

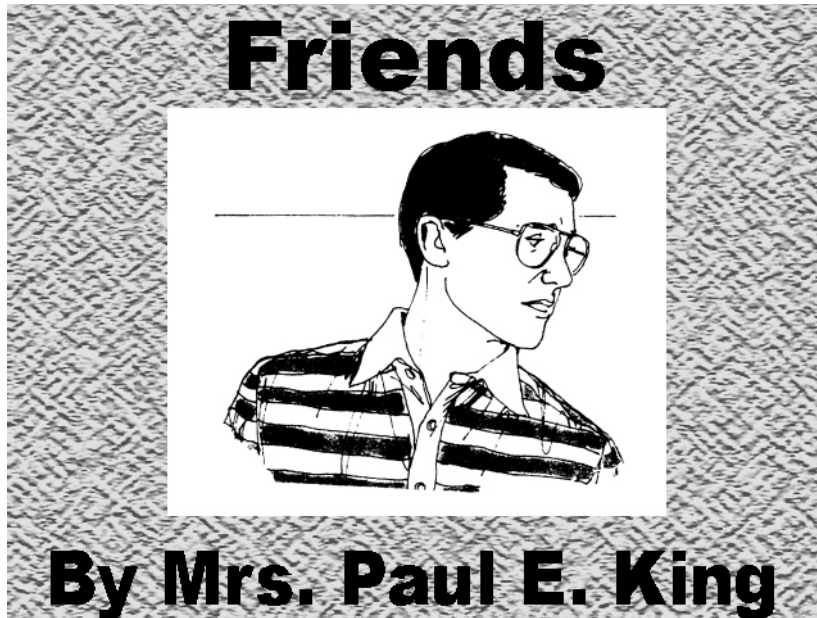
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FRIENDS
By Mrs. Paul E. King

Tyler paced back and forth in the hallway, praying and wondering if he should tell his parents about his sister. It kind of put a fellow on the spot, he thought, when he didn't want to seem like a tattletale (which he certainly was not), and yet he knew that what his sister was doing was all wrong and he felt that his parents should know.

Tyler raised his tear-filled eyes heavenward, once more asking and seeking for Divine guidance and wisdom. He loved Donna Sue; loved her deeply. But love demanded pulling some folks out of the fire too, didn't it? And it was a for-sure thing that Donna Sue needed help. She seemed blind to what she was doing.

"Something bothering you, Ty?" Mrs. Symington asked as she came hurrying down the hallway with an armful of freshly laundered and dried, folded towels and washcloths.

Gently, Tyler took the towels from his mother and carried them into the bathroom where he placed them in neat order on the closet shelves, saying, "There really is, Mother. It's Donna Sue. . . ."

"Donna Sue? What's wrong?"

"I don't know how to tell you other than to be candidly frank about it," Tyler said. "She's taken up with the wrong kind of people, Mom. Her list of friends has changed drastically and radically in school. This is why you don't see Marlis and Gretel here anymore."

Mrs. Symington sat down on the deacon's bench along one wall, saying, "I wondered what happened to the girls; but I thought they were busy at home, helping their mothers."

"They're busy, I'm sure; but that isn't the reason they're not coming here anymore. The crowd my sister has taken up with is not the kind either Gretel or Marlis would associate with. They're a wild bunch, Mother, and I mean wild. I've wanted to tell Dad and you about this for some time now, but I'm not a tattle-tale; so I just kept praying about it, asking God what I should do. Oh, I'm so troubled and concerned for her. It's like she doesn't care. I guess this is what cuts me so deeply and hurts so badly. Donna acts like she doesn't care what anybody says or thinks. And she very definitely resents anyone trying to talk to her about it. I know; I've made several tearful attempts at it only to be told it was none of my business what she did nor with whom she was friends."

"Tyler, please don't ever feel like you're being a tattler when you tell either your father or me when something is wrong. It's wrong not to tell. There are some things in one's family that should never be concealed or covered up

-- things like this with your sister, for instance. If she were going over a precipice and you saw it and knew it but did nothing about it, you would be guilty of her death. And from what you just told me, she is going over a precipice -- a precipice of moral decadence. It's time we knew about it.

"I've sensed a change in her for several months already, and your father and I have discussed it. But we've not been able to identify what it was, or is, nor how to go about handling it. I've talked to Donna; asked her if anything was bothering her, or was wrong, and she declares there is absolutely nothing whatever the matter with her. She said I am imagining things and that I am just being overly protective of her. Do you know these friends with whom she is associating?"

"Know them! Oh Mom, everybody in school knows them. They're the ones with bad names and bad, wild reputations. They're wild, and I mean wild. I saw Mr. Turbot, the principal, talking to Donna only last week after Hillary Manns had some things stolen from her locker. I told Donna she'd never have been suspected, even, of having taken Hillary's things if she'd not been hobnobbing with that crowd of lawbreakers and troublemakers."

"What did she say?" Mrs. Symington asked quickly, with concern registering in her voice.

"Oh, Mom," Tyler cried, "it hurts me to even think about it. She got real angry with me and told me it was none of my business what she did. Donna's never been this way before. Never."

The mother drew her breath in on a sob, saying sadly, "The sinful heart is so insidious, so very deceitful. Are these new friends of Donna's girls, or are they both girls and boys, Tyler? Or which?"

"Both. But mostly, they are boys; the wildest, most wicked bunch in school. Not quite two months ago, a new girl started to our school. She's in Donna's grade -- a sophomore. Donna took to her immediately. Carol's witty, bubbly and as fun loving as anybody has ever seen or met. She's attractive but not what one could call beautiful; she has personality plus! The students in this fast, jet-set group gravitate to her like bees do to sweet nectar. And I think this is how Donna got involved with them. She thinks Carol's 'the frosting on the cake,' so speaking, and whatever Carol does Donna feels she

can do too. If she could only realize -- and see -- what it's doing to her spiritually and morally!

"1st Corinthians 15:33 tells us that evil communications corrupt good manners, Tyler. Pretty much, we take on the way and the doings of those with whom we consistently associate and hang around. This is why it is so important that one choose his and her friends prayerfully, carefully and wisely. We are influenced for either good or evil by our companions, whether we are aware or unaware of it."

"I've never known Donna to be like she is now," Tyler said sadly. "Until she got to hanging around with this wild bunch, she's always been sweet and gentle and kind. But not anymore. It breaks my heart to see the change in her in school. She manages pretty well to cover it up here at home; but at school she's a totally different person. She's beginning to be brazen and brash and loud mouthed. This is all so unlike my sister. And Mom, she dodges me every change she gets at school."

"That's because she doesn't want to face you, Tyler. She knows what she's doing is wrong. I'm sure her conscience is bothering her. She was taught the Holy Scriptures ever since she was born, the same as you. God's Word is like a two-edged sword, my son."

"But how could she do this?" Tyler asked. "She knows she's not getting a 'free ride' in her sin. She knows this! You'd think she'd be scared to death to go even one moment without the Lord's presence in her heart."

"Sin is blinding," Mrs. Symington replied. "It charms its victim and seems to lull him to sleep."

"But it's dangerous!" Tyler exclaimed.

"Yes; extremely dangerous. And now, my dear son, I think you and I can do the most profitable of all things by praying for Donna Sue. Your father and I will take care of her when she gets home. Thanks for telling me, Tyler: I wish we had known sooner. And Ty, continue to choose your friends with prayer and with care. You'll never be sorry, if you do."

"I will, Mother. Always. It's a promise, by God's grace and help." And Tyler fell to his knees, weeping for his sister and asking the Lord to always

keep him tender and sensitive to the Spirit's moving so his friendships would continue with those who were living close to the Lord and would thus be a blessing to him on his journey to Heaven. It was so important that one's friends be an asset and a blessing rather than a hindrance and a curse, he knew, as he began praying earnestly for his sister.