

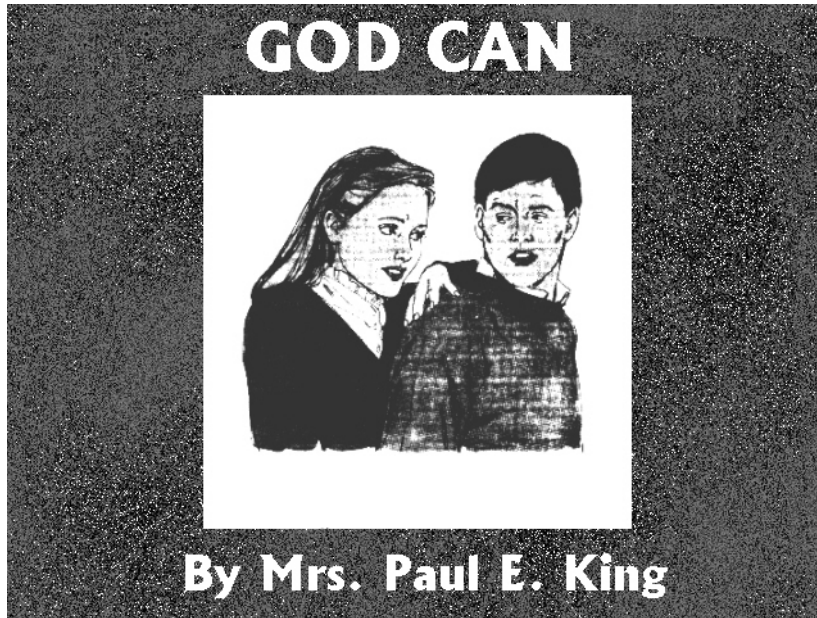
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GOD CAN
By Mrs. Paul E. King

Thad ducked around the corner and hid beneath the stairwell in Redlands High as he saw Mavis and her redbrown hair among the crowd of girls and boys pile off the bus and rush through the doors of the school building. Mavis must not see him. He couldn't stand the thought of having her "drape" herself around his neck one more time. He absolutely could not. The mere thought of a repeat performance made him shudder.

He squeezed his frame more tightly to the wall as he heard the group's noisy banter and loud chatter coming nearer and nearer to where he was hiding. The armload of books he was carrying felt heavy like lead, and for a brief moment he wished he hadn't brought the library's reference books back so early: after all, they weren't due back yet; he could have kept them for three more days. But having obtained all the information he needed from them in the short time he'd had them home, he decided to return them early.

He shifted the books in his arm as he heard the noise climax then grow gradually less as the group moved along the hallway to their classrooms.

Sighing with relief, Thad emerged from beneath the stair steps and began a slow walk to the library, wondering why Mavis was so "free" around the boys; himself particularly and especially. After all, he had never given her the slightest reason to be like she was "toward him. All his life, he had been taught by his parents to be a gentleman through and through; to treat the opposite sex with perfect gentlemanly courtesy and respect and to demonstrate Christ in and through him. And, being a Christian since his thirteenth birthday, he had adhered to and lived by his parents' godly principles and teachings, finding it both pleasurable and easy to do, since Christ lived within him in saving grace and sanctifying power.

Thad compared his four sisters to Mavis and, inwardly, he felt "tall" to have sisters like he had. Like himself, they were taught from their earliest years to be perfect ladies in the truest and purest sense of the word. They were taught to never flaunt themselves around the opposite sex and never to flirt with them or carry on in any way that was unholy and un-Christlike and unbecoming to a Spirit-filled young lady.

"You are lights for Jesus," their parents often declared. "See that nothing blemishes or smears the 'panes' nor mars the light. Live holy lives; shine for Jesus."

Poor Mavis! Thad wondered what kind of training and upbringing she had had, if, indeed, she had any at all. Most of his classmates and peers were emulating, mimicking, and doing what they saw portrayed on the television screen and through the videos, he knew; and basically, from things he had heard and read, the things these counterparts of his were watching and listening to was moral rot and degradation of the lowest kind.

Thad shook his head in a gesture of both sadness and disgust; sadness because of those whose entertainment consisted mainly in being addicted to the tube -- their god; and disgust because of the demoralizing effect it had upon those thus addicted and bound. He praised God that his home had never housed the "god." Never. They had time to be a full-fledged loving family, reading, laughing, playing games together and just enjoying each other's company.

He turned the books in to the school librarian, then hurried to his home room, where he had time to review what he had studied the previous night.

Mavis had tried to grab his hand as he passed her desk on the way to his, two rows behind her. He heaved a sigh of relief as he slid into his seat. She was brazenly-bold, he decided, and seemed to have no shame whatever for her unladylike actions. It gave him a sick feeling in the pit of his stomach. He had never met any girl so aggressive and bold before. Never.

In the cafeteria at lunch time, Thad saw her coming toward his table with her tray, and just before she got there, three of his friends sat down on the chairs.

"Thanks," Thad said with relief. "I'm glad to have you fellows here with me."

"Thanks for saving us a seat," Shane Dowes answered.

"Looks like someone isn't happy that we beat her to your table, Thad," Royce Steel added. "Are we intruding?" he asked quickly as Mavis hovered nearby, frowning and looking for the world like a storm was brewing inside her being.

"Not at all," Thad answered with a smile. "Truth of the matter is, you did me a favor and I appreciate it greatly. I can't figure that poor girl out."

"You can't?" It was Shane.

"I'm not her type," Thad continued.

"That makes you all the more appealing to her," Shane remarked.

Thad gasped "But Shane," he said, "I've never so much as given her even the slightest reason to be so . . . so . . . aggressive and . . . and forward. I'm a Christian. Christians enjoy the company of other Christians."

"That makes you even more outstanding to Mavis, Thad. All her life, Mavis has been able to latch on to any boy that struck her fancy. She has . . . well . . . dare I say everything? Her good looks have a way of knocking a fellow off his feet," Brandon Shell stated emphatically

"Not every fellow, Brandon. No, not all the fellows. Some of us were brought up to see more than a beautiful face and a lovely form in a girl: We look for spiritual qualities and Biblically based principles instead"

"This is why Mavis falls all over you and is so attentive to you: she isn't used to being ignored and rejected by someone she's become interested in," Shane added.

"She's to be pitied," Thad declared as he bit into the ham salad sandwich and nibbled on a potato chip.

"Pretty girls sometimes become extremely vain and proud," Royce stated. "She's one of them. It inflates her ego when a new fellow asks her out, but it deflates her when she's ignored. I'd say you have her ego clear down to the bottom and she can scarcely stand this, Thad."

"It will have to remain there then, fellows, for Mavis and I are poles apart and I haven't even the least little tug of desire to date her. Since I surrendered every single part of me to the Lord -- body, soul, mind and spirit -- and He indwells me by His Holy Spirit, my chief ambition and greatest desire has been to please Him and obey His Word. A believer in Christ and an unbeliever have nothing in common."

"We understand you," Royce said, "even though Shane nor Brandon and I are where we should be spiritually."

Thad looked at his three friends. Tears came to his eyes. "If you only knew how often I pray for you to get back to God!" he exclaimed on a sob. "Bitterness of soul is a frightening thing. What has it benefited you, leaving

the church over that bit of trouble? You're worse off now than any of you ever were"

Royce looked at Thad then said, "You know, I was thinking that same thing recently. And . . . Thad, I feel all scary and . . . and nervous, knowing that Jesus could come any moment and I . . . well, I'm just not ready to meet Him. I know I wouldn't go up in the rapture were He to come ow, the way my heart is. I've been trying to get shed of this bitterness. . . . " His sentence trailed on a heavy sigh.

Thad's face brightened. "That's some of the best news I've had since you fellows left the church," he cried "Only, don't stop where you are, Royce; you know the road back. It may seem hard for you right now to eat the proverbial humble pie, but I promise you that that bitter 'morsel' will help to bring sweetness back to your soul. Make your restitutions, confess your bitter attitude and go clear to the bottom -- you'll find the Lord waiting for you there, Royce And oh, you'll be so happy."

Royce was wiping tears now.

"Guess Royce spoke for us, too." It was Shane. "I know he voiced my feelings."

"Mine too," Brandon admitted humbly. "I've been too miserable for words. All because I got involved in something I had no business meddling in. Such a stupid thing, too, the more I think about it."

"Fellows," Thad said, "life will have lots of problems for us. This is life. Even Jesus said that in the world we would have tribulations, but that we were to be of good cheer because He had overcome the world Problems come to test the stuff we're made of, not to get us down nor cause us to backslide and become bitter"

"I know why I went down," Shane confessed. "I've never been sanctified wholly. I'm sorry I didn't keep seeking until I knew I was cleansed and purged of the carnal nature and then filled with God's Holy Spirit." Royce and Brandon admitted the same thing. "Please come back to the Lord," Thad urged gently and kindly. 'You know the road back. I'll be praying for you. And the church door is always open: you don't need to wait until Sunday to go to the altar."

"Are you working after school today?" Brandon asked Thad.

"Not until six. I work from six to nine tonight."

"Could you meet us at the church, Thad? Please!"

"God willing, I sure can. Right after school. I'll call my mother to let her know where I am. How about the rest of you fellows?" Thad asked softly

"We'll be there. Yes, the Lord willing, we'll be there," Royce declared as Shane nodded assent and brushed tears from his eyes.

As he walked into his house after the victorious prayer time at church with his friends, Thad felt like he was floating on a cloud. Living for Jesus and walking with Him moment by moment was heavenly. It was wonderful, and so worthwhile.

He took his books into the bedroom for studying when he got off work at his part-time job and just as he started down the hallway toward the kitchen, Lois came up behind him. Laying her hand on his shoulder she giggled and said, "Hi Thad, care if I'm Mavis for a moment?" Again she giggled.

Thad turned and looked at his sister, exclaiming with a pained expression, "Oh Lois, please! Please! No! Don't you ever try to mimic her, please! She's positively obnoxious to me. I pray for needed grace each time I see her. Ever since I talked to her about the Lord and asked her if she wouldn't like to be a Christian and know she was saved and ready for Heaven, she seems to think she owns me."

Lois giggled again. "She can't quite figure you out, Thad. She's being 'consumed' because you're not interested in her. She told Hilleary Conkle she'd get you yet. This was several months back. You've never shown the slightest interest in her except for her soul, and this is more than Mavis can handle. She likes nothing better than for every man to come begging her for a date. My brother's attitude and his I'm-not-interested-in-you stance are more than she can handle."

"She's bold, Lois, and embarrassing. She 'drapes' herself around a fellow; a most unladylike thing to do. But say, I have a better piece of news to tell you than to merely discuss poor Mavis: Royce and Shane and Brandon are back in God's fold again. They prayed through over at the church, and I mean through. This will be a spiritual boost for our young people's meetings."

"And in the main services, too," Lois remarked between praising the Lord and crying for joy. "This is a real and very definite answer to many earnest and fervent prayers," she added. "And Thad, don't let Mavis bother you too much. We can pray until she'll either get saved or forget completely about her infatuation over you."

"Say, you're right, Sis!" Thad exclaimed brightly. "Join me toward that end. God can make the change. Yes, God can! From this moment on, I claim His promises. Thanks, Lois. Thanks much." And Thad hurried to the kitchen where his mother kept supper waiting for him.