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THE SHAM
By Mrs. Paul E. King

Todd stood on the steps of Waterbury Christian High and waited for his sister, thinking about Kelli Sue. She was new to the school this year and, without any second thoughts, Kelli Sue was proving to be extremely popular. With Samuel Bender especially and particularly. And, Todd admitted to no one except to his silent heart, she was fastening herself to his own thoughts in no little way.

He wasn't sure if he should be happy or cautious over this; after all, Kelli Sue was new and he knew nothing much about her, only that this was her first year ever in Waterbury Christian High and that she seemed to be OK. He didn't know if Kelli Sue was a really, really true Christian though, and this niggled at his brain at times. Still, she said she was, didn't she?

"Catch!" a voice shouted, and Todd came out of his reverie in time to see Kip's long legs striding easily along the sidewalk toward bus number 323, and just in time to catch the apple Kip had tossed his way. Almost, he missed the apple, so totally and completely oblivious of Kip's presence he had been.

"Thanks," he called after Kip. Then he bit into the apple. It was delicious.

Kip turned and smiled. "Thought you'd enjoy it, Todd. It was fresh-picked from one of Dad's trees this morning. See you tomorrow, the Lord willing."

"The apple's super, Kip. Thanks again. Until tomorrow, God willing, have a nice evening."

Todd turned and saw Kate coming through the doorway, a string of girl friends by her side, all of them seeming to be talking at once and laughing heartily.

"Over here, Kate," Todd called, waving his arms to get his sister's attention and tossing the apple core away at the same time. Kate was quite a girl. Yes, quite a girl. She never seemed to lack for friends. She seemed to know when to speak and when to keep silent and to not speak. She refrained from gossip, but she was friendly and sweet and kind to everybody and she had many friends. Yes, many friends.

"Over here, Kate," Todd called again, more loudly this time.

Ginny Raines saw Todd's waving arms. "Todd's waiting for you, Kate," Ginny said, pointing an index finger in Todd's direction.

"Thanks, Ginny," Kate said. Detaching herself from her friends, she hurried over to Todd and waved a hasty good-bye in their direction.

Kelli Sue followed Kate and, in her softest voice, she said, "I wish I had a brother like Todd to walk me home from school. You're lucky, Kate."

Kate smiled up at her brother, saying, "I feel I'm blest to have a brother like Todd. But actually, it's our folks' idea that he wait and walk home with me. They've been concerned about some of the things that have been happening in our town lately. Todd's kind of like my bodyguard." Kate laughed when she said it.

"Like I said, Kate, you're one lucky girl to have a brother like Todd." She fluttered her eyes and smiled at Todd.

"We don't go in for 'luck' at our house, Kelli," Kate replied sweetly. "We believe these blessings all come from God. Todd is a blessing, I feel."

Todd blushed. "Hey, stop it!" he exclaimed good-naturedly. "I don't like palaver, Kate."

"It isn't palaver, Todd; it's the truth. Sorry if I embarrassed you. Forgive me, please. I didn't mean to embarrass you. I was only speaking the truth from my heart."

"Forgive me too, Kate, for calling your sincere compliment palaver. I know you only say what you mean. I should not have made that statement."

"What is this?" Kelli Sue asked quickly. "Are you always like this? I mean, well, why ask for forgiveness over something so . . . so . . . meaningless? It doesn't make sense."

"But it does, Kelli," Kate said softly and sweetly. "It keeps one's heart soft and tender and one's conscience clear and free of guilt. It's also a wonderful way of keeping one humble. Both Todd and I are born again and sanctified wholly and. . . ."

"What does that have to do with it?" Kelli Sue asked derisively, breaking into Kate's unfinished statement. "To me, it sounds like you're.., well... softies. Pushovers. Too churchy. Maybe I'm glad I don't have a brother like you after all, Todd," she added with sarcasm as she walked away.

Todd stood like one in shock. He was dumfounded. He blinked his eyes.

"You all right?" Kate asked, as her brother watched the blue-eyed blonde disappear around the side of the school building.

Todd scratched his head and looked at his sister, saying, "That was a close call, Kate. Whew! A close call."

"Close call? What do you mean by that remark?" Kate asked.

Shaking his head in apparent disbelief, the tall, almost-eighteen-year-old said, "I'm not sure you'd understand. But I know one thing, and that is that I'm disappointed in myself:"

"That's a new one," Kate remarked. "Whatever made you say that?" she asked. "Generally, people are disappointed in someone beside themselves."

"I said it because I mean it, Sis, that's why. How easily one can be swayed and fooled by a person!"

"Meaning . . .?"

"Like I said, I'm not sure you'd understand, Kate; you're a girl."

"I know a lot of girls who have excellent ability at understanding things," Kate stated with a faint smile. Quickly, she said, "It's a good thing you saw first-hand what Kelli Sue is like."

Todd sucked his breath in quick like. "What made you say that?" he countered softly.

"I have eyes, Todd. You were becoming a bit enamored over Kelli Sue's feminine charms and her wiles. As Mother so often tells us, 'All that glitters is not gold.' I hope you'll never forget this. It's so easy, if we aren't watchful and mindful of Satan's clever ploys and his deceitfulness, to succumb to those ploys and pitfalls. Kelli Sue knows how to charm the fellows. She really needs the Lord."

"But she says she's a Christian, Kate."

"Jesus said we'd know a person by his fruit. Kelli Sue needs Jesus, Todd."

"Out with it, Kate," Todd said. "I know you well enough to believe that you know something conclusive and positive about the blue-eyed blonde. So, what is it?"

Kate sighed, then she remarked, "You know what the Bible has to say about the talebearer, Todd, and by God's grace and His help and power I mean to never ever be a talebearer or a gossip. God hates this."

"But Kate, I'm sure the Lord isn't going to hold it against you if you tell me whatever it is you know about Kelli Sue. Both the Lord and I know you're not a talebearer nor a gossip. Why, if everybody was as careful with his tongue as you are there wouldn't be a problem in the world. Not a single one. So, what is it about Kelli Sue?"

"Kindly, I say it, Todd. Kindly, and with love and compassion," Kate replied. "She's a sham. She professes to be a Christian, but she isn't. She told me this herself. She said her profession of faith is a cover-up because she's coming to our Christian school. She felt if she said she was a Christian nobody would ask her where she stood with the Lord."

Todd gasped. "That's a lie then, Kate. Isn't she scared of God's punishment? I mean, well, she is lying deliberately. This is a scary thing to do. I'd be scared that the judgments of God would fall on me."

"Kelli Sue's rebelling. She didn't want to come here to school; her parents said she had to. She hates it here."

"Why? This is a wonderful school," Todd declared defensively, with fierce loyalty to Waterbury Christian High.

"The rules chafe her," Kate stated sadly. "And nothing's exciting enough. She's 'bored stiff with all this religious stuff,' her own words. But let's not discuss her anymore, please. Talk gets us nowhere and may put wrong thoughts in our mind toward her. Prayer still works miracles. Never forget this. Kelli Sue's on my prayer list. She'll make a wonderful Christian when

she's converted and then gets sanctified wholly. I just thank God that your eyes have been opened. This is an answer to prayer, Todd, and I'm expecting the same thing to happen to Samuel. The Lord's going to help him. He's always been a sensible and steady fellow. God's going to enlighten Samuel in His own way."

"You're quite a girl!" Todd exclaimed, looking down admiringly upon his petite sister, who was one year and one month younger than he. "I feel ashamed of myself;" he added, "for beginning to get carried away by a . . . a sham. You found the key, Kate; the key of staying on the right road and of not being deceived by a handsome face or, in Kelli's case, a face of beauty. By God's grace, I mean to do more drilling -- on my knees."

"It's the most rewarding kind of drill work," Kate answered softly. "It will keep you on the strait and narrow road, Todd. Every time!"

"And that road, my little sister, will lead us to Heaven," Todd stated reverently as they walked homeward along the sun-draped street.