

Copyright 2001 By Lucille King
All Rights Reserved and Duplication
Of This Publication Is Forbidden,
Except For Personal Use

* * * * *

Digital Edition 10/22/2001
By Holiness Data Ministry

* * * * *

The Sunday School Beacon
April 12, 1998



EASTER MEANS NEW LIFE
By Mrs. Paul E. King

Shirley slid the au-gratin potatoes into the oven alongside of the roast which she had put in earlier. She closed the door quietly, making sure that nothing disturbed her sleeping father who worked the split-shift at the auto plant on the east side of town.

She glanced through the window above the sink to the vacant lot at the extreme rear end of her father's yard. Her brothers were the noisiest on the block, she was sure, and it bothered her. How could they be so frivolous and light-hearted? she wondered suddenly as unbidden tears washed her cheeks.

At 19, it seemed as if her life had come to an abrupt end; a very decided halt. Mother had been the foundation stone of the home and now that she had left them -- after her extended terminal illness -- it was as if the light had gone out of her life.

She turned away quickly from the window after making sure that Joe, age 11, and Jack, 12 $\frac{1}{2}$, were all right and not hurt at all as their shouts had intimated to her. She prepared the cooked minute fudge frosting for the chocolate cake she had baked from scratch and which stood nearby on the counter top.

Poor Daddy! How very lonely he must feel too, she thought, stirring the bubbling, fragrantly-sweet, creamy chocolate frosting until it was finished. If any two people on earth were in love with each other and close to each other, it was her father and mother. How very secure Jack, Joe and she had been in that love. But now what?

After dropping chopped walnuts into the frosting, Shirley poured it over the still-warm cake; then she set the table, adding a bouquet of freshly-cut daffodils from her mother's flower garden in the hope of driving the gloom and pall of sadness away. She must do her best to do and keep things as nearly like her mother as possible, she thought with a catch inside her throat. For her father's sake, especially. Mother had always tried to have either a lovely centerpiece or fragrant flowers on the table for the evening meal.

At thought of her father, Shirley glanced at the clock. Its hands told her that it was time for him to get up. By the time he showered and shaved, then had his devotions, her supper would be ready to put on the table.

She hurried down the hallway and called his name softly, making sure that he was awake before she left his bedroom door to answer the doorbell. It was the pastor.

"I know this is a bad time to come calling," Rev. Thornton apologized, stepping inside the door at Shirley's bidding. "But, knowing that your father would still be home, I decided it would be the most appropriate time also."

"Oh, I'm so glad you've come. Please don't apologize," Shirley said quickly, leading the way to the living room. "Have a seat, Brother Thornton. I just now called Daddy to get up. . . ."

"I can't stay long," the minister said. "My wife and family will be expecting me home for supper. But I wanted your father and you and the boys to know that we have been praying for you in this time of sorrow and grief."

A sob tore Shirley's slender frame. "Nothing will ever be the same again!" she stammered brokenly. "Nothing! What is a home without a mother? It's a shell. An empty, aching, memory-filled shell. I . . . I feel like . . . like I'm in a . . . a vacuum since . . . Mother died, Brother Thornton."

Clearing his throat and brushing the tears from his eyes, the minister said kindly, "Your mother is very much alive, Shirley. What's more, she's free from pain and suffering, and you will see her again if you remain true and faithful to Christ and hold fast the profession of your faith without wavering."

"But I long so desperately to hear her sweet voice again and to feel the touch of her dear hand laid on my head in family worship. Oh, what will we do without her?" the young woman cried in anguish of soul. . . .

Clearing his throat, Brother Thornton said consolingly, "We are now in what we call the Easter season. Easter stands for the consummation of our faith. The moment your mother shed her mortal body to put on immortality she just began to live.

"The whole creation bears witness to the fact that life cannot die. The bulbs you and your mother planted last fall, the grass your father sowed on his lawn, and yes, even the trees with their shriveled, withered leaves spring to life again when they feel the touch of the warm sunshine and the gentle spring rains. Christ's main objective in the crucifixion and the resurrection was that all the 'faithful' might have life. And today, Shirley, your godly mother lives because of the glorious resurrection of Jesus Christ."

"Oh, I know this, Brother Thornton, and my heart rejoices in the knowledge that I shall see her again. But it's this loneliness, this empty house and. . . ."

"I know what you're experiencing, child," the pastor replied. "I, too, lost a mother . . . the dearest in all the world, so far as all of us children were concerned.

But it helped me immensely to stay busy. In fact, this was my antidote for the loneliness I experienced in Mother's passing."

Shirley wiped tears from her eyes as her pastor continued.

"I realize your hands are 'full,' as the saying goes," he said kindly; "extremely full, now that you have full responsibility of the home. Mrs. Thornton and I are proud of you and your wonderful homemaking ability. You are just like your mother -- an excellent housekeeper. And by the smell of that chocolate cake you're an equally excellent baker-cook also. However, I was wondering if you'd be able to teach Mrs. Patterson's class of ten-year-old boys on Sunday morning? Her eyesight's becoming more and more of a problem to her. She called me this week to tell me . . . tearfully and reluctantly . . . that she'd have to give up the class due to this physical disability. You could find time through the week to study and prepare, could you not?"

Straightening her sagging shoulders, Shirley said, "Oh, I'd make time, Brother Thornton. God's cause must never, never suffer because of people's unwillingness to do or to be. Then, too, I have two noisy but wonderful and highly impressionable brothers of my own, and dear old Sister Patterson helped them so much when they were in her class that I feel I owe this to others of that age."

A smile creased the pastor's face. "Good. Very good!" he exclaimed, much pleased. "The Sunday school superintendent and I shall be praying for you, Shirley. I was sure you wouldn't fail us. Now, another thing: I'm in need of a Junior supervisor for the Junior services on Sunday evening prior to the preaching service. Sister and Brother Prestler's moving has left quite a vacancy there. . . ."

Shirley's hand flew to her throat. "Do . . . you think I could . . . well, I mean . . . that's quite a big responsibility, Brother Thornton!"

"And I'm sure you could handle it, Shirley. You see I have prayed much over this and each time the Lord brings you to my mind. It would mean preparing a weekly flannelgraph or object lesson. But you've helped your mother enough in DVBS, and you have always come up with such timely and spiritual object lessons there that I felt God was pointing you out to me as the very individual He had chosen for this position. I realize that the Martha in you must continue being the tidy and neat housekeeper here, but I also hoped that the Mary in you would fit these important roles into your already crowded schedule."

Shirley's eyes became misty. The Mary in her! Reverend Thornton had said, "that better part."

"I . . . I feel greatly humbled," she said, half-whispering, "and I hardly know what to say. But if the Lord showed you, then I shall attempt to do as you suggest, Pastor; I'll take it and believe God to help me. As for the flannelgraph or object lesson work, I'll manage these while Joe and Jack are at school, the Lord willing. Better still, I'll enlist their help after school. They're quite artistic, and it would thrill them no end to help create my flannelgraph characters and inanimate objects. It would give them a feeling of usefulness, too, and of doing something worthwhile for the Lord, not to mention the fact that it would keep them busy and occupied."

The minister smiled broadly and warmly "Thanks, Shirley," he commented. "You have just taken a heavy burden off my heart by accepting and filling these vacancies. I'm sure your mother would be proud of you. She was always so active for the Lord before her illness rendered her otherwise. But I must be leaving Give your father my warmest regards. I presume he's catching those proverbial 'five extra winks' of sleep. . . ."

"I'm wide awake," Mr. Prouse said, coming down the hallway to the living room and grasping his pastor's hand in a warm, firm grip. "I'm so glad you came," he added hoarsely, brokenly. "Shirley and I've needed your visit. Both of us have made a noble attempt at keeping the other's spirits buoyed up. Oh, we've never said it in so many words, but the hidden, unspoken message has been there all the time . . . each suppressing his-her tears and sorrow and maintaining a superficially happy facade so as to ease and

lighten the other's hurt and feeling of great loss. Yes, I'm glad you came. A pastor's love and understanding is most comforting at a time like this"

For a time the two men wept on each other's shoulders; then Brother Thornton said kindly, "It's a real privilege and joy to serve my 'sheep' in this capacity, Brother Prouse. And while I came mainly to have prayer with you folks, I had another purpose in mind also. Another reason . . . you'll soon be off this splitshift, right?"

"In three more weeks, the Lord willing."

"I have a job for you, Brother Prouse. I want you to fill that empty Sunday school room in our church with seven and eight-year-old boys, and then teach them on Sunday mornings. I have never enjoyed seeing an empty classroom. Presently, we have only two seven-year-old boys coming to church on Sunday morning and they go into the room with the four and five-year-olds, which is already much overcrowded. Think it over, then give me your answer as quickly as possible"

"Anything for God's cause deserves immediate response, I feel, Brother Thornton: my answer is yes," William Prouse replied. "For a long time the boys and girls in the neighborhood have lain heavily upon my heart I've been planning on visiting in the homes of the boys who play with my sons, but so many things hindered the fruition of my plans Now, by God's grace, I'll make it a matter of business -- the King's business! I'll begin calling this week yet, the Lord willing"

"And God will go before you, Brother Prouse. He will prosper your labors. See if He doesn't! Now, one more favor from you, Shirley. As you know, Mrs. Hawthorn's a very lonely old widow If you'd drop in to see her once or more each week, I know she'd be very happy. She's not able to write her children anymore, and I happen to know they long to hear from her. But her cataracts. . . ."

"I see what you mean!" Shirley exclaimed, brightening up. "Oh, why didn't I think of going over and helping her without having to be told. Shame on me!" she chided herself. "That dear, lonely woman . . . how could I have neglected her? Oh, Brother Thornton, there are so many nice things I'll be able to do for her . . . cleaning, washing and ironing and. . . ."

"I knew I could count on both of you!" the pastor said softly, interrupting the girl. "Now I'll have prayer, then I must be going. Mrs. Thornton's supper must never grow cold and unappetizing because of a negligent and careless husband. . . ."

Standing in the doorway and waving good-bye to her pastor, Shirley's heart felt light and happy with a new kind of happiness. The Lord had not forgotten her father and herself in their hour of deep sorrow, heartache and grief; He had filled her heart with the blessed knowledge of His presence and He had given her a field in which to labor as well. No, three fields! And this was only the beginning, she thought joyously, humming softly as she hurried to the kitchen with the phrase "home missionary" fastening itself securely around her young heart.

Driving homeward, the pastor smiled as he thanked the Lord for showing him His will for the Prouses . . . involvement with people, to help them through their valley of sorrow and loneliness.

It was good to be a "shepherd," he thought silently, turning into the parsonage driveway.