

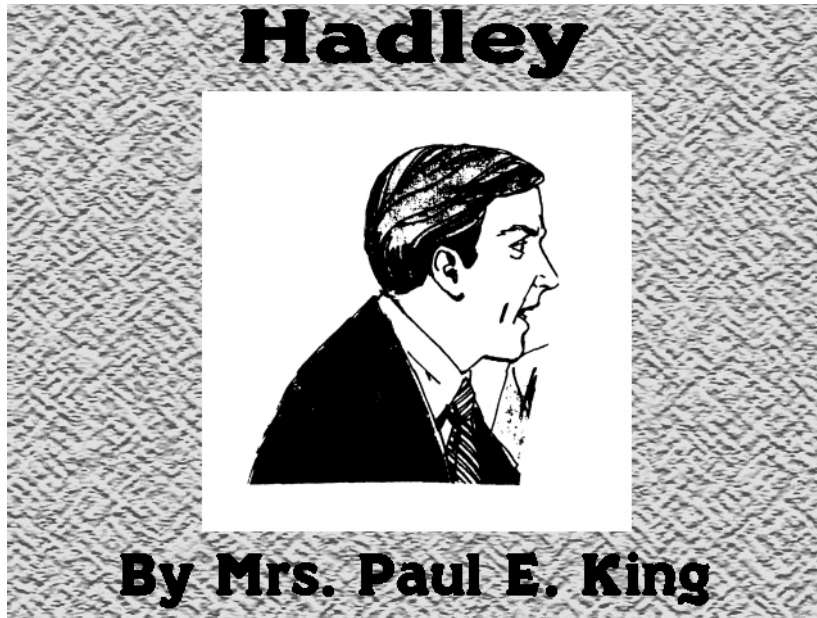
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HADLEY
By Mrs. Paul E. King

I slid into my seat just as Bryan's foot came out across the aisle, tripping Hadley and sending him sprawling down on the floor.

A volley of laughter followed the fall and Mr. Perkins, looking over his glasses on the lower part his nose, asked curtly, "All right, who did it?"

Silence. Heavy like lead. The laughter ceased. Seriousness replaced the laughter. The guilty one now wore an expression of complete innocence on his face.

"Who did it?" Mr. Perkins was on his feet now, standing straight and tall and looking suddenly formidable. Impatiently, he pushed the glasses up on the bridge of his nose and came around to the side of his desk. Looking me straight in the eye, he pointed his long index finger at me. "Did you trip him?" he asked.

"No sir, I didn't."

With just a few steps, Mr. Perkins was beside my desk.

"You better not be evading the truth, Chad," he warned, his face angry looking.

"I'm not, Sir," I stammered.

Taking a step backward, he asked again, "Who did it?" Silence again.

"All right, since no one will tell, each of you will remain here at lunch time until I find out who tripped you," and he pointed his long, slender index finger at Hadley, who had settled himself in his seat like nothing unusual had happened.

That was Hadley. I never did see anyone quite like him. The fellows could make fun of him and the girls could reject him and, always, he "surfaced" with a smile and acted like nothing ever bothered him. Just like he slid into his seat now and acted like nothing unusual had happened.

Mr. Perkins turned and hurried back to his desk, saying nothing more. But his face was white with rage. This I dreaded. In my heart, I wished Bryan hadn't tripped Hadley. It seemed to me that he got special pleasure out of tormenting Hadley.

"He's a real push-over," I heard Bryan tell another classmate one day. "A sort of 'take-anything' kind of guy. It's hard for me to be around him. I like a man to be a man. A real man."

"A bully, like you," the other classmate, Russel Farst filled in.

"Well, I hope I'm not coming across as a bully," Bryan answered. "But neither do I want anyone to think I'm a you-can-do-anything-you-want-to-do-to-me fellow. That kind sickens me."

"But Hadley's never done anything wrong to you," Russel added. "Why pick on him? He's congenial and compliant and he always tries to please everybody."

"And that's what sickens me," Bryan answered quickly. "I'd like to get a rise out of him."

Russel laughed. "You've certainly tried hard enough, Bryan. Why don't you lay off the poor guy?"

"One of these days I'll get that smile off his face, see if I don't," Bryan threatened.

"And you'll get yourself in a peck of trouble, too," Russel warned. "Sooner or later, someone's going to squeal on you to the teachers."

"Let Hadley do it. I wish he would. He nearly bugs me to death. I'd like to see the man come out in that one."

"Not all men are bullies, Bryan; some men are still gentlemen."

"Hey, I thought you were my friend," Bryan countered.

"I am. That's why I'm talking to you his way. A friend sees his friend's faults and shortcomings and tries to help him. You're a bit overbearing and overpowering, Bryan. One of these days you're going to find yourself in trouble unless you change."

"Hey, I didn't ask for a lecture, Russ and frankly, I don't appreciate your advice."

"I figured you wouldn't. But I gave it to you anyhow. It's up to you to do something about it now."

"Thanks, but no. Some friend you are! And I saw Bryan walk away.

I sneaked a quick sideways glance over at Hadley now, who was busy getting his books ready for the morning classes. He looked as calm and as peaceful as the surface of an unruffled lake in a glorious sunset. It was as though he had never been tripped nor had fallen. His face registered no emotional upheaval whatever and, frankly, there were times when I wondered if he was normal.

We went to the same church, Hadley and I, and I never heard him testify once to being saved and sanctified, so I knew that wasn't what kept him so cool appearing under the many adverse circumstances of his life. And I guess that was why I often wondered too if, indeed, he was normal. I never was able to figure him out. And try as I may, I never could get close to him either. Oh I don't mean close like to reach out and touch him; not that kind of closeness: but to reach through and make a friend of him. Somehow, or for some reason, he refused to allow any of us fellows to get too close to him.

I felt a wave of pity and compassion surge through me as I glanced at him now. I wanted to reach through to him; to tell him I was his friend. So were others from our church. But the look was on his face again; it seemed to say, "I'm managing very well, thank you."

I felt a lump pop up in my throat. I swallowed, but to no avail. I glanced up at Mr. Perkins and saw him study Bryan's face with fierce intensity. He knew better than to ask Hadley whom his tormentor was: Hadley would never have told.

Classes began. I forgot all about Hadley and Bryan, and not until the noon bell rang did I think of them again. Then it was Mr. Perkins who reminded us with, "Bryan, you will remain in the room. The rest of the class may be dismissed for the noon hour."

How Mr. Perkins knew that Bryan had tripped Hadley, I don't know. I heard Sally Brothers tell some of the students, as we stood in line at the cafeteria, that someone had slipped a note to Mr. Perkins telling him that Bryan was the guilty offender. But whether that was fact or fiction, I don't know.

At the supper table, I told my folks about Bryan tripping Hadley and Dad said he thought it wasn't one bit funny; said, too, he wondered how Bryan would have felt and reacted had Hadley tripped him.

"That's just it, Dad," I said emphatically, "Hadley wouldn't trip anyone. Not anyone! He just sits back and takes everything. Bryan wants him to fight back. He wants a 'rebuttal'; not in debate but in physical action."

"Sounds like he's a sort of bully," Mother remarked as she started the dish of mashed potatoes around for a second helping.

"He doesn't think he is," I stated, feeling greatly distressed for Hadley, whom I just knew had to be hurting on the inside.

"Have you been faithful in praying for Hadley?" Dad's question came at me like a volcano erupting and spilling and spewing its hot ash over me. "I . . . I . . . well, I . . . once in a while I pray for him," I stammered.

Dad looked at me. Really looked at me. My conscience smote me: I hadn't been praying for Hadley the way I should have been, I realized.

"Prayer is the key that unlocks Heaven, to be sure, and it also unlocks people's hearts, Chad. Begin a prayer vigil for Hadley and his soul."

"Thanks, Dad, I will," I promised.

As soon as supper was over I headed for the grove of trees at the far end of the thirty-acre field. I felt suddenly responsible for Hadley and his spiritual condition.

I entered the grove quietly and silently, feeling like I was walking on hallowed ground, for I had often come here to pray and read the Bible and to meditate on spiritual things. I savored the tranquillity and the peace and quiet of the grove: It prepared my heart for the time of fellowship and communion with my Lord.

I walked to my usual place, a wind-fallen tree, and sat down on its still-sturdy trunk and closed my eyes in a time of meditation prior to prayer. I thought I was alone, save for the singing birds and the many little wild creatures that skittered across the woody floor or scampered playfully up

and down the trees. But a sudden and totally unfamiliar wild sounding noise coming from deeper inside the grove of tree let me know that I was not alone. What was it? I wondered. And who was making that noise?

Getting to my feet, I began walking toward the sound of the noise, being careful not to be seen. I hadn't walked far when I heard a voice say fiercely, "Take that, you bully! And that!"

I sucked my breath in quick like and gasped in horror and amazement. Hadley! His face was white with rage. Hanging from the limb of a densely foliated tree was an effigy of Bryan, and Hadley was pounding it from all sides, exclaiming bitterly, "I'll pulverize you, you big bully. There!" he cried, landing a right to the head of the effigy like a pugilist gone mad. "You thought I wouldn't get even with you, huh, Bryan? You haven't seen anything yet, Here, take this," and in an instant Hadley struck a right to the "jaw" of the effigy, making the senseless thing quiver and shake fiercely.

Without thinking, I rushed up behind Hadley, calling his name and grabbing his arms and pinning them behind him. I felt tears swimming in my eyes, blurring my vision.

"Oh, Hadley. Hadley!" I exclaimed. "Don't you see what's in your heart? It . . . it's murder. You hate Bryan. You. . . ."

"You let go of me, Chad. I've had all I'm taking of that brassy, brashy bully. I'll. . . ."

"No, Hadley. No. Don't say what I think you were going to say. You can pound and sock and punch that poor old stuffed effigy to powder but it won't take care of the real trouble -- your heart. Only God can fix that up, Hadley. And He can fix it up so good and so thorough until that awful nature that's inside you, that makes you get mad and hate your fellow students, will be taken out and gotten rid of."

"Let go of me," Hadley demanded, trying to wrench himself free of the hold I had on his wrists.

"Please Hadley, listen to me. Here," I cajoled, leading him to a tree stump, "sit down. You and I are going to have a real talk; a heart to heart talk.

You have a soul that's never going to die: It will live on and on forever. Where will you spend eternity, Hadley? Heaven or hell?"

I led him to the stump and gently pushed him down on to it. He was breathing heavily when I released his arms. My heart went out in pity and Christian love to him.

"Hadley," I said brokenly, "God's got something real for you. The Lord loves you; so do my folks and I."

Hadley dropped his head. Then great heaving sobs rent his frame. I had never seen him like this before. Never.

"Oh, Chad," he finally said, "I'm so miserable. I believe I'm the most miserable young man living. I know you and your folks love me and care about me. So do others from the church. But I was too stubborn and carnal to allow anyone to get close to me. In my heart, I'm every bit as big a bully as Bryan is. I'm terribly stubborn, Chad. I know I need the Lord: I've known this for years. But my stubbornness and pride kept me from doing what I knew I needed to do. I was trying to prove that I could live just as calm and sweet a life under pressure without God as those of you did who professed to know and love the Lord."

"But that's not possible, Hadley," I said.

"I know it isn't," Hadley admitted dejectedly. "I remained calm in front of everybody but inside I was a boiling, seething pot of bitterness and hatred and anger. I'm ready to change, Chad. In fact, I want to change. I'm tired of pretending. I want to be born again."

"Wonderful, Hadley. Wonderful!" I cried. "Let's pray right now."

Hadley dropped to the moist earth floor on his knees and began the glorious prayer time by calling on God to have mercy on his soul. And you talk about repentance! Never have I heard anything more thorough or genuine and real. And in no time at all, Hadley had pushed through to Heaven's throne and was on his feet shouting the victory and the praises of God.

The new Hadley, how is he? Well, you'd never believe the difference between the old, carnal Hadley and the new, gloriously-sanctified Hadley. What a transformation! He even testifies now to how he took all his carnal tantrums out on that poor old straw-stuffed effigy out in the grove. But now there are no more carnal uprisings. And would you believe it -- but Hadley's working on Bryan, trying to get him saved. And what a switch! Bryan's scared of Hadley now!