"How stupid can you be!" Terry snapped, looking down at the desolate form of Thurman Bright as he stood holding the shoe box out to Terry. "I told you what I wanted, Thurm. I thought I'd taught you better than this. Just look at what you brought out for me! Can't you read code numbers?"

Red with embarrassment, Thurman said meekly, "But this is the number you quoted to me over the phone, Terry. It is, I wrote it down exactly
the way you gave it to me. See?" and he extracted a slip of paper from his pocket and handed it to his friend, saying, "I wondered what you'd want with this style of shoe."

"Well, I don't want it; and this isn't the number I gave you. Now get out of my way while I find my own shoes. I'm in a big hurry and I thought I'd save time by having you get them for me so I could just run in and pick them up. That wedding's at two o'clock! Do you realize what this delay is costing me? I'll be late, that's what."

Thurman stood like one struck dumb. He felt dazed. This wasn't the Terry he had admired all during their high school years together. Surely not!

Brushing past Thurman with a haughty air and a command to, "Write this up for me. Hurry! I don't have time for dribbling nor fooling around. This is the pair I told you to have ready for me. See?" and Terry shoved the boxed shoes under Thurman's eyes, then disappeared in the crowd of rushing, hurried shoppers.

Thurman watched him go then shook his head in disbelief, wondering why Terry had waited until the very last minute to buy a new pair of shoes.

Shrugging his shoulders lightly, he tried to find an excuse for his friend's behavior., maybe Terry hadn't known, until he called, that he needed a new pair of shoes. But his attitude! Whew! There just wasn't any excuse for that! Not if Terry loved the Lord the way he said he did.

It was a mind-boggling thing, this different Terry --something he just didn't have the answer to. Now, if he were saved . . . like Terry said he was . . . well, maybe he'd understand. But . . . on second thought, did he want what Terry had if it would make him hateful and blunt and impolite and rude?

Thurman knew the answer; it was a big, positive "no." Turning, he hurried to wait on a customer.

"I tell you, Gaff," Terry said, sitting beside one of the bridesmaids during the wedding reception, "that Thurman Bright's a dunce. He's stupid. Stupid! I got him on with me in Fair's Shoe Store, and I even trained him. Taught him would be the better, more proper word, I guess. But imagine my surprise when I got there today, after giving him the number of the shoes I
wanted over the phone, and discovered he didn't know how to read simple codes or numbers! Whew! I don't know what to think of him."

"Maybe you gave him the wrong number, Terry. It's easy to do that when you're working stock."

"Me? Wrong number! Forget it, Gail. He's stupid, that's what. I wonder that Mr. Fair keeps him on."

"He must be doing something right, Terry, or he wouldn't be staying there. You know the little rhyme Elwood Yantz made up when he worked there:

Yantz-y, Yantz-y do beware
Today you work for Mr. Fair.
Watch your P's and watch your Q's
Or you'll be getting walking shoes.

Mr. Fair seems to like Thurman, from all I've heard. And haven't you been talking to him about the Lord, too? A testimony minus the life lived is void. A mockery, really."

Terry popped a nut in his mouth. "Whose side are you on, Gaff?" he asked impatiently.

"The Lord's."

"I didn't mean that and you know it. If you think Thurm's so great and wonderful why don't you go down and tell him so?"

"It's really showing up now. Blossoming out like the miserable, vile flower it is."

Turning, Terry said heatedly, "Just what are you implying, Gaff? That I have carnality?"

"Well, don't you, Terry? Can you say with all honesty and truthfulness that every bit of carnality's gone? That there is no root of bitterness inside that's troubling you? If you can't, you know what to do, where to plunge. The fountain's always flowing."
"You make me sick!" Terry exclaimed, getting up from the table and stalking out of the room. A bit of fresh air would do him good, he was sure.

He walked around the building two times. Then, deciding that he wouldn't be missed or needed anymore, he slid behind the wheel of his pale yellow convertible and headed for the highway, hurt and shocked over Gaff's frankness and openness. The ever-gentle Gaff had certainly not been gentle with him today, he thought, wounded inside.

The convertible sputtered then coughed. "What next?" he asked aloud, pulling off the highway and checking beneath the hood. Everything looked in tiptop shape.

Slamming the hood down and starting back into the car, his eyes fell on the shoes. They were like a biblical crowing rooster to his conscience, accusing him with, "You were rude to Thurman; carnal, too. You saw how embarrassed he was. How hurt. How do you expect to win him to God? The life you live speaks volumes. Can you witness to him again without feeling condemnation?"

Terry slid beneath the wheel of the car, feeling hot and flushed in spite of the rapidly-falling thermometer. First Gaff; now this!

He turned the key in the ignition but nothing happened. Another check beneath the hood left him with the same facts as the first check had done; all was well and in good shape.

A brisk wind was rising now. He hurried into the car. His eyes fell on the shoes, and the questions and accusations repeated themselves like a worn-out or broken record.

Reaching down, Terry removed the shoes and tossed them into the back seat. "Miserable accusers!" he exclaimed. Then he relaxed . . . or tried to . . . wondering what he should do. The car was practically new, bought in late fall. So it couldn't be a matter of worn-out parts, he was certain.

"Will you ever be able to witness to Thurman again?" the shoes seemed to be screaming the question to him from the back seat. "You were rude to him..."
Turning and facing the shoes, he yelled, "Shut up, will you?"

"Can you say with all honesty, Terry, that every bit of carnality's gone?" It was Gaff now. Over and over, the question repeated itself in his mind.

Terry was growing impatient. Well, for everyone's benefit, he thought, Thurman is stupid.

Quickly, something carried him back to when he was a boy eleven-twelve years old. Lessons were boring and he was both lazy and inattentive. But for the patient, kind and long-suffering teacher he'd had, he'd have graduated a real dunce, a true simpleton. But that faithful teacher had demonstrated such patience and kindness to him, encouraging him to apply himself, until the "tide turned"; light broke through and he got to the place where he actually enjoyed school and his lessons and graduated with an A average. Not once had his teacher told him he was stupid.

The thought brought tears to Terry's eyes. He guessed he had been a bit too impulsive. Too rude and blunt. Well, he'd make it up to Thurm from here on out. He certainly would.

"But what about your testimony? Do you suppose he'll listen after this afternoon."

Suddenly Terry knew what he must do. Turning the key in the ignition, the motor turned over and he headed along the highway toward home.

He stopped in front of the mall, parked and got out. Then he remembered the shoes in the back seat and put them on, making a straight line to Fair's Shoe Store.

Thurman had his back turned when Terry entered the store. His shoulders looked like they were sagging, Terry thought, feeling a wave of compassion wash over him for this boy who had been his friend all his life.

"Thurm," he said, stepping up behind him. "Thurm, I'm sorry for calling you stupid. I want you to forgive me. I didn't display the Lord Jesus Christ at all. Rather, I've put Him to an open shame again."
"Why, Terry, I..."

"I'm carnal, Thurm," Terry confessed. "But I don't intend to remain this way. After I have your forgiveness and your blessing, I'm heading for the church to do business with God. He has total victory and deliverance over all these evil traits. Forgive me for being rude and impolite and impatient with you. I got to thinking, and it's possible that I did quote the wrong numbers to you. At any rate, I want to shoulder all the blame. I mean to make it into Heaven."

"Why, Terry, how could I not forgive you when you come to me like this and..., and are so humble! Of course, you're forgiven. You know you are. And am I ever glad you've apologized; I believe in you again. I had just about decided there was nothing to salvation, that it was all a sham. But this! Well, I don't know how to say it other than that there's got to be something to it."

"There is, Thurman; believe me, there is. And it's real. You'll see, and experience, the difference when you get saved and sanctified wholly. And now I must hurry. I have an appointment with God. See you tomorrow, the Lord willing."

Heading the car toward the church, Terry began praying. It was a prayer of forgiveness for his manifest explosion in the shoe store as well as at the reception table. He would ask Gail's forgiveness as soon as he could reach her, he decided, remembering that he had one whole, entirely new New Year in which to demonstrate the cleansing, purging power of Pentecost in his life.

It was time to change, he thought, pressing the accelerator. Yes, a time to change. He could hardly wait until his knees hit the floor in front of the altar.

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THE END