

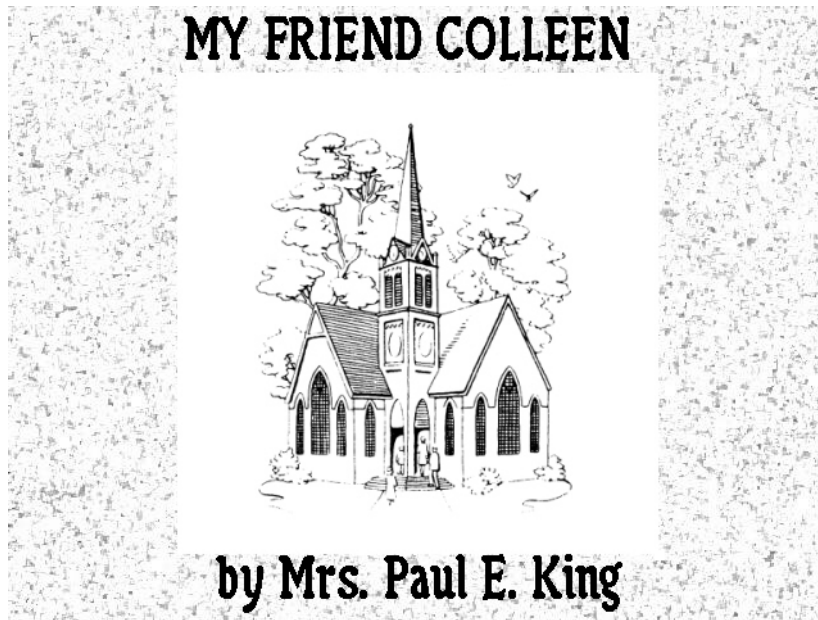
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**MY FRIEND COLLEEN**  
**By Mrs. Paul E. King**

I pushed the last hair pin into the thick mound of honey-blond hair on my head, brushed the loose hair off the shoulders of my black dress and stood in the middle of the bedroom in shocked silence. It still seemed totally unreal and horribly nightmarish to me. I felt numb and cold all over at the mere remembrance of it all.

I walked to the sun-filled window to convince myself that where I was soon to go was not a dream; that I was indeed very much wide awake and that I must face up to the facts and the stark reality of what I had seen and heard and read. It was real! Still, I was numb from shock.

A nameless fear of such propensity and heaviness swept over me as to cause my body to tremble and quiver. Colleen was so young. So pretty. And so full of life and energy. What a zest for living she had! You would have to have known her to understand the depth and the breadth of this exclamatory sentence of mine. About her zest for living, I mean.

She was such a sweet girl. Her two dimples and ever-present smile set her apart from most of the other girls whom I knew in our school. Best of all, Colleen was the rare possessor of a code of old-fashioned ethics and downright beautiful moral standards for daily moment by moment living. It was natural then that, when I entered high school that freshman year, we gravitated to each other at the very beginning of the school year. I was a born-again, sanctified Christian; Colleen was not. It was our set of mutual values that drew us together.

From our earliest friendship, I told Colleen how much I loved the Lord and just what He meant to me and was in my life. She smiled her friendly, winning kind of smile, told me she was happy for me and said she had noticed from the beginning that I was truly different. "Nice-different; good-different." (Her words).

Without being pushy, I told her that morality alone was not enough to get her into Heaven; that Jesus had said, ". . . Except a man be born again, he shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of Heaven." I told her that I wanted her to go to Heaven with me and wanted her to know that she was born again. Again, she smiled. "Megan," she said, quite seriously, "What you have . . . or possess . . . is very beautiful for you, but my parents and I believe a bit differently. Our church teaches us that if we are catechized and live good moral lives we will enter Heaven. This is my belief. You continue to live the way you were taught and I'll continue on in my belief. At the end, we'll both be in Heaven. Okay?"

"That's not what Jesus taught," I said kindly, totally aghast at her doctrinal belief. Putting my hands on her slender shoulders, I said, "Promise me you'll read St. John the third chapter, Colleen." I was crying by now.

With a serious expression on her pretty face, she replied, "I never read the Bible. We believe it's up to the preacher to tell us what to do or what not to do. Our minister has never told us that we had to be born again. So I'll follow his preaching. Not that I don't believe you, Megan. . . ." Seeing the tears and the pain in my eyes, she added hastily, "Your whatever it is, is really very beautiful in you and for you. I love it. For you! It wouldn't be you without it. . . ."

"Him," I added tearfully.

"Okay, Him, then," Colleen conceded softly. "But I'll go the way my parents are going, Megan. We're religious people too."

I tried to tell Colleen that what Jesus declared we must have to get into Heaven was not religion nor some creed or doctrinal belief, but that it was a change of heart, wrought within, by God, through Jesus' shed blood. She remained sweet and kind but firmly unchanged. We remained good friends; best friends, really, but Colleen never changed in her belief that morality and the catechism were the two essentials for an entrance into Heaven.

I fingered the single long-stemmed deep-velvet red rose now. I had removed it from the mammoth spray which lay like a sweetly-scented coverlet over the bottom half of the casket at her viewing. (Was it only last night?) Her mother, looking almost as white as the lilies in a nearby floral arrangement and moving much like a wound up tight mechanized toy, had touched me gently on the shoulder and in a tear-filled voice had said, "Take some flowers, Megan; she would want you to have them."

Throwing my arms around the shaking mother-shoulders, we had wept together. Sobbed, really. Then I removed a single rose as a forever remembrance of my dear, sweet, close friend Colleen and of our once-beautiful friendship. Tears sprang to my eyes now. They blurred and blinded my vision. With trembling hands I put the rose back into the vase on the dresser and sobbed unashamedly. "Colleen! Colleen! Why? Why?" I asked aloud. "Why?" So many memories came to mind then. Good memories. Beautiful memories. Pleasant memories. Until Chip entered the picture. That's when things began to change. Oh what a change! What a change!

"Don't tell my folks, Megan," she had said to me one day. "But I'm dating Chip Trafleer."

"Chip!" I had exclaimed in shocked surprise, almost dropping the books which were cradled in my arm as we walked down the sidewalk side by side toward home. "He . . . he. . ." I began.

"I know. But he's not a heavy drinker." She had defended Chip before I could finish my sentence. "And what's important is that I don't drink. I still have my moral ethics, Megan. Chip was never taught. That's his problem. He's a great guy. He really is. I feel all dizzy and excited when I'm with him."

Seeing that I was stunned and shocked, she added, "Just don't ever tell me he's not going to be good for me, okay Megan? And don't tell my parents. Please!"

I never promised her. In my heart, I knew Chip was not good for my best friend. What's more, I knew that morality and good moral standards were not enough to hold her when the pressure was on. Where Chip was concerned, I mean. She was like putty in Chip's presence. Rather, I should say, in Chip's hands.

Never had I seen a faster downward change in anybody than I saw take place in Colleen's life after she began going steady with Chip. I spent long hours in tearful intercession for God to please get her attention and to save her soul. Her parents, after learning about their daughter's frequent dates with the handsome, tall, well-built young man, and seeing the radical change in her disposition and daily living, had begged me to use or exert every ounce of my influence to try to get her to change her mind, break off with Chip, and "return" to being the same sweet Colleen of another day. But by now I rarely saw my friend. She was too involved with Chip.

The days melted into weeks, the weeks into months, and then one day in late winter I heard the news that Chip and Colleen were engaged and would soon celebrate their wedding day. I cried when I heard about it. The change in my once-best friend was almost unbelievable. My heart cried out in pity for her. Pity, and a nameless fear which I could not define. I wanted to plead with her to turn about-face but I knew it would be useless.

Seven days before her wedding, the accident made headlines in our daffy paper: Couple To Be Married Killed In Automobile Accident. It was the talk of the town! Chip and Colleen were killed when their car hit a tree after a beer party given in their honor, and a 100-mile-an-hour ride, en-route home. The wedding license was found in Chip's pocket. They were to have been married three days after the graduation exercises.

Graduation night was a blur to me. To all of Colleen's and Chip's classmates, really. As we walked across the platform to receive our diplomas, Chip and Colleen weren't there. Their mangled and broken bodies were reposing in caskets inside Hoovers Funeral Home and their soul. . .? I shuddered with the thought. Eternity without Christ! Oh, it could have been so different if Colleen had become a true Christian and given her heart to Christ!

Mother called to me in a softly-sad voice and I was brought instantly and immediately back to the present. "We're ready to leave, Megan," she said. "Your father is in the car, waiting for you and for me. Come, please."

Wiping the tears from my eyes and off my face, I stumbled from the bedroom, down the hallway and outside to the car. My feet felt like lead and my heart ached with agonizing pain and heartache and sorrow. But I knew I had to go. It would be the last time ever that I would see my friend Colleen. The knowledge of this finality was almost more than I could bear and endure. I wanted to believe that she had not been drinking; that she had had time to repent. But the tests revealed a high level of alcohol in her blood. Chip's too.

The church was filled with mourners. Two caskets stood up front. Flowers were everywhere. My heart bled for the parents of my friend and Chip. Their deep grief was evidenced in their ashen faces and their fastly-falling and ceaseless tears. It was a sobering time. A serious time. A never-to-be-forgotten time . . . when the wedding guests and friends and loved ones assembled in the church before the wedding . . . for the funeral!

"Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging: and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise" (Prov. 20:1).