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## Charity Vaunteth Not

By Mrs. Paul E. King

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Nancy finished peeling the potatoes and cleaning the carrots then put each on a separate burner to cook. Setting the table and checking on the slowly-browning blackberry cobbler in the oven, she then hurried up the stairs to her bedroom and changed into a clean, pale mint green dress, wanting to look her prettiest when Kent arrived.

Tucking stray wisps of unruly hair into her neat hair-do and spraying just the very smallest amount of a favorite perfume on her person, she made her way down to the kitchen and the bubbling cobbler which was now almost ready for taking out of the oven.



A quick glance out the window revealed Kent pulling up into the driveway in a brand new, shiny-red, sleek-looking sports car. Nancy gasped in surprise. So this was his reason for announcing his quick, unscheduled visit! When did he buy it? she wondered, marveling at the change in him since his rapid rise on the business ladder of success and prosperity.

She watched him slide easily and confidently from behind the steering wheel, her heart skipping a beat at seeing him. How very handsome and good looking he was, she mused, feeling a surge of love wash over her for him. They had gone through all their school years together, and when he noticed her in a "special" way one year ago, she felt highly honored to be "his girl." -- Kent's words.

Upon his graduation from high school several years ago, the accolade, "most likely to succeed," was bestowed upon him, and it was no ill-chosen accolade either; already, he was well on his way to the top.

Watching his long, easy, smooth strides as he came toward the door, Nancy wondered if his spiritual thermometer was as hot and as much at an all-time high as it used to be? She had mentioned this to him on several occasions and each time she received the same reply: "I'm all right, Nancy. Just because a fellow's successful doesn't mean he's disinterested in God."

There was a gnawing, nagging feeling inside her heart that things were not the same with Kent -- that the fire had burned down inside his heart. His answer was too shallow and entirely too vague.

Troubled, she hurried to the door to answer his loud, insistent knocking.

"Hi there," he greeted her lightly. "How's my girl?"

"Hi, yourself," Nancy countered, smiling up into his handsome face. "I have exciting news, Kent!" she added quickly, holding a letter up before him. "Well?" he said. Simply, "Well?"

Why was he always so totally disinterested and unmoved where her joy and her happiness was concerned? she wondered, her own spark of enthusiasm and eager anticipation fading like a morning vapor in the light of a blazing sun.

He stood there, looking at her with a disinterested expression. "Well?" he said again. "Get it over with; I have something really important to tell you." He smiled as he finished the last statement.

Something in the way he smiled and the way he looked at her always threw her off guard. "Come in," she said quickly, looking away from him. "What's the news?"

He asked the question as dryly as one would ask the price of hamburger, Nancy thought, replying, "Oh, it wouldn't interest you, I'm sure. But one time it did."

"Come now, what is it?" he cajoled. "Out with it; I have something really important to tell you. Something concerning our future..."

The sentence dangled enticingly over her.

"I'm accepted for Bible School," she said simply. What had seemed like such an excitingly-wonderful thing to tell him came out now with even less animation and enthusiasm than when she used to try to make soap bubbles by blowing through the

circle made by crooking her index finger to meet the thumb on her hand when a very small child.

She saw the varied expressions on Kent's face. Then quite suddenly he said, "Look, Nancy, Bible School is out; it doesn't work into my schedule..." She gasped. "But, Kent, you said..."

"That was before I struck it rich," he said quickly. "It's out, Nancy. O-U-T! And you'd better forget about it, too, if you want to continue on as my special."

Nancy swallowed. Her lips and mouth felt as dry as cotton; her heart constricted in fear and pain. She felt trapped. It was almost as if Kent were issuing her ultimatum.

"Kent," she said in a tiny, strange-sounding voice . . . a strained voice . . . "sometime ago it was decided that I'd get at least one year of Bible School in after I graduated, as you will recall. You agreed with me that it would be a good way for both of us to get our bearings, to find God's will for us . . . where He wanted us to go, if anywhere, and what He desired for us to do, and whether He intended for us to do His bidding together or to go our separate ways."

Color mounted quickly into Kent's cheeks. He looked angry, the young woman thought in alarm. Very angry and upset.

"Like I just said," he answered, "Bible School doesn't fit into my plans nor my future. When we discussed it, I had nothing greater to think about or plan for. But that's all changed. I just received another promotion -- a tremendously important promotion. I'm right next to the "big cheese" now. That's one reason I came over: to tell you. I thought you'd be happy to hear it. I'm elated, whether you are or aren't," he continued, indifferent of the anguished look he couldn't help but see on her lovely face. "In fact, I was so elated and excited that I went out and bought that shiny new 'job' standing in the driveway." He pointed an index finger toward the sleek-looking, expensive car.

Instead of feeling excitement and elation over the announcement, like she almost always did when he shared any bit of good news with her, Nancy was gripped with a sense of keen disappointment and shock. Her heart felt wrung; like a wrung-out dishcloth, she thought. "Here's what I want, Nancy..."

Always, she thought suddenly, it was that way: "Here's what I want... I want . . . I want." Never, what would she like, or what did she think?

"Are you listening?" he asked, grabbing her by the shoulder and shaking her roughly.

"Please, Kent!" she pleaded, shrugging free from his tight grasp. "You're hurting me."

"I'm sorry. But I don't think you were listening to me. I want us to be married the week after you graduate," he said. "You see, it's important that we do. I'll need you to help me project a good image -- an image of maturity that will command respect. It does this if a man of prestige and prominence is married. There's something of a... a domestic feeling when a possible wealthy client knows the boss is married. Certainly you can see through that; the valedictorian of her class is not a dunce."

Like one awaking out of a very frightening and fearful dream, Nancy replied, "No, she is not a dunce, Kent. At last she is beginning to see -- clearly. I . . . I'm sorry, but I can't marry you like that, Kent."

"Don't be silly, Nance! You know I love you. But I need you to help put this other across effectively and properly and in a big way. Can't you understand?" He threw his hands wide in a gesture of utter exasperation.

"I understand, Kent. Completely! And, God willing, I'll be going to Bible School, just as I planned."

"Come, come, dear girl! You don't know what I mean: I want us to be married soon -- just as quickly as possible after you have graduated. You'll do this for me, won't you, Nancy?"

Turning quickly, she said, "I think you ought to be going, Kent. Especially since it's quite obvious that we don't agree."

"It's you!" he accused angrily. "Don't you realize what this means to me? I'm almost at the top! One more step and I'll be there. Not bad for someone not yet twenty-three years old. No, not bad at all!"

Facing him with calm, clear eyes, Nancy said softly, "'Charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up.' "

"So that's what you think of me! Well, that's fine. There are others who..."

"Don't say it, Kent," Nancy interrupted.

"Please! And I really do think you'd better leave now."

Making a sound of utter disgust and impatience, Kent replied, "I'll leave as you requested, but you'll be sorry. You're not the only girl in the world. Remember that. I'll give you a couple of days to think it over and then... well..."

His sentence trailed menacingly over her head. "I won't need the time, Kent, thanks. I feel quite confident that I know God's will. Now, 'Can two walk together, except they be agreed?' " she quoted.

"You're being unreasonable!" he ejaculated. "God's Word is never unreasonable, Kent. There was a time in your life when you felt about spiritual things exactly as I feel."

Looking askance at her, Kent turned on his heel and stormed out of the door, leaving nothing behind but an intensely shocking and brooding silence.

Nancy breathed a great sigh of relief when she heard the car drive away. He was indeed angry, she knew, and with that bit of knowledge came an even greater revelation: Kent had backslid.

The thought overwhelmed her. Tears washed her eyes. Oh, she must not become judgmental, she thought. Yet, a tree was known by its fruit, and the "fruit" which she had just seen on such bold display was not that "of the Spirit." Where did that leave Kent since, with spiritual things, there was no neutral ground? One belonged either to Christ or to the Devil, she thought, busying herself with finishing the evening meal.

Kent hadn't called by the following day and Nancy felt strangely relieved. When he appeared at her door three days later and she heard the cold anger in his voice as he all but shouted, "Do you think I'd wait a year for you to decide whether or not you want me and all I can offer you! How foolish! How utterly foolish. There are plenty who would jump at my offer; they'd fall at my feet and..."

"Choose one of those others then, Kent," Nancy said quietly as she stared at his flushed face in utter disbelief.

Calming down somewhat and taken aback by Nancy's reply, Kent said, "I'll give you a week to make up your mind..."

"Like I told you a few days ago, Kent, I don't need time; I'm sure I know God's will for me, and this includes Bible School. I've been doing a lot of praying and my spiritual vision has cleared considerably."

"All right! You have made the decision. Good-bye!"

Speechless, Nancy stared at the retreating figure of the handsome young man, marveling that she felt no heartbreak at all over the final verdict. Instead, she let out a great sigh of relief. God's way, and His will, was all she wanted for her life -- today and always. True love was unselfish, thinking only in terms of making the object of love happy.

Suddenly Kent seemed like a stranger. Her mother's oft-repeated statement that "All that glitters is not gold" was now made realistic and clear.

Falling to her knees, she thanked God for allowing her to see the real man before she became too emotionally involved with him. It was as though scales had dropped from her eyes, she thought, feeling God's love wash over her happy soul.

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THE END