

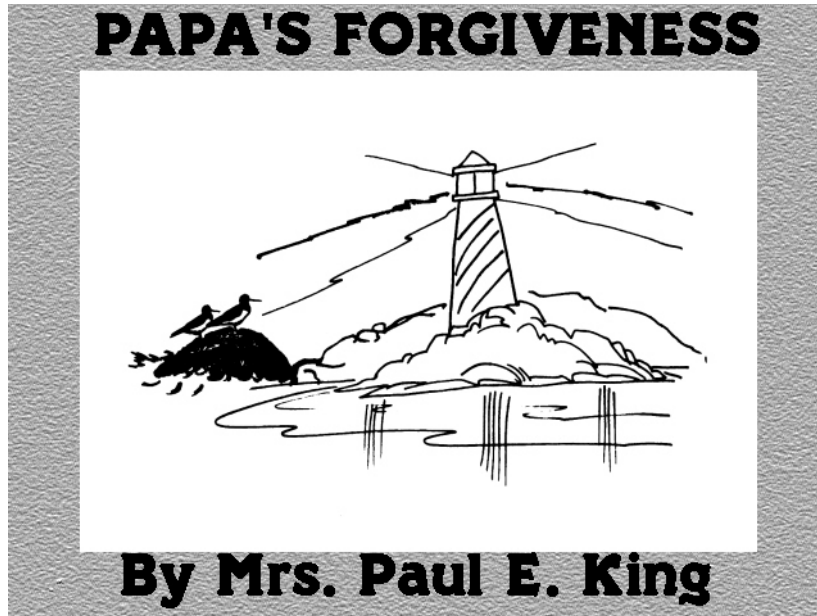
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**PAPA'S FORGIVENESS**  
**By Mrs. Paul E. King**

Fog was rolling in from the bay in great smoky-like billows when I jumped out of bed and glanced through the partially opened window. I jumped up and down for joy and clapped my hands together in sheer delight. I liked the fog . . . very, very much. When it rolled in, like this morning, it made me feel like we lived in a beautiful little world all our own, Papa, Mama, Susann, Sally and me.

Many times, in colder weather and under certain "just right" atmospheric conditions, I had seen the fog roll and rumble and churn across our narrow strip of land in an almost frightening manner, coating, frosting and flocking everything it touched with a thick, soft padding of white, transforming the tall cedars on the hill into something akin to giants -- gleaming, white-garbed sentinels guarding our peninsula. But today the fog promised nothing other than delirious, delicious and gloriously-warm sunshine, hot with June's special kiss and bright and fragrant as the red roses that climbed and bloomed in wild, carefree abandon along the stone wall around Papa's farm.

I shrugged into my shirt and overalls and then hurried downstairs, anxious to get through with breakfast and get outside for my rendezvous with the fog.

"Good morning, Peter," Mama said pleasantly before my bare feet hit the bottom stair landing even. "Did you rest well?" she asked as I rushed to her side and threw my arms around her neck, ready to receive the daily morning kiss she always gave the girls and me.

"Oh, yes, Mama!" I cried happily. "And I dreamed that Sauerkraut and I chased a pretty red fox to his home in the rocks up near the cedar trees."

"Well, well, well!" Mama exclaimed. "And what did Sauerkraut do? Eat the fox?"

"Sauerkraut's not that kind of dog," I commented quickly. "I told him long ago that he must never harm the pretty animals; just chase them for fun."

"And that's what he did in your dream, I suppose -- chased the fox?"

"He did, and he barked terribly loud; it got me awake."

"What a lovely dream," Mama said, putting hot biscuits, bubbly milk gravy and ham and eggs on the table. "Papa and the girls went to town, Peter; so you and I'll have breakfast together," she said. "You are to throw hay down the chute for the horses and clean out their stalls and the stanchions of the cows. Then the rest of the morning is yours. How does that sound?" she asked, patting my chestnut brown hair gently and lovingly.

"Wonderful, Mama. Just wonderful!" I answered quickly, unable to conceal the joy and excitement I felt. An entire morning to mingle and play in and be a part of the fog, I thought, deliriously happy, as I asked the blessing on the food and returned thanks before eating my breakfast (a bit more rapidly than usual). When family devotions were over, I hurried outside.

I stood on the porch with my hand on the balustrade, pretending the porch was my ship and that I was captain of my stately vessel which, like many others at sea, was wrapped in fog. My only safe guide was the instruments along the board in the pretend pilot's house.

The fog horns, blaring raucous warnings loud and clear to ships at sea as well as those in the harbor, brought me quickly back from my world of pretend to the present. I had chores to do, I reminded myself, jumping nimbly down off the porch and shuffling along the path to the barn, pausing for awhile to pat the stout trunk of an ancient oak that grew midway between the house and the barn. The tree was a sort of heirloom landmark, having been planted, Papa said, by my great-great-grandfather when he bought the property which was handed down from one generation to the next.

Lifting my head, I saw the fog swirling and rolling in great misty billows around the limbs of the tree, giving them a grotesque and nebulous-like appearance. Fascinated and intrigued, I stood with my mouth agape, watching until once again I was caught up in a world of pretend and, with the fog I, too, was swirling, swirling, rolling, rolling, higher and higher, into the clouds . . . into a land totally and completely uninhabited by anyone other than Mama, Papa, Susann and me.

It was the blast of the fog horn that roused me once more and brought me back to the world of reality. So, giving the tree trunk one final pat, I hurried along the narrow earth-packed path to the barn.

Frosty and Snowball nickered and neighed a welcome as I entered the door. Going to their stalls, I stroked their velvety-soft noses, crooning quiet "horse talk" in their listening ears before climbing the ladder to the floor overhead and sending the sweet-smelling hay tumbling fragrantly down the chute until I could get no more through the opening. Jumping gleefully on top of the pile, I was soon down with the horses again, hay in my hair and on my

clothing. In no time at all, my chores were finished. The morning was now all mine. O blissful thought!

I stepped gingerly outside and with bated breath, I listened. The fog was speaking to me. (At least I thought it was.) Closing my eyes as it swirled around me, I inhaled and exhaled; great, deep, long breaths they were, my heart "listening" all the while to the utter peace and tranquillity its soft "swish, swish" conveyed to me. If there were problems in the world, they were billions of light years away from Papa's farm, I thought, allowing the beautiful feeling of security and total satisfaction to wash over me like the surf washed the rocks along the edge of Papa's land.

The horses nickered softly again, calling over my shoulder that I couldn't possibly spend the entire morning with them. I walked to Papa's blacksmith shop. It was a shop that stood proudly beneath a mammoth maple tree alongside the road to the east of the corn crib. Papa was a smithy by trade, serving all the farmers in the area for many miles around. The shop had ever been a favorite play spot of mine; the vise, the anvil, and especially the old pump forge held special interest and intrigue for me while the odors from within drew me like a giant magnet into the place.

My heart was beating wildly as I entered the door, and though Papa hadn't had a fire going just yet, I felt that even now I could hear the fan roar and see the dust fly from the pump forge.

On an impulse, I pumped the ancient forge and simultaneously I heard the loud roar of the fan and saw dust flying in all directions. Oh, what fun. What fun! Harder and harder I pumped; faster and faster went the forge and louder and louder was the roar. Dust flew and blew in great billows around me, above me, beside me, settling silently and thickly on top of my chestnut-brown hair and painting great, dark circles around my eyes. Never had the forge worked more beautifully, I thought, ecstatic with joy as I laughed aloud and pumped the harder.

A sudden, single loud crack like that of a gunshot sent chills racing down my spine. The handle was no longer turning; it lay, warm (from my hands) but useless, inside my fisted palm, broken and severed from Papa's much needed forge. Dazed and trembling with fear, I stood as one dumb. Perspiration broke out over my body and tears spilled down my cheeks as I realized that I had disobeyed my father's injunction to never--under any

circumstances-pump the forge. What could I do? I wondered, holding the piece of incriminating evidence in my hand and looking wretchedly at the forge from which I had severed it.

Like all sin when partaken of, the forge was suddenly loathsome to me. Tossing the handle on the floor, as though it had been the accursed thing that made me sin, I fled from the shop to the haymow in the barn to await Papa's return from town and the "fixing" I knew I'd get when he saw the battered work of my disobedience.

"I hate you," I said of the innocent forge. "You made me sin!"

Scarcely were the words uttered than I realized that neither the forge nor its connecting handle was to blame for what had happened; but rather it was I -- my disobedient heart -- that was the culprit.

The revelation was so brilliant and the dagger of conviction and condemnation so sharp that it caused me to drop on my knees like one shot at. Crying to God for mercy and forgiveness, I forgot all about the broken handle and saw nothing other than my lost condition and the intense wickedness of my heart.

I must have prayed for a long time, for when I finally prayed clear through and opened my eyes, Papa was kneeling behind me. Throwing my arms around his dear neck I confessed everything, telling him he could have all the money in the bank on top of the chest of drawers in my room to use as payment for the damage done to the old forge.

Wiping my tears away with his big red handkerchief, Papa's arms drew me close to his manly bosom.

"You have been punished enough, Peter," he said kindly. "So let's forget about the handle. You have learned your lesson well. And since this has brought you to God and since you did not conceal it from me but confessed it, you are freely forgiven, dear son. Yes, freely forgiven. Go in peace and sin no more, and always remember that 'Obedience is better than sacrifice.'"

I hurried from the loft, my feet feeling as if they had wings beneath them and my heart happier and more light and free than it had ever been in all of my natural life.

I blinked when I stepped outside the barn door; the sun had burned the fog away and was shining in all its glory and brilliance. The sea was sparkling, and far to the right the light house was a white needle on the rocky headland. Gus and Joost Borgman were moving a fishing boat down to the water's edge, making a familiarly harsh grating sound against the shingle. Soon they would be aboard and move off from shore, I knew, sensing the exciting buffeting of the waves on the boat.

Suddenly I wanted Gus and Joost to know what had happened inside my heart. They never would come to church, but maybe . . . just maybe. . . .

Running for all I was worth, I hurried along the path to the water's edge. "Gus! Gus!" I called aloud, waving my arms high above my head. "Joost . . . Joost, wait. . . ."

"Yau? Yau?" Joost shouted impatiently in his native tongue, trying to get the motor started.

"I got saved, Joost . . . Gus. Saved!"

"You vat?" Gus asked, cupping a hand to his ear to hear the better.

"Saved, Gus!" I cried happily. "'The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth [me] from all sin.' Believe it, Gus and Joost; it works. You must be born again. It just happened to me. . . ."

"Yau! Yau!" Joost grunted as the motor sputtered and throbbed to life and the two men headed out to deeper waters, the wind and the spray and the swell of the sea taking them in charge.

I watched till their small craft disappeared from sight. Then I hurried home to tell Mama and the girls about my new heart, feeling as light -- or lighter even -- than the sea spray that washed with the waves into shore.

Papa's forgiveness was so like God's, I thought happily. Yes, so very much like God's -- genuine and real -- to never again be remembered against me.

On light feet, I tripped homeward.