

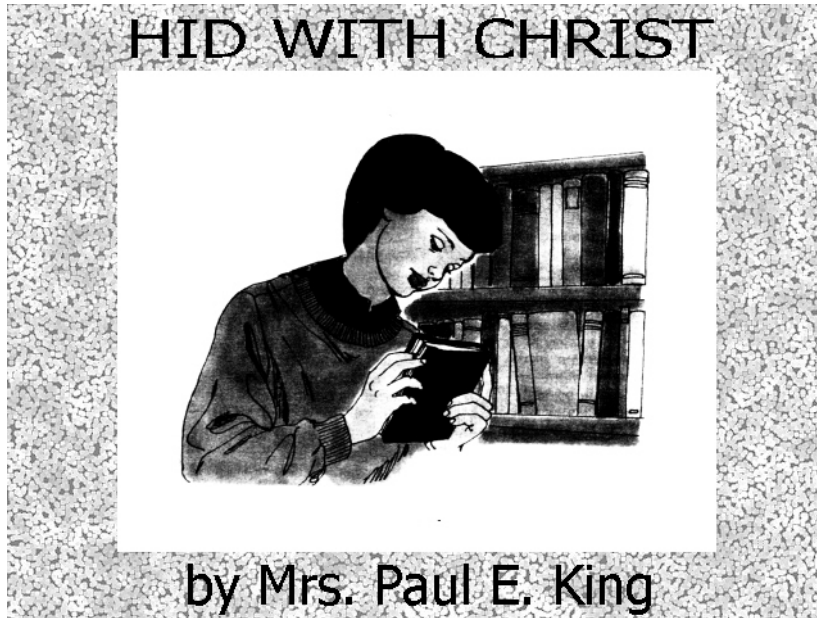
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HID WITH CHRIST
By Mrs. Paul E. King
Chapter 1

Jean looked up from her study book to find Doug's blue-blue eyes resting upon her, giving her that certain look of appraisal which she'd seen so many times in the past few weeks. A hot blush colored her cheeks prettily. She smiled faintly in Doug's direction then changed positions in the seat and

got back to her book, trying desperately to concentrate on the contents in its pages.

Gail was "eyeing" her again, she was sure. This she felt, rather than saw. It was becoming quite an annoying and bothersome habit with her friend. She was acting peculiar lately Jean noticed. Especially where Doug was concerned.

Jean moved uneasily in her seat. Why should Gail's deportment and behavior have changed and altered so drastically? she wondered. Especially since they had been friends for years and had always shared each other's secrets and joys and sorrows. It didn't make sense, Jean decided quickly. Something was wrong. Terribly wrong. But what?

She closed her book slowly. No need to try to concentrate, she thought. Not so long as her mind was a kaleidoscope of troubled thoughts with a multiplicity of unanswered questions over Gail and her fastly-changing attitude and altered disposition.

Jean's mind did a quick mental rerun. Back, back. To the spring when both she and Gail had turned sixteen. One year, three months and fourteen days ago, that was. Since both birthdays fell in the same week, Jean's mother made a birthday supper for them "For you and Gail!" she'd said softly. "And we'll have the young people over from the church, too," her mother had added with a smile, knowing full well how much this meant to the only girl in the Ames' household.

Jean smiled, remembering. It was such a lovely evening, hers and Gail's sixteenth birthday supper. With her father and mother being perfect examples to the twenty-two young people who attended that never-to-be-forgotten supper which climaxed in singing around the piano and testifying and praying, terminating, finally in an altar service in which several of the young people got saved and another sanctified.

It was strange, Jean thought now as she recalled that momentous night, how some could be so happy and full of Divine love, and others, like Gail, so cold, unmoved and unaffected; and ever sharp-tongued, where circumstances didn't shape up to one's liking.

"Where's Doug?" Gail had asked, hurrying into the kitchen where Jean was busy helping her mother make a third bowl of punch in a brief interlude of the night's activities.

"Doug? Oh, he's around. I suppose he's in the living room, somewhere near Dad. He thinks the world of Dad. . . ."

Gail stood leaning against the door frame. "Get in good with the father if you want the daughter!" she said quickly.

Jean remembered how she had almost dropped the spoon she'd held -- from shock. Never had she heard her friend speak like that before. Never! But it was glaringly apparent to all who heard Gail's terse remark that she had a positive talent for putting a sting into an apparently simple statement. It was almost impossible to tell whether she was being deliberately insulting (which Jean hadn't wanted to believe), or whether she was just the victim of her own unfortunate choice of words.

Jean closed her eyes now and squeezed them shut tight, trying to erase from her mind -- forever! -- the memory of Gail's unpleasant disposition that otherwise wonderful "sixteenth" night.

She tried desperately to put only the best construction on her friend's many "barbed" statements since that night, knowing full well the Biblical standard of "Judge not, that ye be not judged. "For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged . . ." St. Matt. 7:1-2. Could Gail be carnal?

The thought hit Jean with almost startling force. Quickly she opened her eyes and sat up straight and erect. Gail carnal! She'd professed to being saved and sanctified for almost so long as Jean could remember. But what did the Bible say about the matter? An individual's life (the daily living part) would definitely correspond with a truly holy heart, she knew, for Jesus Himself had very positively and pointedly declared: ". . . for the tree is known by his fruit" Matthew 12:33. And Gal. 5:22 plainly stated that "the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace. . . ." While Ephesians 5:9 affirmed that the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness and righteousness and truth."

Jean gulped as the Scriptures came vividly back to mind. Sudden unbidden and unannounced tears stung her eyes. She would not judge Gail.

She stood by Jean's desk, wearing an accusative look on her face. "Doug again?" she asked suddenly.

Before Jean had time to collect her thoughts, or reply, Gail's voice continued in a threatening way: "Doug's mine! Do you hear? Hands off!"

Again Jean gulped, this time from shock and virtual unbelief. She couldn't have heard her friend right. She couldn't! What she had just heard was but a figment of her own imagination. She raised her head and found Gail's cold, penetrating eyes glaring down upon her. "Hands off Doug Merken!" she exclaimed between clenched teeth.

A sob tore Jean's body. She tried to speak but discovered she was too choked up to utter anything more than a shocked half-whispered, "Gail! Gail!"

Like one in a stupor, or a sleep-walker, even, Jean left the study hall and headed for her English literature class. She was a trifle late as she took her seat and, though dumb with amazement over Gail's belligerence, she became suddenly alert. Mrs. Conway was calling her name!

"Yes, ma'am," Jean replied in a voice that sounded strange to her own ears.

"Did you or did you not take Doug Merken's English papers? The ones that were to have been turned in yesterday?"

Mrs. Conway's steel-gray eyes seemed to penetrate Jean's very soul.

The girl looked confused. Baffled. And she felt like a hunted animal or fowl. "No, ma'am, I didn't. I haven't even seen Doug's paper, let alone take it --"

A smug smile played at the corners of the teacher's mouth. "Well, we'll soon find out!" she exclaimed, marching boldly down the aisle to Jean's desk. "From what I hear you have the papers. Open your notebook and we'll see. . ."

Jean opened her mouth to speak but no words came forth. She felt hot and flushed with embarrassment.

"I know it wasn't Jean who took my papers, Mrs. Conway! I know she didn't do it!" Doug exclaimed in sudden defense of the lovely girl. "I could have misplaced them: I'll look again, when I get home. . . ."

"You didn't misplace them, Doug!" Mrs. Conway said meanfully as, sorting through Jean's notes, she brought Doug's papers forth with a look of triumph on her face.

"I . . . I don't understand . . ." Jean said suddenly. "I have no idea how they got into my notebook. I really don't"

"We'll settle that score later Jean." Turning and facing the class, the teacher remarked caustically, "It proves one thing, even religious people are dishonest. Very dishonest!"

"But I didn't take them, Mrs. Conway I have no idea how they got into my notebook -- nor when -- but I can truthfully say I didn't have a thing to do with them being there."

"They just walked in, Jean. Yes, they just walked right into your notebook!"

A volume of snickering and laughter went up from some in the class.

Jean felt like crying.

In the midst of her most trying moment a sweet, soft voice spoke to her soul: "Ye are dead; and your life is hid with Christ in God --"

A shower of tears rained down her cheeks. They were tears of sheer joy. Yes indeed, she was dead; having been "crucified with Christ," but living!

The memory of her marvelous conversion and gloriously-real experience of entire sanctification, wrought by the mighty power of God in her heart and life some better than six years ago, came into beautiful recall now. Her inner peace and joy knew no bounds. Holiness of heart and life worked. Yes, it did! It took the storms and the trials and pressures of life to make one realize just how wondrously well this experience of purity -- Holiness -- did work.

Jean brushed the tears away and smiled. It was wonderful: there was no hatred nor malice toward whoever had done this evil deed. None whatever. Just love, love, love. Divine Love, flowing in and out and through her. Right would come to the fore. It would triumph in God's time and in His way.

Doug met her after school. He wore a look of deepest concern on his ruggedly-handsome face. His eyes were deep pools of pity and sympathy.

"Jean, oh, Jean!" he exclaimed, falling in step with her. "I'm sorry; believe me, I'm sorry! I have no idea who did this to you. Nor do I know who took my papers, nor when. But whoever took them out of my notebook and put them in yours, was one and the same person. It had to be. But why would they have done it? I mean, I didn't think you had an enemy in the world. What is the motive behind this?" Doug shook his head. "It doesn't add up," he said suddenly. "It just does not add up! But, here, let me carry your books."

As Jean handed her books to the tall young man she said softly, "I know you didn't do it, Doug, but let's forget it, shall we? It's wrong to draw evil conclusions about anyone and I for one refuse to do so. I'm innocent; this makes the burden a whole lot lighter and easier to bear than if I were guilty. In God's time, truth will surface and everything will be straightened out."

"But until that time, what about you? It looks like you're guilty, Jean; and some of the students believe you did take my papers. . . ."

"Little matter what they think. 'My witness is in heaven and my record is on high,' Job 16:19. God knows I'm innocent; He'll plead my cause and it will be done righteously and right."

"But the suffering you'll endure; and the taunting remarks and withering looks! I . . . I can't bear for you to have to suffer, Jean! . . . you must know how I feel about you! It's quite obvious, I'm sure."

Jean took a deep breath. "I feel honored to . . . to be admired by one so noble as you, Doug, but if we 'suffer with Him we shall also reign with Him.' This Christian walk is not strewn entirely with thornless roses. Ah, no. But for every thorn there are many roses: for every trial and each test there are joys and blessings innumerable. His grace is sufficient. Furthermore, I feel God

will bring good out of this. You know how anti-God Mrs. Conway is." Doug nodded. "Suppose this is God's way of revealing Himself to our teacher . . ."

"I'm afraid I don't quite follow you." Doug's face was creased with a frown.

"You'll see what I mean, Doug. Mrs. Conway's been teaching that there's nothing -- absolutely nothing -- to 'this religious thing,' as she chooses to call our salvation and sanctification, making sport of those of us who love the Lord and live clean, pure, wholesome and upright lives. Well, it may be that the Lord needs a display of how excellently and wonderfully real this blessed way of Holiness is."

"I see it, Jean. I see it!" Doug exclaimed suddenly bright tears filling his eyes. "I'll be praying for you Believe me, I'll be praying. Earnestly and fervently."

"That's all I want," Jean said softly as she turned to go up the steps of her house.

* * * * *

Chapter 2

Taking a leisurely walk to school the following morning, Jean was startled out of her quiet thoughts and time of deep meditation upon God and His goodness to her by a rough slap upon her shoulder.

She cringed beneath the pain and let out a slight moan. Turning, she came face to face with Gail.

"Oh, hi!" she greeted cheerfully. Pleasantly. "Your slap on my shoulder felt like you were angry," she teased, smiling into Gail's face.

"Don't try to be funny, Jean. I'm not exactly pleased with you," she retorted hotly.

Jean stood suddenly very still. Cradling her books in her arms she looked searchingly into her friend's face. "Whatever has happened to you,

Gail? You . . . you're just not like you used to be. What's bothering you? I love you. . . ."

"Love me! Love me!" Gail repeated with sarcasm in her voice.

"I really do."

"Stop it! Stop it!" Gail cried vehemently. "I told you to keep your hands off Doug."

Jean stood in shocked silence, beholding her friend as if for the first time.

"Oh, don't look at me with such innocence!" Gail shouted. "I know you're pretty and . . . and vulnerable -- especially to Doug! And you've always made friends easily, and had lots of them. You have good parents; kind parents, and two wonderful brothers, while I . . . I . . . have nothing. Nothing! But unhappiness and fusing and fighting and quarreling at my home." Gail was near hysterics now. "And now you want Doug. . . ."

The girl's unfinished sentence came out little and frightened sounding. Covering her face with her hands, she cried.

In an instant Jean's arm was around her. "I do love you, Gail. Mother and all of us love you. I'm sure you know this. But what has happened to you? You used to be so happy in Jesus and. . . ."

Brushing Jean's hand off her shoulder Gail rushed down the sidewalk, calling as she ran, "Hands off Doug, or I'll do something worse to you than what happened yesterday. And don't forget, Mrs. Conway's on my side."

Jean gulped. She felt stunned. Was this a sort of conspiratorial thing? she wondered. She knew Mrs. Conway resented her leaving tracts in the library and the lavatory, and when Becky Jearnigan and Keith Sauna got converted a few months after the school year began, the teacher was unusually caustic and belligerent toward her.

"Trying to convert the school, eh?" she taunted. "And some of the most brilliant students at that! Well," she'd added meaningfully, "there's more than one way to put a stop to such a thing."

Jean didn't know just what the teacher meant at the time of her statement but now she wondered what connection, if any, Gail's unusual behavior had in relation to the sentence that was more of a threat than anything else. And Doug's English papers? What about them? Walking slowly toward the school building, Jean recounted the many times Mrs. Conway had made some sinister remark about those who believed in God and His Almighty power denying vehemently His existence. It cut deeply and freshly into Jean's heart now.

The young, beautiful but mod and worldly-wise teacher was new to Blueridge High, having come there from the university, from whose halls of learning she'd acquired a master's degree. But she was poison; destroying, in her subtle way, the little spiritual life and heath of those boys and girls who were churchgoers but whose hearts and lives had never been changed by God's transforming power.

Over these, the young teacher was affecting a subversive influence. It was a destructive influence and, as a consequence, morality in the school was on a rapid decline while smut and filth and gutter language were encouraged and laughed at.

Hanging her sweater in the locker, Jean couldn't help but feel that it was Mrs. Conway who had helped to affect the radial change in Gail's disposition now. The girl didn't have a happy home life, it was true. This was one of the express purposes for Jean and her mother and their family befriending Gail, trying to fill in where her home life was lacking so desperately in happiness and love and understanding.

When the last bell had rung and each student was seated at his and her desk, Mrs. Conway announced loudly that Jean was to remain after school for a week and write on the board, five hundred times, "I stole Doug's English papers."

Quietly Jean rose to her feet. "I can't write that!" she exclaimed softly. "I'd be writing a lie. I will write 'I didn't steal Doug's English papers,' though." She sat down.

Tension ran high in the homeroom. Two forces were at play: the force of evil and the force of uprightness and truth. Which one would win?

The students were instantly alert and for the first time in months, yea, years, some who had thought Jean, and those of like faith, to be spineless and soft, changed their mind. Instant admiration showed on their countenances. Here was a girl -- a very pretty girl and modest -- who dared to stand up for what was right; and that to be against a God-hating, God-denying "new idea" teachers ideas and philosophies.

Mrs. Conway's face drained suddenly of all color. Fire registered in her steel-gray eyes and she was no longer pretty. Not at all.

"You will write what I have told you or face the principal!" Her reply was cutting and laced with malice.

"I appeal to Mr. Upperton," was Jean's quiet reply.

"You shall have your request. Come. Now! It will give me supreme delight to escort you to his office; and believe me, I'll not spare in telling him what a little lying cheat you are." Turning to the class she said, "Fill in the time the way you want to until I get back."

Once inside Mr. Upperton's office, Mrs. Conway unleashed all the hatred and anger she'd ever felt toward Jean and her Christian counterparts, ending with, "and this holier-than-thou 'saint' stole Doug Merken's English papers then lied about it. As punishment I told her she'd have to remain after school for one week and write, five hundred times, on the blackboard, 'I stole Doug's English papers,' and she refuses to do it."

Mr. Upperton sat farther back in the depth of the desk chair, his hands folded across his chest. Pushing his trifocals up on the bridge of his nose and smiling slightly in Jean's direction, he said, "You may speak for yourself, young lady."

"Thank you, Mr. Upperton. First of all, I want you to know that I didn't steal Doug's papers. I honestly didn't. I have no idea how they got into my notebook -- nether does Doug know -- but I didn't take them."

"Now isn't that incredulous? They didn't get into your notebook by themselves," the teacher exclaimed with an "I-know-you're-lying" tone of voice.

"Jean is talking, Mrs. Conway," the principal said, easing forward in his chair and focusing his attention upon the lovely young girl before him. "Go on," he urged.

"I didn't say I wouldn't stay after school, as Mrs. Conway inferred to you; I merely stated that I couldn't write, 'I stole Doug's English papers.' I would be writing a lie, Mr. Upperton, for I didn't steal them. I told Mrs. Conway that I'd write, instead, 'I didn't steal Doug's English papers.' It is to this that she objects."

"But you did steal them!" the teacher exclaimed quickly. "Gail. . . . "

Suddenly she gasped. "I'm sorry, I wasn't to tell. . . . "

"Go on. Finish your sentence," the principal ordered.

Mrs. Conway looked trapped.

"Go on, I want to know it all."

"Gail saw Jean take the papers. She told me so."

Getting to his feet, Mr. Upperton walked toward the door. "Come with me, both of you. Since you embarrassed Jean before the entire class, and since they know what's going on, I want to see Gail and hear what she has to say."

"But you can't do that. It wouldn't be fair and. . . ."

"Why wouldn't it be fair, Mrs. Conway? You have chosen to malign and belittle and undermine those in Blueridge High whose spiritual lives and holy living have been the very lifeline and moral backbone of this school. I feel it's high time now that I step in -- in defense of Jean and those like her."

"Can't this be settled in your office?" Mrs. Conway began. "After all, I promised Gail I wouldn't betray her confidence. . . ."

"This is a very light thing with you; it's quite apparent. And no, we'll not settle it in my office. I've been biding my time, to declare myself -- where I

stand on certain serious matters and how I feel -- and this seems to be the opportune time."

Upon entering the classroom, Mr. Upperton turned to Jean. "You may take your seat," he said, speaking kindly to her. Then in a stern, emotion-packed voice, he called Gail's name. "When did you see Jean take Doug's English papers out of his notebook and put them in hers?" he asked.

Gail's face turned the pallor of death. "I . . . I . . . let me think. Oh, yes, it was day before yesterday, I believe."

"Where was Doug at the time? And how did you manage to see it?"

Gail stuttered and stammered. At last she broke down and cried. "I . . . I'm sorry," she managed feebly

"For what? That you took the papers and put them in Jean's notebook yourself trying to make it appear that an innocent girl had stolen them?" the principal asked.

Gail drew her breath in quick-like. "How . . . how did you know?" she asked, a frightened look in her eyes

"I saw you looking in Doug's desk yesterday as I passed by the door. Wondering why you'd be going through his things, I watched. I saw the whole transaction, Gail. Do you have anything to say to this?"

"I . . . I guess there's nothing to say."

"For me, there's plenty to say!" Mr. Upperton declared emphatically. "And I mean to say it here and now. First of all, let it be known and noised abroad that so long as I'm principal here, Blueridge High will tolerate no more snide remarks concerning those who believe in God Almighty and who follow Him and His teaching of purity and uprightness and Holiness. I may not be a Christian myself but I recognize one when I see him or her, as the case may be; and believe me, when I say I admire the real Christians in this school. I'm honored and proud to be their principal.

"Yes, my hat's off, so speaking, to the young men and women who are true Christians. Those, like Jean Neal and her counterparts, whose lives are

living proof and silent testimony to the transforming power and the redeeming grace of a merciful Savior. It is young people like these who are the backbone of the school.

"Last of all, all filthy speaking and smut and gutter language must cease. From the teacher on down to the student. I will have no more of it in these halls and the classrooms. Is this plain?" Mr. Upperton's face was stern looking and his jaw was set. His penetrating eyes seemed to bore a hole through Mrs. Conway.

Turning quickly he started for the door, then just as quickly he did a sudden about-face. "No after-school blackboard assignments for Jean" he added emphatically, his steel-gray eyes resting enigmatically on the teacher who was highly agitated and greatly angered.

"I think you've made yourself quite clear!" she retorted hotly the color mounting in her cheeks.

Without another word Mr. Upperton strode briskly out of the room.

"You will pay dearly for getting me into this mess, Gail!" Mrs. Conway threatened, turning her hard-looking eyes upon the frightened girl. "I want to see you after school. . . ." Her sentence trailed carrying with it a threat.

Tension mounted in Blueridge High and Jean and Doug were thankful when the bell rang for dismissal that afternoon.

"What do you suppose Mrs. Conway will do to Gail?" Doug asked Jean, walking with her down the hallway. "After all, she cares nothing for Gail's feelings -- nor anyone's, for that matter. Her little plan was foiled and she's raging"

Jean's eyes were full of sympathetic tears. "I can't leave Gail, Doug," she said with sudden finality. "I can't! Please stop by our house and tell Mother I may be a little late. Tell her why. OK?"

Doug stood looking down upon the petite figure before him. How beautiful she was. How very lovely and . . . and rare! he thought, his heart hammering so loud inside his chest that he was afraid Jean could hear it.

"Will do," he said hoarsely, turning quickly and walking toward the big double doors of the entranceway.

Jean hurried down the hall to Mrs. Conway's room where she stood outside the door until she heard the teacher leave through another doorway, then she walked into the room.

"Gail." Her voice was soft and tender.

The scarred girl turned tear-wet eyes on Jean "Go away!" she cried. "Go away! Just leave me alone."

Jean hurried across the room to where Gail sat writing. "I love you, Gail, and I'm your friend. I really am. You must forget the past, dear . . ."

"Forget the past! How can I? I've been so jealous of you, Jean, and believe me, I'm not one bit happy. Just go away and leave me alone. I don't deserve your friendship. Not after what I did to you. Psalm 7:15-16 has befallen me."

"You only acted out what was in your heart, dear. But there's something better for you, Gail. Something that honestly and truly works under pressures."

"Oh, Jean, please, please pray for me! I'm in an awful state of mind and soul Your beautiful life has made me so envious of you until I have almost hated you at times. But I'm sorry Oh, I'm so sorry. I don't want to be like this. I don't!"

"Why not come by the house when you're through your . . . work? I'd help you write, Gail, but that wouldn't be honest, so I'll just sit here and study while I wait for you."

"Oh, Jean, you . . . you're wonderful. I don't deserve a friend like you; but I appreciate this so . . . much I want to get back to God and be sanctified wholly. This 'old nature' got me to do things I never dreamed I'd do. But it must go! Yes, I'll go home with you. I must get back to God! I must!" Gail's head dropped onto her arms and she wept brokenly. "Forgive me, Jean! Oh, please forgive me! I was so hateful and . . . and wicked."

Jean was beside her friend, her arms around her shoulders. "You know you're forgiven, Gail. Now finish whatever it is you are writing, then we'll go home. Mother will be glad to pray for you and so will I."

"But . . . what about Doug? I mean . . . I think he's great and. . . ."

Jean laughed softly. "No harm is liking a fellow. Gail but it is wrong to . . . to. . . ."

"Act like I did," Gail finished the sentence for Jean "Do you like him, Jean?" she asked quickly.

"Very much. But this doesn't mean anything. I'm young enough that I may have this feeling for several boys before God sends me His choice, Gail. With Bible School ahead, the Lord willing well, a lot of things could change."

Gail's eyes rested on her friend's sincere face. "You know what, Jean?" she said. "When I get saved and sanctified I want to be just like you. You're tops You're genuine."

"Strive only to be like Jesus, Gail. Never pattern your life upon frail humanity. Always, our prayer must be, too be like Jesus; To be like Jesus; All I ask, to be like Him.

"Christ shining through you and in you makes me more determined than ever to go all the way to the bottom this time."

"And you're going to strike The Rock!" Jean exclaimed with the triumph of faith as she settled down to studying while she waited for Gail.

There was a "sound of going in the tops of the mulberry trees"

Her eyes and ears of faith could feel it. Yea, see it!

She raised her head upward and said a victorious, "Thank You, Jesus, for Victory through the Blood!"

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THE END

