tearing around like a wild thing, whipping the snow in swirls and marshmallow mounds, well, by morning light who knew what to expect?

She turned from the window and walked slowly through the kitchen into the living room and sat down in the rocking chair and closed her eyes, thankful beyond words that she had kept oil in the three kerosene lamps at all times, both winter and summer. She had known how a summer storm or a winter's blizzard could cause power outages which lasted sometimes for days. But thankfully, this time there had been no power failure.

The log in the fireplace grate glowed red-orange with heat, crackling every now and then as flames shot upward then settled down like a tired child and burned more evenly and steadily again. Betty watched the log as it was being slowly but surely consumed by the flames, relishing the feeling of both the warmth and the coziness which it brought into the room. If only. . . .

She shook her head violently and brushed a hand across her eyes, trying desperately to push every painful and bitter thought out of her mind completely. And forever. It worked -- but only for a little while. Try as she may, the events of the past few months refused to remain outside. Just when she thought, or felt, she was climbing out on top of everything that happened, it all came rushing back to her. Like a mountainous tidal wave it rushed in, seeming to crush her and to suffocate her.

She felt tears start. It surprised her, the tears: she thought she had shed them all when Ed left her so abruptly, and then Bob, shortly after. Poor Bob. Where was he? she wondered, longing to hear from him; to know that he was safe and that he had enough to eat. He couldn't understand her; thought she should have divorced his father. But Ed was her husband, Bob's father. She had vowed to love, honor, and obey him "until death do us part." One didn't just up and end a relationship with an injunction like that. No

indeed! And whether Bob understood her or not, Ed was still her husband, even though he had forsaken her for another.

Tears coursed freely down Betty's cheeks now. It was as if the old wound had been opened wide again, so keenly and deeply did she feel the pain of it all. She had trusted Ed so implicitly; much like a child trusts his parent. She had believed him when he told her he was working late, those nights when the midnight hour came and he still wasn't home. Maybe Bob did have reason to get upset with her when he asked why his father got home so late and she told him he'd said he had to work late. More than once she had noticed the look of disbelief on her son's face. Did he know things she didn't? she wondered now. He had told her she was too trusting where his father was concerned.

The wind moaned as it swept down the chimney and with a start Betty remembered the cow and the few sheep out in the little barn-shed. She must care for them, now that the snow had stopped falling and the blinding part of the blizzard had blown itself out. In the blizzard, she'd never have found the barn, she knew, and she'd have frozen to death had she ventured out in it. Visibility was nil! Absolutely and positively, nil.

Hurrying to the closet off the kitchen, she slipped into boots and a heavy coat. Then she wrapped a warm wool scarf about her head and neck and pulled on the fur-lined gloves. Stepping quickly outside, she started for the barn, walking as rapidly as the drifts of snow allowed her to walk. It was tedious and tiring, since the mounds of snow were still not solidly crusted over and with each step she took she plunged into the huge drifts.

She snuggled her chin more deeply into the warm folds of the scarf. The bitter-cold wind pounded her chest and "hammered" her face with its icy fists, almost knocking her over. She plodded on, more slowly now, since the drifts were higher and the wind stronger and more fierce the farther she moved away from the wind break of trees that surrounded the house and lawn solidly on three sides.

She knew the sheep and the cow must be hungry -- very hungry -- but she was happy in knowing that they were warm. The little barn-shed was well built, and even on the coldest nights it was cozy and warm for the animals.

They must have heard her coming, for as she neared the building she heard Molly's soft "moo," the always welcome greeting she received from the faithful jersey milk cow, now waiting to calve. The sheep were bleating hungrily and Betty's love and concern for the animals so overwhelmed her until her own grief and sorrow was forgotten in the thought of being needed and caring for the helpless creatures inside the barn.

"I'm coming," she called softly and cheerfully as she let herself inside the warm barn and turned on the light.

The six sheep crowded to the edge of their pen, each vying for a pat on the head or a stroke on the nose. It was a beautiful sight, Betty thought, as she patted heads and stroked heavy coats of fur. Then she hurried to Molly and, throwing her arms around her neck, she cried out, "Oh, Molly! Molly! What a beautiful little girl you gave me. But aren't you smart, surprising me this way! Guess the blizzard helped to hurry things along. My, my, this is a surprise. A real gift."

Tears filled Betty's eyes. For once, they were tears of joy. It was almost like the Lord had sent Molly's calf along early (or maybe she, Betty, was mistaken as to the date of the birth) as a "rainbow" of brighter things to come.

She hurried to the big grain barrels and began filling buckets with the sweet-smelling nutritious mixture and dumping it into troughs. Then she filled the water containers with fresh water from the inside spigot. It was while she was dividing a bale of tender and fragrantly-sweet alfalfa hay that Betty noticed Blackie in a corner by himself. Her heart reached out to the little sheep in such love and pity that she hurried into the pen and wrapped her arms around its neck.

"Oh, Blackie!" she cried as she buried her face in the soft, wooly neck. "I know how you feel. Yes, I really and truly know. I understand, Blackie; and I love you all the more, now that I understand. You were rejected by your mother; a good mama, but not so good where you are concerned. It hurts to be rejected; I know it too, Blackie. And oh, I love you! I do. I do. I hurt too, Blackie: Ed 'rejected' me for someone else. . . ."

The lamb nuzzled Betty's face and snuggled its head into the crook of her arm, bleating softly as it did so. Betty remembered how she had nearly lost the pretty little lamb, whose mother refused to let it nurse and would have

nothing whatever to do with it after giving birth to it. She had taken it into the house and bottle-fed it -- day and night -- until it was strong enough to be put back into the pen and feed itself.

"Oh, Blackie, I love you," Betty said again. "And now you better get busy and eat. And drink some of that good fresh water too. Here," she said, grabbing one of the buckets and heading to the grain barrel with Blackie at her heels.

The frisky black lamb ate hungrily as Betty held the bucket with grain at a proper angle.

"You're spoiled, do you know that?" she asked, as she stroked its head and back. "It's all my fault, I must admit. But you're spoiled, and I guess I kinda' like it."

Betty left Blackie to go check on Molly and her calf. "Molly! Molly!" she exclaimed again, as her calf nursed and stood strong and solidly on her four little legs. "You're quite a mother. A good mother. And I think I'll name your little girl Dolly, for she's beautiful, and she looks enough like her mother to be called Molly II, only that would be too confusing. So I shall call your baby Dolly."

Betty hugged Molly's neck and stroked her soft, shiny back for a long while, then she cleaned out the pens of both the cow and the sheep and spread down a thick layer of fresh, clean, dry straw. How good it felt in the barn and how sweet smelling the straw and alfalfa hay were.

She sat on a bale of hay and listened to the softly-soothing sounds of the animals as they ate hungrily. The storm had deprived them of three meals. Oh, there was always hay aplenty. She saw to this whenever there was a warning of a winter storm. But the grain -- Ah, yes, the grain! How they loved the grain.

Betty watched as the little black sheep finished his grain then ran quickly into the pen for a drink of water. Then, kicking his hind legs into the air, he frolicked through the partially opened pen gate out to where she sat and ran across the barn floor from one end to the other, over and over again and again, kicking the little legs high into the air in joyful and playful glee.

Betty laughed as she watched the little fellow gamboling and cavorting like she'd seen the lambs do on the green hillside on a softly-warm, sunny day in early spring. He came full speed toward where she sat, then stopped so abruptly that he nearly fell over with the sudden stop. Then, shaking himself, he lay down at her feet. She stooped down and stroked him and soon he was asleep, his nose resting on the toe of her boot.

Betty watched the little fellow for a long while, recalling again his rejection by his mother. And that had been the first and only time that Miss Nan had ever behaved in such a manner. Every other time, she had been an excellent mother. What caused the rejection-behavior in the ewe was still as much an unanswered thing as it had ever been. It had been a sad thing to watch Blackie try to nurse or even get close enough to his mother to touch her -- nuzzle her -- only to be butted and totally ignored.

Watching the sleeping lamb now, Betty's thoughts raced quickly to Another who was rejected. Isaiah 53 stated it graphically when he wrote,

"He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

"Surely he has borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted.

"But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed."

"With his stripes I am healed!" Betty cried aloud, as she buried her face in her hands and allowed the full impact and meaning of the verses to wash over her soul. He knew the pain and the agony and the hurt of rejection too. Ah, yes, He knew. He knew how it could torment one, too. Yet through it all He could still pray, "Father, forgive them; they know not what they do."

Betty prayed. How she prayed! Above all else, she wanted to shine for Jesus in and through her fiery trial. What really mattered was how one's anchor held in the midst of the storm, and how he or she acted and/or reacted when the fire was at its hottest point.

She prayed until she prayed clear through on the matter again. Her confidence was not in her own strength but was in the One who was tested -- tempted -- in all points like as she was: He came through victoriously triumphant. Through Him she could do the same. Yes, through Christ she would triumph and come forth more than a conqueror!

Turning both her husband and her hurting, grieving son completely over into God's hands, she got to her feet. Lifting the lovable little lamb up in her arms and snuggling her face into his soft, wooly neck, she placed him gently inside the pen and secured the gate. Then, hugging Molly's neck and stroking little Dolly's back, she bade her "friends" goodnight ere she turned off the light and stepped out into the bitter cold night.

Stars were shining brightly between breaks in the darkly-scudding, windy clouds; one above all others seemed to pierce the night with its brightness and its brilliance. And suddenly Betty remembered that it was almost Christmas time. Christ was born in a stable: in a manger. He had come, and with His coming there was hope and salvation for every man, woman, boy and girl of Adam's race: this included Ed and Bob.

Knowing that God was on her side, she felt that the Lord was helping her, indeed, to cast her burden upon Him and to leave it there!