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**SHANNA**  
**By Mrs. Paul E. King**

I felt like I'd been double crossed by my very best friend, Shanna. The pain inside my chest seemed almost unbearable. I had trusted Shanna. Completely. She and I shared the usual amount of girl secrets which, more often than not, amounted to little or nothing. Still, we had the satisfaction of sharing and yes, of giggling. How deliciously-delightful it was to giggle over something known only to the two of us!

I stifled a sob that tore at my heart, wondering again how Shanna could have done what she did and what had motivated her action. I was incredulous. I had believed her when she told me that she wouldn't betray the trust I had placed in her. I hoped -- with all my heart -- that my parents wouldn't find it out My mother especially. Morn was as tight lipped as a clam when it come to repeating or telling a thing. She declared firmly that "the church world could be spared of ninety-nine plus percent of its turmoil and trouble and strife if everyone kept his/her tongue and minded only his/her business and affairs," end of quote.

I glanced quickly at the clock above the fountain in Miss Tate's Gift Shop, where I worked during the summer months and after school, and noticed the bands pointing to the hour I got off work. This evening, more than ever, I was loathe to leave the cozy and quaint little shop. I felt sure that by now Mother had received word about what I had told Shanna in strict secrecy and confidence. Miss Tate's Shop seemed like a haven for me now.

I found a speck of dust on an exquisite piece of crystal so hurried back to the neatly-kept cupboard where she kept the polishing cloths and the polishes, waxes, cleaners and sprays; anything to keep from going home just next.

"Kathleen Marie."

Miss Tate was calling my name from a little side room in which she did needlepoint and crochet when business wasn't brisk.

"Yes, Miss Tate?"

"It's time for you to close. Didn't you notice?" "Yes, ma'am. I'll leave just as soon as I clean the dust off a piece of crystal up near the front of the shop. Thank you for reminding me."

"You are welcome. And Kathleen, lock the front door then slide the bolt into position; you may leave via my back kitchen door. I have the tea kettle on the burner; thought a cup of hot tea and some cookies may refresh both of us."

"Oh thank you, Miss Tate; I'll love having tea with you." I polished the piece of crystal until it sparkled and shone brilliantly beneath the chandelier overhead; then I locked the door, turned off all the lights and followed Miss Tate through the doorway of her shop into the kitchen where I saw the glass-topped kitchen table set for two. Like Miss Tate, the kitchen bespoke of total orderliness, neatness, good taste, and cleanliness. I felt right at home, much like I was still inside the shop, and for a while I forgot all about Shanna and what she had done.

The walk home was delightful. There were times, like tonight, when I still could scarcely believe that I alone was chosen, of many young women, to work in the beautiful gift shop. I knew it had come as a definite answer to many prayers. This was without any doubt in my mind.

I felt most highly honored to be employed by the middle-aged spinster, whose lover had died shortly before they were to have been married, she had confided once to me, adding sadly, "There will never be anyone else for me; I loved Robert too deeply. Other men have pursued me, but they have gotten nowhere: my heart still belongs to Robert -- the only man I have ever loved or will ever be able to love." And Miss Tate had wiped tears off her cheeks when she finished speaking.

The subject had never again been brought up nor mentioned, and I felt that it never would. In my inner being, however, I felt highly honored to have been the one to whom the sad episode had been told and related. And on more than one occasion I had conjured up in my mind a picture of a tall, broad-shouldered, laughing man escorting my employer to and from school functions and church services. I was sure they had made a handsome couple, for, even yet, Miss Tate was a most attractive woman.

I saw the lights inside our house and like a great tidal wave everything washed over me. sweeping away Miss Tare and every beautiful thought I'd had and cherished on the way home. I felt myself getting hot then cold, hot then cold, and by the time I got to the door I was wiping perspiration from my face.

I stood in silence for a moment and took a long, deep breath of the cool, early evening air, then opened the door and stepped inside.

"Oh, hi, Katie" Cherie chortled happily as she ran to me with chubby little arms open wide.

"Hello, Sweetheart," I answered, stooping down and, in one big swoop, gathering the bright-eyed girl up into my arms and dancing merrily around the room with her.

Cherie squealed with glee and delight, relishing every moment of this nightly ritual.

"That you, Kathleen?" Mother asked as she peeked around the kitchen doorway.

"None other but me, Mother," I answered, still cuddling my sister and hurrying out to Mother.

"Have a good evening?" Mother questioned sweetly. "I always have good evenings working for Miss Tate. I love that little shop more and more, I do believe. And sometimes I can scarcely believe I'm the one who's working for her. She's a wonderful employer, Mother."

"And knowing my daughter as well as I do, I know Miss Tate has a conscientious and wonderful employee. By the way, did you see Shanna today?"

At mention of Shanna's name I felt myself wilt. "Only from way down the street, just before going into Miss Tate's gift shop on my way to work," I replied, sitting down in the nearest chair.

Cherie entwined her little arms more tightly around my neck and snuggled closely to my bosom. I buried my hot face in her silken, soft, sweet-smelling curls.

"Shanna called here. She seemed troubled over something." I gasped.

"Do you have any idea what could be troubling her, Kathleen? She sounded as though she was crying."

I took a long, deep breath. Then I said, "Oh, Mother, I wish I had remembered not to speak; not to tell Shanna what I did!"

Mother came over to where I sat. She saw the tears trickle down my cheeks then drop into Cherie's soft curls. Placing her hand on my shoulder, she said, "Tell me about it, honey; you'll feel better, and then we'll talk to the Lord about it."

I felt like I was going to burst with grief and remorse. "It . . . it's about the Carpenters, Mother; they're getting a divorce."

"Is that true, Katie?" Mother probed gently, calling me by my nickname. "Someone said they saw it in the paper; but you know how gossip is."

"Yes, it's true. But I should not have said anything to anyone but . . . but to the Lord." "Are you sure it's true?"

"Positive. Mrs. Carpenter was in the gift shop last week and she told Miss Tate and me. She said her husband told her he didn't love her anymore, so he was leaving. She said she couldn't tell the children. Especially not Brandon. He loves his father too deeply. She said she didn't know what would happen when Brandon found it out. She was crying so hard she could scarcely talk. Then she turned to me and begged me to pray for them."

"Did she ask you not to say anything, Katie?" "No. But if she didn't want Brandon to know about it that meant that it should not have been repeated. And I didn't tell it to anyone else but Shanna. And now the whole town seems to know all about it. And . . . and, Mother, Brandon ran away. No one knows where he is. Oh, I feel so . . . so . . ."

"Kathleen, listen to me. please." Mother remarked, interrupting my unfinished sentence and pulling up a chair beside mine. "What if Shanna didn't tell anyone else?"

"But Mother, I didn't breathe it to another person. I only told her because I felt she and I could pray together about it. We always do this, you know."

"I know you do. And that's why I say, suppose it wasn't Shanna who talked? Shanna's not any more of a gossip than you are."

I lifted my head and looked into my mother's face. She took her apron and brushed the tears off my cheeks.

"If Mrs. Carpenter talked so freely to Miss Tare and you in the shop, could it not be possible that she told others about it, Katie? She's nearly beside herself with grief and shock, I'm sure. Was anyone else inside the shop when she told you and Miss Tate about it, dear?" "There were two women in one end of the store, yes" "Well. . . ."

My mother's single word gave impact to what she had just said.

"One of the women was Josiah Bridge's wife. I didn't know the other one"

"Josiah Bridge's wife, huh? Now dry your tears, Katie, and then I want you to call Shanna. You're worrying needlessly over something for which you're not responsible. Mrs. Adelaide Bridge is the newspaper's gossip reporter."

"But Brandon, Mother; what's going to happen to him? It was cruel for him to have to find this out through someone's idle gossip and loose tongue"

"How very true. But we'll pray for Brandon. The Lord knows where he is. And always remember, Kathleen, that the tongue can be a thing of great blessing or a curse. Don't spread tales -- never. Now go and call Shanna. I have a feeling she is worried that, now that the news is out, you may be wondering if she told it."

"Oh, Mother, thank you. I know you're right. And I know now, that Shanna didn't tell. How could I have doubted her when she's never broken a confidence before!"

I put Cherie down then hurried to the phone. I could scarcely wait until I could apologize to my dear friend for having had worries and doubts about her.

With a light heart, I dialed her number.