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Digital Edition 08/02/2001
By Holiness Data Ministry

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The Way Of A Maid With A Man

By Mrs. Paul E. King

From the January 21, 1973 Sunday School Beacon

"Digits, digits, digits -- swarming around like June bugs!" Artis exclaimed to her twin as she hung her coat in the entrance-way closet of the apartment they shared together. "The telephone company has gone slap-happy on digits, Sis. Do you like it?" She stood tall and slender -- and darkly-beautiful before her somewhat shorter but equally beautiful and fair, blonde-haired sister, Iris.

Iris' pleasant laughter filled the room. She put the book which she had been reading down and stretched lazily before answering her serious-minded sister. "I hadn't given too much thought to it," she admitted.

"Do you mean it, Iris? Actually mean it?" Artis' dark eyes searched her sister's face disbelievingly. "Why, nearly all the girls at the telephone company are complaining."

"I don't see why they should, Artis. It's a matter of getting accustomed to it. Once we get used to this new system it won't be any more difficult than the old. For all that matter, it may help simplify matters. I haven't had overmuch difficulty at the switchboard."

Donning an apron, Artis hurried into the kitchen to begin with the supper preparation. "I saw Melody Carr on my lunch hour today, Iris," she called as she slid seasoned and floured steak into the hot skillet. "She works in the post office now. Seems the post office is using digits in quite a confusing array too. Melody said it used to be that postal clerks could read names and places. Not anymore. The Administration in Washington started this frith and froth some better than thirty years ago when it forced a



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number on every citizen -- just like they do in penitentiaries. Now all you need to do is to remember about sixteen digits in a row on every individual, and if the numbers aren't there, back to the dead-letter office go tons and tons of mail. Melody said it's a grand mess. She despises the system as much as most of us do who work for the telephone company."

"One thing sure, Artis, I'm not going to lose sleep over it. Not one single wink!" and the carefree, happy-go-lucky Iris settled back to her book.

"You're on the same shift as usual this week, aren't you, Iris?" Artis asked, framing herself in the archway door between the living and dining rooms.

"Right. I'll have to leave in an hour and a half."

"Supper won't take long and..." Artis paused in the middle of her sentence. Her brows furrowed. "Why Iris Castleton! What are you reading? That title and cover doesn't look like a fit and proper book to be found in this apartment!"

Iris laughed again and flung her arms wide. "O my dear, dear Artis! Will you never grow up?" she remonstrated. "We're no longer children, you and I. We're twenty-one!"

"But if that book is what the title suggests, it's not fit for anyone to read! No matter what his age. And that picture on the cover . . ."

"Don't be so naive, Artis dear. We're on our own now. Forget about our home training. That may have been all right when we were little girls and growing up; but since we're on our own and are fully grown I have laid aside and cast away all that home training. I want to live like the rest of the world is living."

Artis stared at her sister in utter astonishment. Did she hear rightly? she wondered, or was she having a nightmare? She brushed a hand across her eyes then stumbled blindly to the kitchen.

"Don't feel badly about it," Iris called after her. "This isn't the first and only such book I've read," she confessed. "All during school I was at it. Mother and father didn't know, of course."

"But God did!" Artis said through her tears.

"O Sis, you're far too serious-minded!" Iris chided. "You'll get old before your time."

A torrent of tears spilled down Artis' cheeks. "O Iris! Iris! My dear sister! It can't be!" she sobbed. "We've always been so close to each other. Are we at the parting of the road now?"

"Of course not. Now shut off the tears. I can't stand them. It so happens that I have changed . . . slightly!"

"Slightly!" Artis echoed softly in profound shock. "Drastically, would be the more fitting of the two words. O Iris, we are what we read. Does this mean that my lovely sister's mind is wicked and unclean and defiled?"

"I'm 'broadening my mind and my thinking, Artis."

"And it is the 'broad' way that leads to doom and hell and damnation!"

Supper was eaten in strained silence. It tore painfully and grievously at Artis' tender and sensitive heart. "I love you so very much, Iris," she said softly, "we mustn't allow anything to bring a wedge between us. Get back on the right road, dear."

"I'm with the 'now' generation, Artis. I mean to learn all I can about them and from them; and take on their ways, their thinking and . . ."

"Oh no! No, Iris! You don't realize what you're saying!"

"Indeed I do! And don't try to change me nor stop me. I was a 'free-thinker' long before mother and father died."

A great heaving sob and groan escaped Artis' lips. She rushed into the bedroom and threw herself across the bed. She called a fond good-bye to her sister as she heard her leave for work but got no response.

She lay for a long while, too shocked to move almost. Her heart was sending great inward sobs and groans toward heaven. The cross of Christ was offensive indeed to many people, including her sister. Never before had she realized how wide the gap was between Christ and His followers and the world. She felt it keenly now. No wonder the Scripture said, "Can two walk together except they be agreed?"

Slowly she raised her body off the bed and dragged her feet across the floor to the kitchen. She felt suddenly old, and completely helpless where Iris was concerned. She washed and dried the dishes in a sort of mechanical way and a daze. The phone rang. "Hello," she answered, her voice coming out weak and small and completely unlike her.

"Artis, this is Steve. You sick or something?" he asked.

"O Steve!" she exclaimed, still too shocked and dazed to sound natural. "No, I'm not ill. Thank you."

"You . . . you don't sound like yourself."

"O Steve, just help me pray for Iris. I feel I'll die if she..."

"Iris. What happened?"

"She . . . she needs the Lord, Steve. Please join me in prayer, will you?"

"Indeed I will. It must be serious if you say so. Do you want me to come over?"

"Thanks, Steve. No. I'd be so happy to have you here but it wouldn't look good; and you know what Paul wrote about abstaining 'from the very appearance of evil.' I know you understand."

"I certainly do, Artis. I thank God for you. Your holy and clean Christian behaviour and conduct make it easy for me to serve the Lord."

"This is how God planned that it should be, Steve. Soon we'll be married then we'll be thankful and happy that our love was always pure and clean and of the highest kind. Just pray for Iris, Steve, and forgive me if I can't talk long. My heart is broken over my dear sister!" A sob rent her slender frame.

"Is .. is it Dennis?" Steve asked carefully.

"No. I've known for a long time that she and Dennis were getting quite serious, though. But Steve, he... he's too good for Iris. She'll ruin him and..."

"Why, Artis, you can't be serious! Certainly not!" Steve said, shocked.

"I am serious, Steve. Iris told me only a few hours ago that she is now a 'free-thinker' and a part of this poor lost 'now' generation. She's been 'broadening' her mind by reading books of a low, degrading nature, I can scarcely endure the thought of it. Excuse me, Steve. I must go and pray!"

"And I'll join you. Right now, too!" Steve said solemnly as he bid Artis good-bye.

Day after day the gap widened and grew. Then one morning Iris announced tartly, "Dennis and I are being married today, Sis. I'll be moving out of the apartment . . ."

"I shall miss you terribly, Iris; for I love you so. Change your way of living, dear and don't ruin Dennis. He's a good boy, even though he isn't a Christian. You should get right with God yourself so you could lead Dennis into salvation, Iris. He has a soul that will live on somewhere in eternity. You will recall mother's words: 'A woman can either make or break a man.' "

"The implication being, I gather, that my way of living will have ill effects upon Dennis?"

Artis was silent for a long while, searching for the right thing to say. "A woman wields tremendous power over a man" -- she answered softly but forthrightly -- "for either good or evil. He will someday answer to God for..."

"Stop it! Stop it!" Iris exploded. "I don't want to hear anything more from you! Dennis will someday come to enjoy my new way of living and thinking."

Sensing that talk was futile, Artis walked into the kitchen, away from her irate sister.

The apartment seemed empty after Iris had moved her belongings out with herself. Worse than the emptiness and loneliness was the fact that not once had Iris invited her sister to visit her and Dennis in their little rented house. This cut deeply. But after Artis and Steve were married the keenness of the hurt was gone.

Immediately after their marriage, Steve and Artis, while still on their honeymoon, erected and established a family altar. Artis' original apartment became their home and was a veritable heaven on earth. They attended Sunday School and church regularly and faithfully and grew by leaps and bounds in the things of God.

Steve was installed as Sunday School Superintendent in the church while Artis became the organist and teacher of a teen age girls' class. Under her Spirit-filled teaching and by her godly example, Artis' class grew until it had to be divided many times over. Steve, too, was prospering and flourishing in all ways through the daily example of his wife's godly life and her careful living and wise counsel.

Iris, meanwhile, was becoming more and more worldly minded and more liberal. Slowly and subtly she led Dennis on the downward path with her.

Two years later, while preparing for bed one evening, the phone in Steve and Artis' apartment rang insistently.

"Hello," Artis pleasant voice spoke into the mouthpiece.

"Sis! O Sis!" It was Iris, her voice was full of pathos and urgency. "Can you come over, Artis? Right away!"

"Iris!" Artis exclaimed.

"Please . . . right away, Artis!"

"We'll be there!" Artis answered, placing the receiver back in place. "Iris?" Steve questioned, hurrying into his shirt and slacks.

"Yes, Steve. She sounded scared and like she was in distress."

"It must be urgent if she finally decided to call," Steve remarked, his face in serious thought.

The porch light burned brightly as Steve and Artis pulled in front of the house. Before they could knock, the door swung ajar.

"Artis! Artis!" Iris exclaimed, throwing her arms around her sister. "Dennis! He.. he..."

"What happened?" Artis asked, her anxious eyes searching her sister's troubled looking face.

Steve hurried past his sister-in-law and dashed through the house in search of Dennis. In the den with the television belching out rot and filth, he paused, too shocked to believe his eyes. He took it all in at a single glance . . . the empty whiskey bottle, partially smoked cigarettes, the trashy magazines scattered across the floor and on the sofa, in a pool of blood . . . Dennis, dead! A pistol on the floor, lying where it had fallen from the now lifeless hand, and a wet mark from spilled whiskey, told the grim story.

Hearing voices coming toward him, Steve hurried through the doorway to meet his wife. Placing a steadying arm about her, he led her in an opposite direction. "Not in there, dear," he said softly, brokenly.

"O Steve! Steve!" Artis moaned. "Why did he do it? Why? He was such a promising young man and was once so morally good too."

"Perhaps I can answer that." It was Iris. No longer was she the self-assertive Iris of another day; she looked old and haggard and broken. Thrusting a note into her sister's trembling hand she said dazedly, "Read this!"

Unfolding the note, Steve and Artis read: "Sorry, Iris. I can't go on like this any longer. Your ambition to be popular and to be with the so-called 'in' crowd has led me on the downward path to hell. By the time you read this, my soul will be suffering the torments of hell. How I wish you had been like your twin sister! She inspires only the highest and noblest ideas in a man. You knew my weaknesses, and exploited them to the damnation of my poor soul. Your drugs are not satisfying. Neither is your whiskey. They have ruined my mind, robbed me of my morals, and are now damning my soul. There is no substitute for the salvation Artis possesses and which you have forsaken. Good-bye, Iris, until we meet in hell. There I shall curse you forever and ever. I shall give you no peace of mind "

Seeing the look of consternation on her sister's face, Iris sat down and in a tired, weak voice explained, "We were having trouble. I . . . I guess I wanted our lives patterned too much after the characters in the magazines."

Magazines! Immediately Artis remembered the kind of magazine she had seen her sister reading. "We are what we read." she had said. She shuddered and a numbness possessed her.

As if sensing her sister's thoughts and remembrance, Iris threw her hands out in justification of her statement, "We are living in a different day and age, Sis. Everybody is seeking thrills any more."

"Do you call that a thrill, Iris?" Artis asked brokenly, pointing toward the den where Dennis lay. "May God be merciful to your soul!" she exclaimed emphatically.

After seeing Dennis' silent form carried away in the hearse, Steve and Artis left for home. There was nothing they could do for Iris, who became suddenly belligerent and wild appearing as Artis tried to reason with her over spiritual things.

"O how very different things could have been, Steve! If only Iris . . ."

"How true!" Steve's hand reached over and caressed his wife's cold one. "Proverbs says something about 'the way of a man with a maid' In reverse, this has been 'the way of a maid with a man.' Your sister's influence was poison to her husband. It was damning to him! It reveals the power woman exercises over man, honey," Steve said thoughtfully.

"And God will hold each of us responsible for wielding that power wrongly and contrary to His will and His teaching!" Artis exclaimed with bowed head. "May God help me!"

The phone was ringing when they stepped into the apartment. "Hello. Hello," Steve called into the mouthpiece.

All he heard was a weird, wild scream. In the background, someone was shouting, "She's gone mad! Iris is crazy! She lost her mind. Do you suppose the drugs...?"

Iris was committed to a mental institution, driven there by sin and it's devastating, soul-damning effects.

" 'The way of transgressors is hard.' Hard!" Artis exclaimed, as she crawled-in bed.

"And the final end!" Steve said, " 'He that soweth to the flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption.' "

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THE END