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BLIND DATE
By Mrs. Paul E. King

"Don't look now, Crista, but I think we're being followed," Ileta said softly to her friend as they left the dime store and started up the street to the shoe repair shop, where Crista was to pick up the pair of shoes which her father had taken there earlier.

"Oh no!" Crista exclaimed in alarm, fearing the worst and feeling panic boil up inside her. It seemed the newsmen were always giving some terrible report about teens disappearing and being murdered. She wanted to run; instead, she said, "What can we do? We could scream. There are ever so many people coming and going. Surely, someone would help us and . . . and hear us."

Ileta covered her mouth with her hand and giggled. "Oh, Crista, you're funny. I didn't mean that kind of being followed. it's Bill Prantis. The new boy at school; the tall, blonde-haired, handsome heart-stopper. The fellow with the soft but deep laugh, whose smile hypnotizes most of the girls and leaves them positively speechless and breathless. Do you still want to scream?" Ileta teased.

"Well, no. Bill would think we're a couple of weirdos instead of two very ordinary but devout Christian girls. I'm sure he won't harm us, even though we don't know him very well. He seems perfectly rational of mind, and normal and harmless too, don't you agree?"

"I certainly do, my friend," and Ileta giggled again. "What's so funny?" Crista asked, smiling.

"You," Ileta answered. "That 'rational of mind' bit, Crista."

"Well he does, and it's true, I'm sure. For, usually, you can tell if someone's not exactly normal, can't you?"

"Oh Crista, you're such a dear friend, and so serious minded. But I love you for it. You wouldn't be Crista if you tried to be like, say, Marietta Green."

"Marietta Green! Why Ileta Wagoner, I guess I wouldn't. Marietta's a clown. I sometimes wonder if she has even a thimbleful of seriousness to her credit. But I suppose if God made you that way there's nothing much you can do to change it. And the nice thing about Marietta's clown-ishness is that it's as natural for her as breathing is. There's no put-on -- no sham -- with her."

"She's just like her father, my dad tells me. Jeff Green and Dad were in the same grades all through their school years, and Dad said Jeff was a natural-born comedian. He kept the teachers and students laughing most of the time," Ileta informed.

"Wouldn't that have been a bit of a trial to the teachers?" Crista asked seriously. "After all, books and studies aren't exactly a laughing matter. Miss Nissan gets utterly -- and profoundly -- exasperated and upset with Marietta at times. I feel sorry for her. Miss Nissan, I mean. She seems totally frustrated; like she doesn't know what to do, nor how to cope with Marietta's clownishness some days."

"But everybody seems to like Marietta, Crista. She's friendly and sweet, and you can't help but like her."

"I suppose it bears out the writing of the poet, who penned, 'Laugh, and the world laughs with you; weep, and you weep alone.' And since God made each of us different, well, Marietta will have to be Marietta. But I'm thankful the world isn't made up of all clowns and comedians. Nor of all serious minded persons either," Crista added meaningfully with a smile.

"My, my, how serious minded you seem to be," Bill remarked, stepping from behind the two and falling in step with them. "Sorry, but I did get fragments of your conversation and bits and pieces of what you were saying," he confessed, giving them a charmingly-genuine smile. "But I didn't try to eavesdrop, and this is a fact."

"We were just discussing Marietta and her natural and normal clownishness," Ileta replied.

"And my seriousness," Crista added softly. "It's a good thing we're not all made alike, isn't it? God made some one way and some another. He's so wise. And because of His wisdom we have a world full of different but extremely interesting people."

"Marietta's fun to be around," Bill said. "But a steady diet of cutting up and clowning becomes tiring and tedious to me."

"But she can't help it that she's like this," Ileta defended sweetly. "She inherited it from her father. He's exactly like Marietta. Or, I suppose I should say, she's a carbon copy of him."

"And like Ileta said to me, Marietta's a sweet girl," Crista added. "This is a fact. And I'm sure that if we knew her thoughts, she'd think me extremely

boring and tiring to be around. My serious minded nature and personality is completely opposite of her natural wit and humor."

"But it would be far more relaxing and easy to be around you for a long period of time than to be around a comedian for the same time period, day in and day out," Bill asserted. "But enough of this. I have a favor to ask of one of you. . . ."

Ileta and Crista looked at each other, wondering what was coming.

"A favor?" Ileta finally asked. "Like what?"

Bill smiled again. His blue eyes looked like a clear summer sky more than ever, the girls noticed. He was, indeed, handsome. But there were things of far greater importance than a handsome face and sky-blue eyes and a disengaging smile for a Christian to take into account and think about. Oh yes. Things of spiritual worth and eternal value. Little matter about the handsome face and fine looking external features when and if the heart was empty and devoid of God's holy presence and His grace and out of step with what the Bible taught and instructed.

"I need help. . . ." Again Bill let the simple statement trail.

Was it for affectation or to arouse curiosity? each girl wondered quickly.

"Help?" Ileta was incredulous. "Whatever with, or for?" she asked, finding Bill Prantis a bit mystifying and mysterious. He knew where both Crista and she stood when it came to moral issues and right versus wrong; knew, too, that they were Christians. So what kind of help had he referred to?

Bill looked from Ileta to Crista. Then he broke out in a hearty laugh. "Oh Crista," he said, "don't look so utterly mystified and sober. I'm not going to ask either of you to do anything wicked or . . . or wrong. I know how you feel about God and the Bible and I know you're both real Christians. I know all this: I've been observing you closely ever since you talked to me about my soul the first week of my arrival at school. And even though I haven't gotten born again, as you told me tearfully that I'd have to do to get into Heaven, I admire each of you greatly for your stand for the Lord and how you live your separated-from-the-world lives. I find it beautiful and quite refreshing and

wholesome, though a bit old-fashioned and . . . and puritanical. But it becomes each. of you."

"I wish you'd give your heart to the Lord," Crista said with deep feeling. "You have no idea how wonderful it is to be saved and know you're ready to meet God, and ready for Heaven if you should die."

Bill smiled broadly. "Thanks Crista, I'll take your word for it. But I'm not ready to take that step just yet. Now, how about it; will you help me?"

"That depends," Ileta and Crista replied simultaneously and in unison.

"It's nothing much, really," Bill said. "A cousin of mine is coming here for the weekend: I need a date for him."

Crista gasped. Incredulity registered plainly and visibly on her face.

Bill spoke up quickly. "You're transparent, Crista; I read your answer: It's written all over your face. Look," he added pleadingly, "Cody's not a villain. He's O.K. He and I've had many good times together. He won't harm you."

"But Bill, a blind date!" Ileta was shocked. "Well . . .?"

The girls were silent; they were speechless with shock.

"Hey," Bill said, "what's wrong with asking you for a blind date? It's not like I don't know with whom I'm pairing you. Cody's a nice guy. I'd like him to have a good time while he's here. I have a date for myself, but I need someone for him. I told him I'd rig up a blind date for him with a pretty girl. How about it?"

"Rig up a blind date for him!" Crista exclaimed in utter disbelief and shock. "Did you think either of us would accept, Bill? Now did you, truthfully? Is this your way of mocking us?" she asked softly but tearfully.

"Bill Prantis," Ileta said, "if you had my father for your father and he'd ever find out that you proposed to 'rig' up a blind date for your cousin, he'd teach you a few lessons that you'd never forget. That's an insult to women

who are ladies. Why ask Crista and me? You pretty well knew the answer before you asked, didn't you?"

Bill's face flushed scarlet. "I'm sorry if I insulted your ladyship," he apologized sincerely and profusely. "I honestly didn't mean to insult either of you. I suppose I did phrase it rather crudely and . . . and offensively. But I meant no harm by it."

"But Bill, the school is full of girls who'd gladly and willingly 'help' you out and go with your cousin and you on your 'rigged' up blind date," Ileta stated. "Why didn't you ask one of them? You know Christians don't date non-Christians; not if they follow what the Bible teaches. This applies to both Christian men and Christian women."

"Do you really want to know why I asked for either one of you; do you?" Bill asked seriously.

"Why?" Crista asked kindly. "I'm sure you didn't expect us to say yes."

Bill hung his head. "Frankly, I was pretty sure you'd turn me down. But, truthfully, I was hoping you wouldn't. You see, you're two of the most sensible and unspoiled young women I've ever met or known. You're neither fickle nor flirty nor pushy and aggressive. In a nutshell, you're genuine and real; no phoniness in either one of you. I knew I wouldn't be embarrassed by anything either of you would say or do and I didn't want Cody to be disappointed with my choice for him."

The girls felt genuinely sorry for Bill. But sorry or not, they knew God's higher law and standard forbade them dating an unsaved boy, be it Bill or Cody.

"Why not do something together, just you and Cody?" Crista asked. "I'm sure he'd enjoy time alone with you. Or, even, some of your male friends, Bill. At least you wouldn't need to worry about his blind date being an embarrassment to either him or you, if this is your concern. And we'd be delighted and overjoyed to have you and Cody come to our young people's meeting on Sunday evening. I'm absolutely sure you'd enjoy the service."

"And we'll be going to Mister Crotts' orchard on Saturday, God willing, to pick apples," Ileta added. "Why not come along? Mister Crotts invited our

entire young people's group out for freshly-pressed cider and doughnuts and hot chocolate. And we're going to help him get his apple harvest in. Wayne and Wilfred and Amy and Cindy Crotts are all in our group. Please come. I'm sure your cousin and you would enjoy every minute of the day. Christians have such good times together; times of clean fun and laughter and wholesome fellowship."

"Thanks much. It sounds like fun. But I've made other plans for Saturday. I'll mention it to Cody, though, and if he'd like to come you may see us there. I've seen the Crotts' orchard advertised in the paper. Well, I must run along now. Stay like you are; don't change." And Bill turned and walked away.

"That's a new one for us to 'chalk' up in our memory book of strange happenings," Ileta said to Crista as they walked homeward.

"And I believe Bill would have been disappointed in us had either of us accepted his proposition, Ileta. Know what? I'm going to double up on my praying for Bill. I believe he's more interested in God and the things of God than he's letting on to us."

"You know something, Crista? I think you're right. And right here, on Honeywell Street, I promise and pledge to pray more earnestly for Bill's salvation." With serious thoughts, they walked on.