

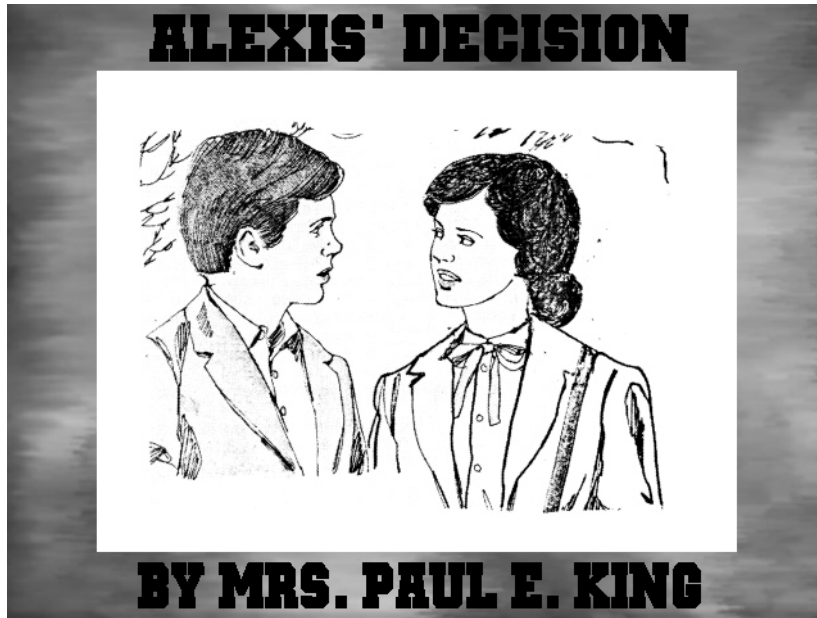
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ALEXIS' DECISION
By Mrs. Paul E. King

"So you didn't do it, huh? Some friend you are!" Chelsey exclaimed, looking Alexis full in the face before she turned and walked briskly away, her head held high and her shoulders proudly and haughtily erect.

Alexis watched until she couldn't see Chelsey any more, then she started slowly down the sidewalk toward the drugstore, where she worked at the soda fountain for Mr. Hillis, the owner.

"When are you going to stop allowing Chelsey to walk all over you, Alexis?" She turned and came face to face with Doug McCallister. "She bosses you and pushes you around like she owns you," Doug declared. "I don't like it. And I don't believe the Lord is pleased with it either."

Alexis felt her cheeks blush scarlet. Doug was so very special to her.

"I . . . I . . . feel sorry for her, Doug," she said, her lips trembling. "She has so very few friends."

"And is it any wonder why!" he exclaimed. "Chelsey's the most proud, vain, haughty and bossy girl in Pineville High. She's obnoxious, Alexis, and you're a pushover for her. Why doesn't she take care of her own matters and affairs instead of always trying to get you to do it for her?"

"I . . . I really don't know why, Doug. Unless she knows that I pity her and feel compassion for her. It's a sad thing to have as few friends as she has."

"What didn't you do this time, as per Chelsey's accusation which I just happened to overhear?"

"She wanted me to talk to Mr. Hightower about a change or two she thought was needed and necessary."

"Mr. Hightower, the school principal?" Doug was incredulous. "Who does Miss Chelsey think she is? I hope you've had enough good sense to not comply with her demand."

"It wasn't exactly a . . . a demand, Doug," Alexis said kindly.

"Knowing Chelsey, it wasn't anything less than that. Honestly 'Lex, I don't know what it's going to take to pull the scales off your eyes and let you see Chelsey for what she really is--a little schemer and a professional conniver. And you, my dear little Miss Innocent, are the tool she manipulates and uses in her craft. And God does not approve of manipulation."

"Doug!"

"I'm sorry, Alexis, but it's true. I know you're trying to win Chelsey to the Lord, but I doubt you'll ever succeed until you stop being manipulated by her. Let God handle her. Be her friend, but give her to God."

Tears shimmered in Alexis' dark brown eyes. Chelsey wasn't the easiest person in the world to have for a friend. She, Alexis, had tried so hard to win her to the Lord. Chelsey, however, had other ideas: she wanted nothing whatever to do with church, she said. She considered religious people weak-minded. "Even you," she had told Alexis on more than one occasion.

Alexis sighed. Her heart hurt for Chelsey; she needed the Lord so very much. If only she were not so exceedingly proud and vain! Her beauty and vanity, coupled with her parents' wealth, were positive detriments in keeping her from God.

Alexis wanted to pray. If only she could run home to the privacy of her bedroom right now and plead with God in intercessory prayer for her friend's salvation, she thought. But she had a working commitment to think about; an obligation to fulfill to Mr. Hillis.

She was a busy part time worker as well as a last year student in Pineville High. Her obligation to Mr. Hillis was every bit as binding as was her duty to give all diligence to her studies and make the best grades possible. In each case, or field, she had committed herself; one, to being on time for work and of giving her very best service to said work, namely, at the drugstore; two, to making the best grades that she possibly could -- not wasting time nor God-given brain matter -- and learning all she was able to learn, in preparation for whatever place the Lord might want to use her.

"Here's your drugstore," Doug said, bringing her abruptly out of her thinking. "You were in deep thought," he teased, adding, "I'm sorry if I hurt you, Alexis; I really am. You know I'm not a brute of a man. But it bothers me no little bit to see my special and favorite-to-be-with friend being used the way she is. Well, I'll see you later. I have an errand to run for Dad."

Alexis looked up into Doug's face, her honest eyes pleading with him. "Pray for me," she said tearfully. "And for Chelsey, too." Then she hurried inside the store.

"Hello-o, Miss Alexis." Mr. Hillis greeted her in his usual and always pleasant manner, letting the "lo-o" linger like a musical note in midair.

Alexis smiled and returned the greeting. It was wonderful to be working for the congenial Mr. Hillis, whose long-established reputation of honesty and uprightness and fairness was known far and wide.

"Looks like we're in for another busy day," the man declared, hustling about like a busy bee.

Alexis laughed. "That seems to be the normal thing around here, Mr. Hillis," she answered, taking her place behind the counter of the soda fountain. "But I enjoy it," she added. "God has given you quite a business."

The owner smiled and brushed a tear away. "I'm so glad you said 'God,' Alexis, for it is through Him that this business has grown and thrived and come to be what it is. Father and I proved Him and His word years ago: we began to pay tithes of all we made and earned. Then we started giving offerings on top of the tithe, and God has blest this business greatly."

Alexis smiled. She recalled hearing her parents, and grandparents, tell how the elder Mr. Hillis, now retired, had gotten converted as a young man and had begun the drugstore business, now carried on by his son-Alexis' present employer -- under the same roof and in the same building in which it had its beginning. There had been improvements, of course, and two major remodeling jobs were done on the building which transformed it and made it look new and very beautiful.

Alexis enjoyed working for Mr. Hillis. Her work of "building" sundaes was truly a work of art. Mr. Hillis complimented her repeatedly for her "masterpieces," as he called them. Her milkshakes were whipped to creamy-soft perfections that almost overflowed the tall containers in which they were served. Her "corner" of the drugstore was an almost always busy place; both young and old were steady regulars.

Washing sundae dishes and milkshake glasses in hot sudsy water during one of the lulls in her busy day now, Alexis thought about Chelsey and her remark. It was true, she hadn't gone to the school principal and told him what Chelsey thought needed done and what should be changed. In the first place, Alexis felt she had no right to tell one who was over her what he should or should not change. She was brought up to respect her superiors. And, too, it was the parents who should be speaking out and voting for the changes, if such were really wanted and needful, she felt.

Chelsey, because of her exquisite beauty, had seemed to think her "subjects" should carry out her every wish and order. She had been elected Beauty Queen for some organization and this had only served to feed her ego. Chelsey's jet-black hair, falling in wave after natural wave over her slender shoulders, was in sharp contrast to her delicately-fair complexion. Her eyes, a deep, rich blue, were accented beautifully by long, naturally-curling dark eyelashes and gracefully curving eyebrows. She was slender and tall and lovely to look at. But she had few friends, this in spite of her beauty.

"Beauty is as beauty does." Now where did that come from? Alexis wondered, as she placed the now-clean, well-scalded and drained containers on the clean drying boards. Then she remembered where; it was a saying of her Grandmother Brown.

She mulled the proverb over and over in her mind until its full impact was thoroughly absorbed and realized for what it really was. She came to the conclusion that Chelsey's small circle of friends was due to her own making, like Doug had said. Still, Chelsey needed friends just like everybody else did. Oh, if only the girl were beautiful within! Alexis thought.

"Please, kind Father," Alexis prayed silently, "help me to help Chelsey see that one must be friendly and kind too, and considerate of others in order to have friends. She lives so selfishly. And . . . and Lord, she's extremely bossy and, maybe, like Doug stated, she is demanding. Show me what to do, please. There have been times I have felt uncomfortable doing what she asked me to do; kind of like I have been a stooge. So help me to be able to show Chelsey, in a Christ-like way, that Christians can say no and still be like Thee. Make her beautiful within. Transform her, please."

As she worked, Alexis' thoughts went to the New Testament and to Jesus. He was firm in what He did, going even so far as to drive the money-hungry money changers out of the temple with a whip.

Suddenly and clearly, she saw that not complying with all of Chelsey's "Do this for me if you really want me to believe you are a Christian," orders, was all right. In fact, she had the sweetly-confirmed feeling that the Lord would be more pleased with her by saying a kindly-soft but firm no.

Tears filled her eyes and fell into the bubbly soap suds. She felt a relief like she couldn't explain. She was not meddlesome, ever, and a few times some of the things Chelsey had asked her to talk to some of the students about bordered very much on the meddlesome side, according to her sensitive feelings. True, she had used diplomacy if and when she complied with Chelsey's wishes. Still, she always felt ill at ease doing it.

How dumb could one be! she thought, turning to wait on half a dozen senior citizens who had come in together, laughing and chattering like happy magpies. She had tried so hard to prove to Chelsey that salvation and sanctification was wondrously real until she had almost become involved in becoming meddlesome, a thing the writer of Proverbs warned against doing and becoming, or being.

As she made sundaes for her happy customers, Alexis knew what she would do: always, she would try to be a friend -- a true friend -- to Chelsey, and she would continue praying for her, like always. But from today on out, if Chelsey wanted a message to get to someone it would be heard from Chelsey herself. She, Alexis, would no longer be a "messenger girl" for her friend.

Quietly praying, she placed Chelsey in God's hands. He knew better than she how to bring Chelsey around until she was willing to follow the Lord and to become truly converted.

Serving her delicious works of art to the customers, she saw Doug come through the doorway. She smiled at him. He would rejoice to hear what she had to say.