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Flowers By Flowers

By Mrs. Paul E. King

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Darrel looked toward his sister. She was bent over a large bed of petunias, working diligently away at pinching off the dead blooms and allowing only the brightly-colored flowers to remain.

Taking careful aim and whistling loudly, he threw the lump of dirt in her direction, hitting her lightly on the back of her head, continuing his work all the while as though he had done nothing amiss.

Darla lifted her head and looked in her brother's direction. Darrel was busy with the long-spouted water can, dutifully watering the seeming endless rows of flowers and plants in flat after flat after fiat.



She stood to her feet and straightened her back, her eyes taking in the beauty around her. Everywhere she looked she saw the beauty and the glory of spring's welcome arrival. Oh, she and Darrel were fortunate indeed to have gotten this job, she realized with thankfulness and gratitude to God for giving them work after school and all day Saturday, too.

She got down on her knees again and continued with her work. A second clump of dirt landed on the back of her head., Turning, she caught the grin on her brother's face. "Darrel!" she exclaimed, laughing softly. "You'll have my hair a mess."

"Sorry," the eighteen-year-old apologized mischievously, "but I honestly couldn't resist the temptation, Sis. Then, too, I decided I'd see how true to aim and mark my pitcher's arm is." He laughed pleasantly.

"No problem there, Darrel; the back of a head's not exactly a tiny target. Don't let your perfect score inflate your ego," Darla teased, "not until you hit something smaller than the back of your sister's head, at least."

"You looked so vulnerable and irresistible," the senior admitted with a chuckle.

"I'm glad it was my head and not one of Mr. Flowers' ornamental shrubs nor one of his pretty flower pots. He wouldn't appreciate having anything tossed on his beautiful things. Oh, I just love working here, Darrel. Look at the dogwood trees! They're beautiful! And all these other trees and bushes and flowers. Everything smells so clean and fragrant and earthy. I love it."

"And here comes some customers. Your turn to wait on them, Darla."

Getting to her feet and brushing the dirt off her skirt, Darla hurried along the row of flats to where the three women were looking over some vegetable plants.

"May I help you?" she asked pleasantly and sweetly.

"After a while," came the immediate reply from "one of the women. "We'd like to browse a bit, OK?"

"Enjoy yourself," Darla said. "I don't blame you. It's too bad more people don't pause to view all this beauty. Just look at those young trees in bloom! And these beautiful flowers."

By now, the three women were totally aware of the beauty of the immediate surroundings. "I think I'll have a look at those fruit trees," one of them told her companions. "Harold's been wanting to replace two of his peach trees and get another apple tree." And the woman walked over to the fruit trees.

One of the other women made her way among the myriad oriental shrubs and bushes while the third lingered among the brightly-colored flower and vegetable plants.

Darla went back to her care of the flowers when more customers came up. One of them, a man, seemed to be in a big hurry.

"May I help you?" she asked sweetly, going to his side.

"You certainly may, young lady. I want two dozen tomato plants, half a dozen banana pepper plants, a dozen cucumber plants. And don't forget to throw some extras in," he ordered sternly.

Darla looked at him. "I'll fill your order, Sir, but I can't put in any extras..., only if you pay for them."

"What's wrong with slipping in a few extras? Suppose the plants die? The boss'll never know the difference."

Getting a trowel and some papers, Darla said softly, "I don't own this business, Sir; I only work here. The rule is that nothing 'extra' goes into the packages. The plants are priced accordingly and Mr. Flowers sees to it that you get only stout and healthy plants. These are the only kind he sells. If planted properly and taken care of, he guarantees his plants and trees and shrubs and bushes. He handles only the best of everything."

The man spat contemptuously on the ground. "I suppose, judging from your old-fashioned appearance, it would be a violation of your conscience, huh?"

"Of my conscience and my heart," came Darla's instant reply. "I am a Christian, Sir..."

"No sermon, please! I had enough of that when I was a kid at home. Now get those plants and be quick about it; I'm in a hurry."

"What variety of tomato plants did you want?" she asked, noting that none was specified.

"Just any kind," he replied. Then, quickly, "Guess the wife would like something that would make good slicing though."

Darla suggested several excellent varieties for this and the burly man agreed to it.

When she had the order ready and the bill tallied, she gave the packages to the man. "Still no extras?" he taunted.

"No extras," Darla replied with a smile as she rang up the sale on the cash register. "With proper planting and care, you should have quite a fine selection of vegetables. Have a nice day."

Grumbling about not getting "even a couple of extras," the man got into his car and drove away.

She waited on the woman who had been looking over the splendid variety of vegetables and flowers, and sold three fruit trees to her friend. She was just on her way to finish cleaning out the dead and wilted petunias from the flats when Mr. Flowers approached her. "A word with you, Darla," he said, motioning her aside.

Darla hurried to her employer, wondering what she had done wrong. Mr. Flowers was known to be a hard man to work for, and she had felt so fortunate in having secured the job. Both her brother and she enjoyed working among green things., living things and now Mr. Flowers was asking to see her.

"How many extra plants did you slip inside Mr. Finnigan's packages?"

Darla trembled. Mr. Flowers was so skillful and adept at frightening her, she thought, sending a hasty prayer heavenward. "None, Sir," she replied quickly and truthfully.

"You Sure?"

"Positive."

"Did he ask for any? He always does," the owner said, answering his own question.

Darla nodded that he did indeed ask.

"And why didn't you give him any extras?"

The question, so unexpected and shocking, shook Darla. "I couldn't do that, Mr. Flowers," she cried. "I'm a Christian. And Christians don't cheat and disobey their employer's orders. Darrel and I were hired with the understanding that we would be working for you, and according to your orders. I couldn't give extra plants; that would be dishonest of me."

"He heckled you, I'm sure."

"Somewhat; but it could have been worse, I'm sure. I just stood my ground..."

By now there was a broad grin on Mr. Flowers' ordinarily serious face. "I'm sorry if I frightened you," he said apologetically, "but I wanted to know why you and your brother were like you are. Now I know! I heard and saw Mr. Finnigan when he tried to put the pressure on you and I admire you and your courage, Darla. At last, I have found two whom I can depend upon and two who are honest and upright. You and your brother will have work for as long as you desire to work. I'm in desperate need of a fun-time employee to take over the gardening supplies and fertilizer and seed part of the business and I feel Darrel's my man. He graduates in June, right?"

"The Lord willing, yes."

"Well, congratulations, Darla, for proving to a many-times disappointed businessman that the world still has a few honest and upright people living in it. And now I'll be running along. I want to find your brother and see if I can't hire him full-time. You're the kind I've been waiting for."

When he was gone, Darla let out a big sigh. Mr. Flowers wasn't nearly so hard and austere as they had heard he was; he was just being cautious and observant and careful . . . necessary characteristics for any businessman, she decided.

A stream of cars pulled into the parking space and Darla hastened forward to help the many customers needing help. Living the Christian life wasn't hard at all; not when one was genuinely saved and wholly sanctified like Darrel and she had been. It was just a natural for the child of God to be honest and upright as it was to breathe, she thought, smiling happily.

Flowers by Flowers, the big illuminated sign above the entranceway said. Suddenly Darla thought it was one of the loveliest signs in the entire area.

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THE END