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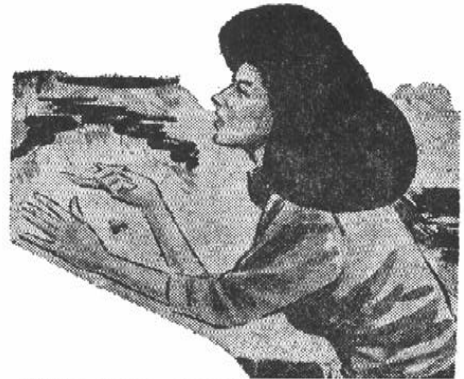
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## True Thankfulness

By Mrs. Paul E. King

From the November 26. 1972 Sunday School Beacon

Joan hurried down the hallway and cast quick, critical glances into the rooms on either side of the hall. Everything was neatness and order and spotlessly clean. She took it all in at a glance. The boys teased that she had "detective eyes." She frowned at the appellation, knowing full well that it was more of an accusation than a jest. Coming upon the boys' bedrooms, she paused. Charlie and David were in Bob's room and what was to have been a clean-up hour turned suddenly into a hobby session. Books, toys, games, and clothing that had been brought out of place to be straightened and put back properly were now scattered helter-skelter throughout the two rooms and even in the hall, while the boys sat engrossed in the process of assembling a model airplane.



"And your rooms had better be just as beautiful!" she snapped.

"This piece comes next." David laughed with glee as he handed his older brother Bob a wing.

"It's going to be a beauty!" Charles exclaimed, watching the plane take shape and form under Bob's skilled hands.

"And your rooms had better be just as beautiful!" Joan snapped as she surveyed the disarrangement of things on the floor.

The boys looked at her in surprise.

"Aw, Mom," David moaned, "Bob's almost finished with the plane. Can't we finish? Please?"

"We'll clean our rooms, Mother," Bob said softly, wondering what had happened to his one-time sweet mother. "May I finish it for Charles and David?"

"I want these rooms straightened up. This is Thanksgiving Day!" Joan reminded sternly. "Everything must be finished and cleaned within the next hour!" she ordered, as she walked briskly down the hall toward the kitchen.

She finished peeling the potatoes then set the big pot with its heavy contents on the stove. She may as well turn the burner on "Low" and get the potatoes to a slow boil before she had too many of "the clan" under foot, she soliloquized bitterly.

The delicious fragrance of browning turkey and oven-glazed ham, mingled with the spicy aroma of still-hot pumpkin and mince meat pies gave her a feeling of inner satisfaction .... if not peace and calm.

She brushed her hand across her forehead and sighed heavily. What had happened to her, she wondered suddenly. Where had the bitterness and lack of patience and understanding crept into her life? and when? How could she be truly thankful with such bitterness in her heart.

She leaned over the sink and looked through the prettily curtained windows to the woods, and the snow that lay soft and white and clean on the earth, the evergreens and trees. Soon it would be laced with paths and trails and footprints everywhere. Soon, too, her lawn would sport from one to four or five snowmen plus snow sculptures, with Bob Sr. and his four brothers taking part in the creations. And, of course, her beautiful house that had been neat and spotlessly clean would soon sport mud tracks, along with the heavy, pungent odor of wet socks and mittens and gloves drying.

At thought of it, Joan cringed. Why did the entire "clan" have to spend Thanksgiving at their house every single year? It wasn't fair. Not when Bob had four brothers and three sisters who were just as capable of cooking as she. They should take turns at entertaining, she thought. But, no, they had all insisted that since Bob and she lived in the country, with a house of many rooms and a dining room large enough to accommodate a small army, that it was the only place in the world for them to share the special day.

She thought back miserably of last year. Until then, it had always been all right with her for the Willard "clan" to have Thanksgiving at their house. For she had no family ties of her own, having been reared in an orphanage. Then Chip, the youngest of the boys and the last son, had married and brought Harriet along. Harriet was young and talented and beautiful. What was more, she was deeply spiritual and it was plain to see

that father and mother Willard loved her deeply and felt Chip... the Willard nickname for Maurice .. had made a wise choice indeed.

Harriet was always pleasant and sunny and cheerful and so unworldly. She was a plain little thing who possessed graces boundless, it seemed. She had a heart full of love for everybody and was nothing other than kindness and goodness. This in itself bothered Joan no end.

What baffled her most of all though, and upset her completely, was Harriet's spirit of contentment in the midst of poverty. Chip was pastor of a struggling little church in Buttermilk Falls, his salary the total and stupendous sum of ten dollars per week (when, and if, the people could pay it!).

Chip, who never complained, was forced to work four days out of the week; and was known to put much of his earnings back into the church to keep it going. Harriet was right in there beside him, encouraging him to do it. She never grumbled or murmured and complained but was always full of praise and thanksgiving to God.

Joan looked around on her own furnishings. She saw the new deep-red velvet drapes that off-set the Austrian curtains at her living room windows, the thick, deeper-toned red of the carpeting on the floor and the elegant furniture Bob had just had the furniture store deliver two weeks earlier . . . after her continual whining and complaining over how "shoddy" the old was looking.

A pang of guilt shot through her. How easy it had been for her to be pleasant and patient and compassionate and understanding with Bob and their children when their house was more modestly furnished. She had even had time to play games with them and to read to them, too. She remembered with pain, how happy and content she was those days. Hers had been a satisfied way of living -- a fulfilled life.

She remembered, too, of the long agonizing months when Bob Jr. lingered between life and death in the hospital, breathing only with the aid of the iron lung. How close she was to God then and how easy it had been for her to pray clear through in those days of trial and testing. How thankful she and Bob had been when, by a Divine miracle and Divine intervention, Bob Jr. came home from the hospital and in short order had learned to walk again. The doctors had termed it, "A Miracle." And indeed it had been.., a miracle of Divine healing; for Bob Jr. walked with not even so much as the hint of a limp! Yes, those were good days. Happy and satisfied days, Joan soliloquized silently. Days that were filled with inner peace and joy and contentment even though Bob's weekly pay-check was small and many times far from adequate to meet even the barest of the necessary things.

Suddenly, she saw what had happened.., and when.

From the time Bob had been promoted to the Superintendency in his department and his weekly pay-checks had soared with the promotion, Joan's unsanctified heart had overflowed with an insatiable desire for "things." True, some were badly needed and were, therefore, not sinful to obtain and acquire. But many other things stemmed purely from a selfish desire to have things that made her house look like the Secrist's who lived a mile down the lane.

She saw suddenly that her desires had been of a covetous nature, and as such she had broken one of the Ten Commandments and was, therefore, in the sight of God, guilty of breaking them all, as the Scripture plainly taught. No need for pretending now. She knew where she stood with God. She had lost all the grace of God that she at one time had possessed. Any woman who wanted all for self and who resented her husband giving generously to the church and the cause of God was most certainly backslid and needed to do her first works over!

"O my God!" She groaned, as she dropped to the floor on her knees. "Forgive me!" she cried. "I craved things instead of You! Please forgive me and save my soul again! Give me right perspectives. My vision's been off focus. Give me Thy peace and I shall be truly thankful again."

The potatoes began to bubble and boil happily, gently. On and on she prayed until the peace and joy which one time were hers flooded her soul anew.

Quickly she arose and started down the hallway.

The boys met her.

"We're through, Mother," Bob said quickly, not wanting to be scolded. "You can go in and inspect our rooms."

"It's all right, Son," Joan said softly. "I've been too harsh and sharp with you dear boys. Please forgive me."

"Of course we will, Mother; but .... "

"I found my way back," she said, hugging the trio to her. "Back into the arms of my Saviour."

"You... you mean . . . you'll read the Bible to us again?" Charles asked, his eyes lighting up with glad surprise.

"And . . . play games, too?" David inquired.

"It means all that and more, dear children. From this day on, I will be more thankful than ever for my many wonderful, daily little, taken-for-granted blessings -- those

things most priceless and precious and lovely and wonderful; namely you three and your dear, dear father. The Lord helping me, we shall have a Thanksgiving Day every day of the year. Did you finish the plane, Bob?" she asked suddenly, with tenderness in her voice.

"Not completely. But I put it away until ...."

"You may finish it, dear. I know how delighted David and Charles will be to have it hung from their ceiling ...."

"Mom! Do you mean it? Honestly and truly?" The boys squealed with delight.

"I mean it. If I had time I'd come in and help you but it's almost time for your wonderful relatives to arrive."

"They're here now!" Charles shouted. "See! There's Uncle Ben and Aunt Emily and..."

"And there's Jackie and Susan and Dick and' . . . Hooray!" Bob exclaimed, hurrying down the hallway to the door to greet his cousins. David and Charles were right behind.

As she started for the door, Joan's heart felt good and right. This year she would not feel detached from the wonderful Willard family. She would again, as in years other than the last Thanksgiving Day, be a vital and integral part of this spiritual family. She had alienated herself from them. Her backslidden condition had made her feel all out of place around this happy, deeply-religious family, she realized with opened eyes.

When Mother Willard's tottering feet crossed the threshold of the kitchen door and she had gathered Joan in her motherly arms and planted a kiss on her rosy cheek and crooned softly in her ear, "How's my dear little Joannie?" Joan's world seemed to be normal again.

When Chip and Harriet arrived, Joan was happier than ever.

"O Harriet! Chip!" she exclaimed, "I've come back!"

"Come back from where, Joannie?" Chip inquired. "I didn't know you'd gone anywhere."

"Home To God!" Harriet answered, knowing the minute she had seen the radiant, peaceful countenance of her sister-in-law. "O Joan, I'm too happy to talk!" Harriet added, throwing her arms about Joan's neck and weeping for joy with her.

"This will be a wonderful Thanksgiving Day!" Joan sobbed brokenly. "Especially after I get sanctified."

"The dinner can wait!" Chip announced. "Let's take care of the weightier matters first."

"O Chip, how wonderful of you! You don't mind waiting dinner then?"

"Not when there's important business to be taken care of, I don't mind waiting."

Joan was on her knees, her heart hungering and thirsting for a pure and clean heart.

When she arose, it was with the certainty and the knowledge that the Comforter had come to abide. With sudden delight and wondrous joy, she was now positive that the promise she had made to the boys only minutes ago of having a Thanksgiving Day every day of the year, would indeed be a reality in their home. It was a glorious feeling. Happily, she started toward the stove to finish the dinner. Thanksgiving was a wonderful time for getting together -- especially when one had relatives like the Willard "clan"!

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**THE END**