GREATER THAN THESE
by: Mrs. Paul E. King

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SheraLyn stacked the books neatly on the top of her desk, readying them for carrying home as soon as the school buzzer sounded for dismissal. Carefully, she clipped her pen onto the notebook, slid a pencil into the inside of the ring-bindered text book and sat quietly in her seat, embarrassed over the noisy shuffle of feet as her peers became impatient for the buzzer to ring. Behind her, she heard several desk tops slam shut with a loud bang.
Mr. Brewster glanced over the top of his black-rimmed glasses, pushed them up on the bridge of his nose, and got to his feet, in that order. Folding his arms in the I-caught-you-in-the-act attitude, uniquely his own, he exclaimed with unmistakable authority, "Quiet! You're not dismissed yet. Use the remaining minutes for study." Then, just as quickly as he had risen to his full six-foot-three height, he sat down and busied himself with the stacks of papers on his desk.

SheraLyn, looking at him out of the corner of her china-blue eyes, decided that he was grading papers. Test papers, she was sure. A wave of sympathy and pity surged over her for her teacher. He was a good teacher. Excellent, really. And why her counterparts acted so rudely and shamefully towards him was a sort of mystery to her. Perhaps he really did know what he was talking about when he told the class one day after a disturbance by several classmates that he could tell what kind of home each came from by the way they conducted themselves and carried on in school.

It was a sobering thought to the conscientious, careful-living girl. She respected her teachers. Every single one of them. Not that all of them lived the way she knew God's Word declared they should live, no indeed, but because they were her teachers.

She opened her literature book and began reading where she had left off earlier in the afternoon, as per teacher's advice. No need wasting precious time. What she wasted and squandered of it today could never again be captured and regained, she knew. And, too, minutes were the substance of which hours were made up of.

She was still reading when the buzzer sounded and there was a mad dash made for the door by her classmates, who got practically wedged in the doorway in their attempt to get out en-mass. They pushed and slid and shoved and yelled, "Hey we're free; free for another weekend! Yippee! Hooray!"

As their yelling died down and faded away, SheraLyn collected her books together, slid them carefully off her desk into the cradle of her arm and walked timidly but gracefully toward the doorway, calling softly to her teacher to have a pleasant weekend before starting down the now mostly-empty hallway for home.
Mr. Brewster turned his head, thanked her for her thoughtfulness, told her good-bye, and watched her as she left the room. To a discerning eye, and he was that, SheraLyn gave evidence of future beauty, unusual graces and refinement and intellectual superiority, not to mention her already outstanding Christian character and witness. And to think that Melissa Sandstone and two or three of her friends had been making fun of SheraLyn because her dresses were not bought in the store and failed to have the name brands on them.

Mr. Brewster shook his head sadly. Contemporaries of sixteen are not noticeably discerning, he thought, and apparently SheraLyn's romantic awkwardness (or lack of romanticism), her lowered-lid shyness and generally unoffering voice seemed to them evidence only of incapacity. If only they knew, he thought. Yes, if only they knew. Someday the real SheraLyn would emerge. Not loudly and vociferously, he was sure; but quietly and silently. She would excel. See if he wasn't right. There was an untiring determination and patience in her.

He got to his feet, arranged the papers to take home for grading, then stretched his long arms and sighed tiredly. He would have to tell Marilyn about Melissa Sandstone's unkind remarks concerning SheraLyn's clothes. Yes, he would; his wife was extremely fond of the quiet girl. She had taken care of their twins on more than one occasion and Marilyn had told him that she would never again entrust their precious twins with anyone but SheraLyn. "She is totally trustworthy and competent," Marilyn had told him repeatedly. "And she's conscientious and caring, too."

Again the teacher sighed; then he arranged the books neatly on the top of his desk, opened the drawer and slid the pencils into the narrow groove made just for pencils and pens, closed the drawer, and leaned back in his swivel chair, lazily eyeing the student exodus through the windows in his room.

"Friday," he said to no one in particular as he smiled. Yes, Friday was not a day on which pupils clustered around his desk for yet another word on a particular subject or any of the silly questions usually presented to him during the week. Friday was free day. For the students at least.
He got to his feet and walked toward the hall just as SheraLyn closed the door to her locker and started for the heavy doors to the outside. It bothered him, Melissa's unkind remarks. And he was sure SheraLyn had heard it she was just around the corner when Melissa said it. Had Melissa known and done it intentionally? He wondered about that, now that he had time to ponder over it. He was not given to being presumptuous, yet, somehow, he couldn't help but believe that the attractive and popular Melissa had done it intentionally and willfully. To hurt, he was certain; she was prone to doing this sort of thing.

He stood for a while, thinking about it; then he turned quickly back to his desk, gathered the test papers together and placed them inside his attache case. He was a teacher, not a psychologist. SheraLyn would surmount the fun-poking barbs. She had something within her that would make her rise above it, he knew. He sighed with relief.

SheraLyn walked down the tree-lined sidewalk so familiar to her. She heard the buses pull away with their load of noisy pupils and felt relieved to know that she was not on one of them. The walk home afforded her time to think, to pray and meditate, and to enjoy God's things of beauty all around her. She felt a kinship of sorts with the outdoor creatures who seemed as timid and shy as she was around her peers. She never would fit into their mold. Never! God, for Christ's sake, had washed her sins away with precious blood. Consequently, she was made new in Christ; old things had passed away and all things were made new.

She had no desire to please the worldly crowd. None whatever. Neither had she ever tried to speak the loud, rapid, familiar repartee of high school, delicious to so many in its lack of grace or clarity. The language of the initiate. She would never belong to the "in crowd" at school. But little matter; she had long ago settled it that she was going to Heaven, and Heaven bound people just did not fit into the world's mold. She knew that she was not at the snug center of the storm which was high school society, nor even vacillating on its outer fringes. Yes, she knew all of this. But she was listed on Heaven's roster. In the Book of Life her name was recorded. That was the only important thing.

She heard a footstep behind her, and before she could turn to see who was following a male voice said, "Mind if I walk with you?"
SheraLyn looked up to see a tall, broad-shouldered young man fall in step with her. "Not at all," she replied kindly. "You're Drew Pierce, I believe. Right?"

"Right. I'm rather new to Sunset High. Dad was transferred here a few weeks ago. I believe someone told me your name is SheraLyn Cooke?"

"That is correct," SheraLyn answered softly, shyly. "I would like to welcome you to our community and invite you to our church."

"That was one of the things I wanted to speak to you about. But first, let me say that I overheard the sarcasm of that obnoxious blonde. What difference does it make if one can't wear brand name clothes?"

Shy though she was, SheraLyn found it easy to speak to Drew. "Oh, that!" she exclaimed. "Melissa's a sweet girl, really. She tries so hard to impress people. Peers especially. You see, her folks are rarely ever home with her and I think she does these things to cover her hurt and pain. And she actually does wear name brand clothing. That is true."

"That part doesn't bother me," Drew said stoutly. "What name tag's on her clothing, I mean. It's the dig and the sarcasm she hurled at you in front of a bunch of girls. And she had to have known you were within earshot when she said it. That bothers me. I mean, that's just downright . . ."

"Don't say it, Drew," SheraLyn interrupted sweetly. "True, it wasn't the most courteous thing to do. But who are we to complain? Jesus was mocked also, and He didn't deserve it."

"Neither do you."

"It helps to make one strong inside, Drew. So I will praise the Lord for that. He said for us to give thanks in all things, that this was the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning us. True, I can't wear expensive clothing, clothing with big names attached to it. But the Bible has something to say about that too. It says we're not to wear expensive clothes -- 'Not costly array' is how it is stated. My mother makes all my clothes. She's a tremendous seamstress, and I would dare to say that her workmanship far exceeds and excels that on the bought clothing."
"Well, all I can say is, Melissa has a problem. A 'pride' problem."

"Like I said, Drew, Melissa is a sweet girl. At least I think she is. She's to be pitied. I can't imagine what it would be like to seldom have one's parents home with them. I'm sure it would be fertile soil for insecurity to develop and mature."

Drew's brows furrowed in thoughtful contemplation. "I'm sure you're right, SheraLyn and I should not have said anything about Melissa. But it was extremely rude and unkind of her. No one ever gains anything by tearing someone else down in trying to build self up. In the long run, that individual is the loser. And what I have seen displayed through you in these few weeks since coming to school here, well, it's far greater than any of the most expensive name brand clothes. A truly God-like, holy spirit and Christian attitude is far greater than any of these little worldly"

"Thanks, Drew. Thanks much. I have tried to make everything that comes into my life a learning, benefiting experience. I am asking God to make my life a shining example of His holiness and righteousness to those 'name brand girls.' Instead of dwelling on the things they say and do, I try to occupy my thoughts and my time with exciting things, like being a soul winner and inviting other young people to church. Clothes seem totally inconsequential when one gets a taste of working with God to bring another soul into His family. Which brings me to the point; I'd love to have you attend our church. Are you a born again Christian, Drew, washed in the blood of the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ?"

A smile tugged at the young man's mouth. "A hearty and heart experienced "I am' answer!" Drew exclaimed emphatically. "And if you hadn't asked me, I planned on dogging your footsteps someday until I found out where you went to church. You're sanctified wholly, too, I'm sure . . ."

"Yes, I am, Drew; cleansed from all the old carnal nature and alive unto Christ."

"Praise the Lord! And SheraLyn, thanks for being such a good example. It was easy for me to pick you out from all the rest. 'Ye are the light of the world,' " he quoted, finishing with, " 'A city that is set on an hull cannot be hid.' "
Tears shimmered in the china-blue eyes. There were many things greater than name brand clothes: This was one of them, she thought happily.