

Copyright 2001 By Lucille King  
All Rights Reserved and Duplication  
Of This Publication Is Forbidden,  
Except For Personal Use

\* \* \* \* \*

Digital Edition 08/22/2001  
By Holiness Data Ministry

\* \* \* \* \*

## Void Of Offense

By Mr. Paul E. King

From the August 24, 1980 Sunday School Beacon

Shana hunched over her desk in deep concentration and thought, her pen moving furiously across the paper before her, writing down each precious thought and sentence just as God the Holy Spirit gave it to her. Writing had never been her forte, she knew, and this assignment proved more grueling and tedious than any she had ever done. Perhaps it was because it was to be strictly original.



"I can't do it!" Shana said.

She busied her face in the open palms of her hands, praying and waiting for another thought, when her mother called up the open stairway, "Astrid's here to see you, honey."

"Send her up, Mother. We're both working on the same theme for our speech and maybe she can give me a thought or two."

Hearing her friend's voice, Astrid bounded up the stairs. "Here!" she exclaimed nobly. "I went rummaging at The Book Nook at Walnut St. and found exactly what we need." With that she tossed an old, much-used, dog-eared book on Shana's desk. Shana picked the book up.

"Open it," Astrid told her. "A book's good-for-nothing until one peruses its contents."

"All right, Mr. Derksen!" Shana remarked, smiling. "You sounded almost like our literature teacher that time, And."

"Oh, did I? I don't know if that's a compliment or an insult though."

"Accept it as a compliment from me; I think he's pretty great where teaching is concerned. Especially when he opens with his 'A book's good-for-nothing until' line. That's when he gets you into the heart of the lesson. I learned a lot from him."

"Wait until you read that book, Shana! You'll really learn a lot. The answer to our problem lies on pages 20 through 140. Our speeches are there -- written out beautifully for us. Now all we'll have to do is copy them and memorize them and we're all set. I want the first speech; you can pick any of the others you want to."

Shana closed the book and looked at her friend. "But that's not right, Astrid. The rules of the contest are that all material submitted and memorized is to be strictly original."

"Oh, poof! Whoever heard of anything so stupid. Even writers aren't always original; they borrow something or someone for their thought. Artists, too. At least a lot of the time -- unless, of course, it's that horrid, interpretable, totally obnoxious abstract kind."

"But, Astrid," Shana persisted, "it's dishonest to copy a speech out of a book when we were told that our material must all be strictly original. I'm thoroughly amazed that out of all the students available in this area you and I were chosen to compete in the finals."

"You're terrific in speech, Shana; I'm not amazed that you were chosen."

"And you're fantastic with words," Shana told her friend. "So go home and put your 'thinking cap' on and come up with that prize-winning scholarship."

"We must not only write, Shana, but deliver as well. This is why I'm going to use that first speech out of the book It was written for me -- for this assignment, if you please. It's interesting, humorous, logical and factual. Furthermore, the book's ancient. Who'd ever think of going to an antique book store for anything like this? No one. Positively no one!"

"I can't do it. The rules say original, and original mine shall be." "You're crazy, Shana. This is just what we need. . . ."

"Not for me, Astrid. I must live with my conscience and I can't do it. By God's grace I mean to keep 'a conscience void of offense toward God, and toward men.'"

"You take everything too seriously, Shana. Honestly, I even wonder if you have any fun at all."

"Oh, I'm really quite happy, Astrid, and completely satisfied, too. I do have a certain amount of fun, but I have possession of a far greater blessing-joy. In Christ, one has joy. Fun is so transitory -- so . . . so shallow and short-lived; joy, on the other hand, is perpetual and constant."

"Well, I know one thing, Shana Wilson, you're a kill-joy and you're overly conscientious. And now I suppose you'll tattle on me."

Shana walked over to her friend. "Have I ever been known to be either a tattler or a gossip, And dear?" she asked softly.

"Well, no. But then we were never involved in anything so tense either. I'll tell you, Shana, I'm all keyed up over this."

"I've simply turned my speech-writing, speechmaking assignment over to God and asked that He write and speak through me. I mean to do my very best and leave the results with Him. Oh, Astrid, I do wish you'd turn the reins of your life and heart over to God. You'd be so happy, and when He saved you, you'd feel like tons of bricks were removed from your heart . . ."

"Look, Shana, I like you as a friend; so don't let's spoil that friendship by overmuch preaching. I'm not a bad girl; I go to church every Sunday, same as you. Not to your church, perhaps, but I do go to church. Well, I'll be seeing you. I'm going to type this speech and begin memorizing it. It's bound to be a winner, even if it's only second or third place."

Shana watched her friend through the upstairs bedroom window until she turned the corner and disappeared from sight. Then she settled down at the desk once more, her heart heavy and aching over Astrid's lost condition.

\* \* \*

Three weeks later four contestants took their places on the platform, among them, Shana and Astrid. The large auditorium was crowded to the door and an air of expectancy pervaded the atmosphere. Looking out over the crowd, Shana bowed her head and prayed for God to bless her speech and make it a blessing. It would, no doubt, be the only speech with anything spiritual and scriptural in it, she reasoned.

A quick glance at And told her what she had already known -- her friend was scared, as she herself was. And then she heard her name being called.

"Shana Wilson is our first speaker for this evening," Professor Tomlinson was saying. "Her subject is, 'True Happiness and How to Find It.' "

A volley of applause ascended as Shana walked to the center of the stage and in simple and beautiful articulation delivered her prepared speech in the allotted ten minutes. Then she took her seat, feeling beaten. Oh, if only she knew how to write on paper what her heart felt, she thought.

Then contestant number two -- a Dennis Broadhed from a city sixty miles distant -- was called to the center of the stage. His topic, "True Success and How to Obtain It," was presented impressively, the inflections of his voice emphasizing and stressing the most important phrases, questions and sentences. Shana was sure the young man would get the scholarship. He had a beautiful delivery.

There was loud applause when Dennis walked to his seat on the platform. Then Astrid's name was called.

Gazing at her friends as she walked toward the center and the microphones, Shana wondered if Astrid was ill. Her face was ashen-white and Shana was sure that her hands trembled. All the natural ease and poise and buoyancy of her friend was gone. Her cheeks turned suddenly strangely crimson and Shana was positive she saw a tear bounce off one cheek.

Stammering over the brief salutation, Astrid announced the title of her speech, "True Success and How to Obtain It." Then, for ten tedious, tension-filled minutes, there followed the identical speech given by the previous speaker, Dennis Broadhed. The crowd grew restless and some even hung their heads in embarrassed silence. The judges looked surprised and baffled, and Astrid felt modified and humiliated, longing for the floor to swallow her up.

The fourth and last speaker was another young man, Jeremy Drower, from a city eighty miles distant. From the minute he began speaking, Shana knew that here was a Christian gentleman. His speech, like hers, was poignant and weighty with spiritual truths. She wasn't a bit surprised, at the conclusion of the evening when the judges brought in their decision, to hear the name of Jeremy Drower called out as the winner of the scholarship.

The applause was thunderous, and when it died down and subsided, the professor said, "We are indeed sorry that two of the contestants broke the rules when they copied their speeches. It's quite a mystery, too, how one of these contestants, separated from the other by 60 miles, would use the identical topic and copy the identical speech out of the same book -- or some type of book -- as our local dishonest contestant has done.

"Although her material was not superior, yet because of the beautiful delivery of her originally-written speech and because of her honesty and uprightness, we are presenting Shana Wilson a scholarship, also. Ladies and gentlemen, the dual winners, Shana Wilson, another of your local contestants, and Jeremy Drower!"

Surprised beyond measure, Shana took her place beside the clean-cut, fine-looking, upright young man. They smiled at each other: The crowd stood to their feet, applauding.

Bowing her head, Shana gave thanks to God for helping her and for giving her a conscience void of offense toward Him and her fellowmen.

\* \* \* \* \*

THE END