

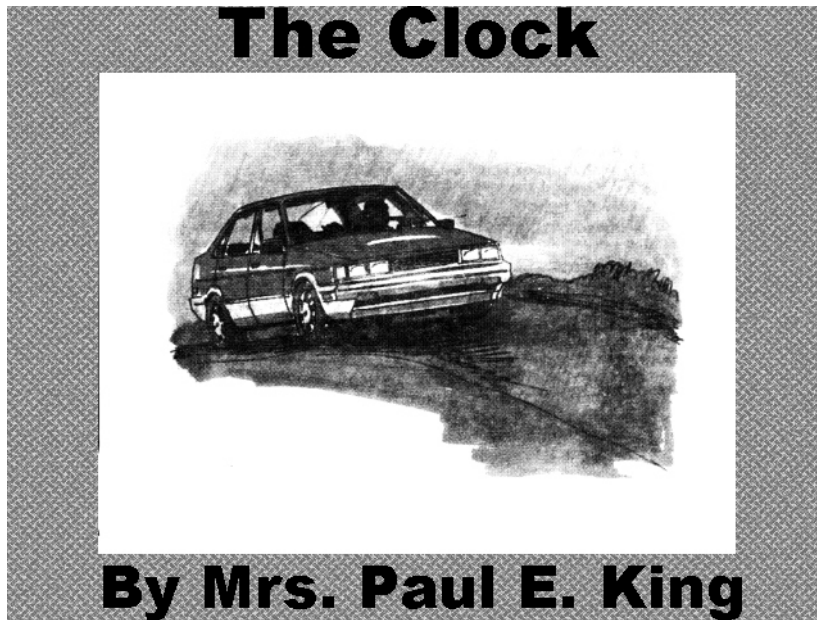
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THE CLOCK
By Mrs. Paul E. King

Patrick brought the car to an abrupt stop in front of the gate at the home place and sat for a while looking at the many familiar sights before getting out of the shiny-new, bright red sports car. A prick of remorse stung his conscience over the neglect of his mother and his unconcern about visiting her. He could have dropped in and brightened her life by his visit at least once every week, he realized suddenly, but, instead, he had allowed

months to go by without so much as even writing to her or calling her on the phone. He was a busy man, it was true; but he could have made time for a weekly visit, or more, had he given her the honor and respect due her, he realized with a fresh stab to his conscience. A hundred miles was no great distance; not with the excellent interstate that connected him and his city to the old home place.

The ancient oak caught his attention and he sat staring at the lovely tree. For all the years of his life, the tree was there, standing stout and tall and spreading its branches wondrously over the back part of the lawn. His father had helped him build a tree house high in its branches and the two of them had slept out in the house a night or two every summer while he was growing up. How wonderful those nights were: it was like his father and he were alone on an island with no one to interrupt or disturb the solitude of those priceless hours.

Memories of those special nights sneaked out of the corners of his mind now as he stared at the tree in whose lofty branches he had spent such happy and carefree hours. Golden hours, his father had said they were, as they sat and read by the light of a kerosene lantern or just talked and laughed until they crawled into the sleeping bag and fell asleep to the lovely sounds of the night while a silver moon peeked in on them as they slept. Never had he seemed closer to his father than at those times when they were alone in the rustic tree house at night. It was with perfect ease that he bared his thoughts and opened his heart to the man whose wisdom and knowledge he felt were somehow akin to God's. It was during one of those "golden hours" nights that he had expressed to his father the empty feeling in his heart and his parent had helped him to pray until the dear Savior had forgiven him of all his sins and he was born again, of God. He was sure he had never slept better than that night: he knew he was ready to meet God.

Patrick shook himself and slid out of the car, chiding himself for mentally dwelling so long on what was past; for the "had been" times of his life. Before leaving his Town House Apartment, he had resolved to take care of the business at hand when he arrived home and not to allow the years of the past to haunt him nor take possession of his mind; but already he had broken the resolve and disregarded what he had planned to do and what not to do. He was a full grown man now with a law firm of his own. It was time that he put away forever those childish times and things of the past. It had been a good time, the years spent with his deeply religious parents and his

twin, Patricia. Yes, they had been good and great and wonderful years. But so had his college years been, also. True, he had changed during those long, hard years of intense study and preparation for the bar examination; but to achieve one's goal in life, change was often necessary. In his case, he had deemed it an absolute necessity if he were to succeed and make it to the top of the ladder. He was there, to be sure. The taste of success was sweet. He savored it with pride.

"Patrick! Patrick!" Patty was out of the car and encircling his neck with her arms before he had time to protest. He had been too deep in thought to hear her car announce her arrival.

"Oh, Patrick, it's wonderful to see you! How are you? It's been ages since I saw you. I miss you."

Patrick stiffened. He tried to untangle his sister's arms from around his neck. He had forgotten how bubbly and loving Patty had always been.

"Hey, we're not children any more," he said rather tartly. "Be sensible, Patty, and cut out the fussing over me. I'm not used to such . . . such effusiveness."

"Then it's time I reintroduced you to our original way of living and our wonderfully delightful and loving upbringing. Unwind, Patrick, and be yourself again."

"I am myself. Now, no more fussing over me. I'm not used to being fussed over."

"Better get used to it, Patrick; for so long as you're here, I mean to 'fuss' over you. I haven't seen you in ever so long, and I'm not about to let you freeze me out of your life the way you froze dear Mother out of yours. Shame, shame on you. When anyone feels he's too high and mighty for his humble mother, that man's about ready for a fall. Yes indeed, a mighty fall. God's going to bring you down, Pat. He is. It may be sooner than you think."

"You know I don't believe in God anymore!" Patrick stormed as the color rose in his cheeks.

"Oh yes, you do. You just think you don't. He's going to make you aware of Him one of these days, see if He doesn't. It may be a humiliating awareness, but you're going to know that He's still God. This is a promise, my dear twin."

"Cut the nonsense, Patty. I came here to get things settled, not to discuss God. I can't stay long; I have an extremely important case coming up in less than a week. If I win the case for my client, it will be the crowning achievement of my practice thus far. I'm riding the top as it is. . . ."

"I pray you're being a man of principle and honesty and integrity and uprightness, Patrick, like our father. And like we were taught from the Word of God that we are to be."

"What I do is my business; how I handle the case is my affair." His response had a razor-sharp edge to it.

"And God's to judge; to put His approval or disapproval upon, Patrick. Keep this in mind, dear. Now come, let's go inside. I have the key."

It was cool as they stepped inside the door of the living room. Rays from the sun spread what looked like a path of shining gold from the one window into the dining room.

"Our path of shining gold. Remember?" Patty said as she noticed the shimmering brilliance that stretched from the living room window into the dining room. "I always felt that God was giving us a little glimpse into what Heaven's going to be like whenever I saw this."

"You're a sentimentalist. When are you going to grow up and put away these childish things?"

"Never, Patrick. Never. I want to remember some things for as long as I live. Little things like this have kept me aware of Heaven and how beautiful it's going to be when I get there and can see it for myself and live with Jesus forever. It is things such as this that make life's trials and its burdens seem as nothing; when I remember, I mean."

"Let's get down to business now, Patty; I have more pressing things to do within a couple of days. The things I want are few: the bulk of what's here is yours, if you want it."

"Oh no, Patrick; the will states that the furnishings are to be divided equally."

"Look, Patty, I live in a posh and very elegant Town House. It's furnished with elegant things. Elegant, I said."

"In other words, these humble furnishings wouldn't fit in."

"If you want to put it that way, no, they wouldn't. Dad's desk and his leather chair will look fine in one of my offices. But I want little else. Actually, I have no need of anything."

"The clock, Patrick; what about the clock? You built it for Mother," and Patty hurried over to the stately grandfather clock and wound it by carefully adjusting its weights after having set its hands to the proper time of day.

"Mother loved this clock better than anything," Patty continued, as she sat down in a nearby overstuffed chair. "Remember how she always dreamed of having a grandfather clock, Patrick? Daddy's earnings never allowed for such an expensive thing. Still Mother hoped on, and dreamed. I remember how relaxed and happy she seemed when she'd hear the Westminster chimes in the furniture department of Knisely's Store. I always knew where to look for her if we got separated in that store. There she was, sitting in one of the rocking chairs, watching the pendulums of those many stately, regal and elegant clocks swinging slowly back and forth listening to their beautiful Westminster chimes musically proclaiming what time of day it was."

Getting to her feet, Patty hurried to the clock and ran her hands gently and caressingly over the satin smooth wood as tears came to her eyes. "Mother really loved you!" she cried. "Oh how she loved you! She was so proud of you, Patrick."

Taken off guard, Patrick stared at his sister. How utterly and completely sentimental she was!

Still stroking the wood, Patty said, "You made a lifelong dream come true when you gave her this clock. It meant ever so much to her. Especially since you built it for her: and you still had the victory in your soul and the smile of God's approval upon your life. How old were you, Patrick; nineteen maybe? I know you hadn't left for college yet."

"Why all the fuss over a clock, Patty? Won't you ever learn to grow up and put away all this . . . this childish sentimentality and . . . and nonsense?"

Ignoring the sarcasm in his voice, Patty added, "After you changed so radically and drastically, Patrick, Mother told me that she prayed for you every time she heard these beautiful chimes strike the hour. So I guess I could say that while Mother lived, you were prayed for all day long and into the nights, too, when sleep eluded her, which was often, as she got older. I sometimes wonder if this clock -- the one you built with your very own hands -- won't rise up in judgment against you, Pat, seeing how Mother used it to intercede for you and your precious lost soul."

"That's nonsense. Pure nonsense!" he retorted hotly. "Is it, Patrick? Be careful what you say: the prayer of a saint is of great value. Revelation 5:8 and 8:3 speaks about the prayers of the saints, and James tells us that the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous person avails much. Mother's many prayers for you and over you, are all reserved in golden vials in Heaven. Your eternity could well be determined in and by this clock, Patrick. By this I mean that how you act upon or fail to act upon Mother's many, many prayers that were prayed for you every time she heard the clock strike the hour, could well determine where you will spend your long eternity -- Heaven or hell. Oh Pat, don't go to hell. Please:"

"Look, Patty, I came here for one purpose only. I'm different, yes. Changed, yes. I want nothing but what I stated and mentioned earlier; the desk and the chair. I'll send for it soon. I didn't come here to be preached to. Have a nice day and, by all means, enjoy the clock. Yes, by all means, enjoy the clock!" With long, quick strides, Patrick fled from the house as the clock was striking twelve.

He was glad to get away; glad, too, that the new little red beauty of a car had get-up-and-go; lots of get-up-and-go power. Pressing his foot hard on the accelerator, the car leaped into action and speed. Racing down the road like a mad man, the clock's chimes all the while seeming to shout

"Eternity! Eternity!" in his ears, Patrick sped away; down the road that led to and connected with the interstate that would take him back to his posh, grand, elaborate and elegant Town House. Back to where he could forget about his "had been" years and days. Back to where his twin's tears and pleading eyes could soon be erased and forgotten by losing himself in the details of the upcoming biggest case of all.

Eternity! Eternity! Eternity! The word haunted him. Tormented him. Questioned him.

Like one blinded by too much light or too great a light, Patrick approached the ramp to the interstate. The little car seemed to be racing -- flying -- as it left the ramp and leaped onto the interstate into the path of an eighteen-wheeler. It was demolished completely. The driver, screaming wildly, "Eternity: Lost: Lost:" was wrapped in flames as the car's gas tank exploded.

"There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death" Proverbs 14:12.