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A Friend

By Mrs. Paul E. King

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Jill's my friend; believe me when I say this. But she can be the most frustrating, dumbest and most stupid acting person in all the world at times. Let me tell you why I say this. Then you'll see what I mean by my statement and understand its meaning better.

We were walking home from school one day and, as usual, we stopped and went into The Sweet Tooth Shop -- Mr. and Mrs. Hermanie make their own confections and are they ever yummy! Um-m! Mouth-watering and tongue-melting really!



Well, like I said, we stopped in the small but neat and meticulously-clean candy store and, like always, I ordered a favorite of mine -- five green jellied mints topped with a layer of scrumptious, airy-light, cloud-soft marshmallow and the whole thing coated over and wrapped up in a melt-in-your-mouth creamy green chocolate covering. Talk about being on cloud nine; it always seems to send my taste buds there!

Handing Rilla Hermanie my money and biting into one of the delightful concoctions at the same time, Rilla turned her full attention on Jill. "And now, what will you have?" she asked.

"Five, too?"

Jill shook her head.

"Four?" Mrs. Hermanie prodded gently, her hand resting on the tray of mints and her eyes studying Jill. Again Jill shook her head.

"Six?" Rilla asked with a merry twinkle in her sky-blue eyes.

"No? Well, maybe a dozen then?"

This time I almost feared for Jill's head and neck -- she shook it vehemently, with intensely-fierce force and earnestness.

"Some fudge then, perhaps? No? What about these coconut haystacks?" Rilla probed, her fingers "walking" the various trays while she spoke, her eyes all the while resting enigmatically upon my friend.

In profound embarrassment and chagrin, I felt color jump to my cheeks. Quickly I turned away, not wanting the kind, soft-spoken woman to see how thoroughly mortified and exasperated I was.

"Three? Good!"

I heard Mrs. Hermanie's soft voice and, turning, I caught her faint smile of relief and the slight shaking of her head, which seemed to be saying, "I just can't understand some teenagers these days." Then she pulled the tray of coconut haystacks toward her and lifted three plump, beautifully stacked delicious pieces out for bagging when once again, out of the corner of her eye, she saw the negative motion of Jill's shaking head. Like one begging for clemency or mercy, she cried, "What do you want?"

"Three!" Jill nearly shrieked the simple word out in a falsetto tone of voice.

I thought I would suffocate from shame and embarrassment.

"Three what?" Rilla's voice nearly broke. Instead of replying courteously and lady-like, Jill pointed. Imagine! She actually pointed -- to the mint delicacies, of all things!

"But I... I asked you!" Mrs. Hermanie remonstrated, sounding for the world like she was on the verge of tears.

Then, shocker of all shocks, Jill answered petulantly, "But you never said three!" I gasped.

"Oh, but I did!" Rilla cried out in defense. "After you put up three fingers..." Her voice trailed piteously inside the flagrant sweet-smelling shop.

"Well, I certainly didn't want those . . . those icky haystacks!" Jill protested, again petulantly and childishly.

By now I was doubly mortified. Bidding Mrs. Hermanie a pleasant good day and a sincere "God bless you," I hurried away, leaving Jill inside.

"You're some friend!" she exclaimed a short time later, hurrying down the street after me.

For a while I didn't say anything, just kept nibbling away on the delicious mints.

"What a friend you are!" Jill chided again, color mounting to her face, her gray-green eyes as cold as steel.

I stopped abruptly. "You can be so . . . so devastatingly exasperating!" I cried suddenly in open candor and embarrassment.

"When are you ever going to learn!" I implored. "You acted positively juvenile; and . . . and Mrs. Hermanie is such a sweet, dear woman."

"Now who's being exasperating?" Jill countered quickly. "Your exasperation has me utterly exasperated. Besides, you have devastated my self-esteem, and made me out as some hideous, ignominious character in the eyes of Rilla Hermanie. Why did you walk out on me...?"

Well, I guess by now you see why I said what I did. And the sad part is that Jill's not stupid or dumb mentally. Actually, she's very bright and highly intelligent. She's a straight A student and, of course, always on the honor roll. But where human relationships are concerned, well, she's a failure, making straight F's.

"Hey, dreamer, wake up! What are you thinking about, Sue?" Carron Kramer asked, sitting on the edge of my desk and eyeing me suspiciously. "Is it Wayne? Did he jilt you?" she asked quickly, with sincere concern.

"How could he jilt me when I've never allowed him to take me anywhere but to church two times and to the Sea Palace once?" I answered, pinching Carron's arm and sending her screaming across the room.

"I'm sorry, Carron," I apologized. "I honestly didn't think I pinched you that hard. I really didn't mean for it to hurt. Forgive me, please."

Grimacing, she hurried back to my desk, exclaiming, "Oh, Sue, you dear, dear girl! You know you didn't hurt me; it was a 'put-on' thing. I screamed just to be funny. You are so conscientious, so afraid of hurting anyone and of bringing pain or grief to them.

Bless you! We all love you for it, I must confess. But what were you thinking about, if it wasn't Wayne? Any of my business? Yes? Or no? No hard feelings either way."

"It wasn't Wayne. He's a very dear friend, it's true; but I have other things I want to do before I think of becoming too 'male conscious' -- in a serious way, I mean. Frankly, I was thinking about Jill."

"You must be kidding!"

"I'm not; I don't say a thing unless I mean it and unless it's so."

"But why Jill?" Carron wanted to know. "Nobody likes her."

"Wrong."

"I concede I'm wrong; I should have said 'nobody but you.' How you can stand to be around that girl and how you put up with her is a mystery to me, Sue."

Tears stung my eyes and surfaced. "Like I said, Carron, several weeks ago, if you'd ever give Jesus your heart and get saved, well, you'd understand why I'm concerned over Jill and why I love her. I think one of the saddest things of all would be to not have friends."

Tossing her head lightly, Carron said, "She's responsible for no one liking her, Sue. You know it's so. Honestly, she's completely and totally obnoxious and . . . and repulsive to be around. Ugh!" She shivered. "I can't stand her; she gives me the willies -- my word for the 'creeps'."

I sighed, feeling like a heavy weight was pressing down upon my heart.

"Don't feel too responsible for her," Carron advised. "After all, you can only do so much and no more; she pretty much does as she pleases and what she wants. I think you're feeding her ego by giving her so much attention. I really do, Sue."

"Please, Carron!" I remonstrated softly and kindly. "If I don't show the lonely girl a bit of Christian attention and charity, who will? She's terribly lonely; she wants the fellowship and the friendship of girls her own age and . . . and everybody shuns her like she has the black plague."

"She has it all right!" Carron exclaimed, grabbing a pen off my desk and doing a bit of quick art work on a scratch pad. "It's the black plague of 'self' and selfishness. What is blacker than that? Nobody can stand to be near her even. She's sold on herself and her scholastic abilities and achievements. Personally, I'm thankful she makes that A honor roll; it's the only thing she has going for her."

"But what good is making an honor roll when one doesn't have friends or know how to get along with people?" I asked in anguish, recalling a friend of my older sister who was a multi-talented man but lacked the ability to communicate with people, thereby isolating himself and becoming a virtual recluse.

"Like I said," Carron told me again, "don't feel over-responsible for her. Some people don't want to change. It wouldn't surprise me too much to know that she's one of them. Well, I'll see you later. It's almost time for that buzzer to send us back to class again. Sorry if I bothered you with your work."

"You didn't disturb me, Carron. In fact, I always enjoy your company. And don't forget, I'm still looking for you out to church."

"If I ever go anywhere, Sue, it'll be to your church. You're genuine, and I guess I'm too hard on Jill. I'm glad -- now that I think about it -- that you're nice to her. I believe you can help her..."

After Carron went back to her desk, I made a decision: I would talk to Jill (again).

Walking home from school with her, I said, "Jill, I really want to help you; I think you know this. You have hurt yourself by being selfish and so dreadfully self-centered. The Bible tells us that to have friends, one must show himself friendly. You have been anything but friendly to your fellow students and classmates, keeping yourself vainly aloof and frigidly cold. Your..."

"I thought you were my friend!" Jill exclaimed, interrupting my little speech and furrowing her brow in a frown.

"I am, Jill. I really and truly am your friend; that's why I'm telling you this. I want to help you. You're not happy, Jill; a selfish person is never truly happy."

"And how would you know?" she asked quickly. "You've never been selfish for so long as I've known you; so how would you know?"

"Observation," I replied simply and without preamble.

"Well, you can just go on with your 'observation' bit, and the selfish part, too, for all I care. As I see it, the students are jealous because I've never been on anything less than the straight A honor roll. They're jealous of me and of my grades."

"And you're proud and vain, and all wrong on that jealous theory," I told her kindly but frankly.

"And until God humbles you -- and He will someday, someday -- and until you want friends, well, I guess there's nothing I can do to help you."

"Sue!" Jill cried. "You . . . you never talked to me like this. You... you're not my friend."

Looking at me with those cold, calculating, gray-green eyes of hers, she crossed the street and walked home on the opposite side, never so much as turning her head when I called good-bye and told her that I loved her and would be praying for her.

As I entered our front door and was met by Mother and baby Kendra, my heart did funny, happy little flip flops. I was blest, I realized, with overwhelming love for my wonderful Lord and Saviour. He it was who had given me the rich heritage of a loving Christian family and the added blessing of many friends -- and all because one day I died out to self and the old self-life and turned the reins of my life over completely and entirely to God and to His will.

Hugging mother, then picking the laughing Kendra up, I determined anew that my prayers and intercession for Jill would be multiplied. I wanted her to know the joy of sins forgiven (as I had told her on numerous occasions) and the delight of having friends.

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THE END