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Vicky's Dilemma

By Mrs. Paul E. King

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Drying the last pot and pan and putting them carefully inside the cabinet where they belonged, Vicky Marsden hung the dish towel over the drying rack then hurried down the hallway after her sweater. "I'll be home around eleven tonight," she told her mother as she slipped her arms into the pale blue, light-weight sweater. "Mrs. Hammond will be working over-time, she told me. Don't wait up, Mom; you need your rest."

"I couldn't rest if I went to bed, honey; not with you out. I'll send Daddy after you."



"I sure hate to be a bother," the blonde-haired girl replied. "But it isn't safe for me to walk home alone, especially not at that hour. Perhaps Vance could come after me; at least Daddy wouldn't lose any sleep this way."

"What could I do, perhaps?" a voice asked from the porch. "I heard my name mentioned . . ." he teased, laughing good-naturedly.

"Oh, Vance, I'm glad you heard us talking about you," Vicky told her brother. "Could you pick me up tonight at eleven? Mrs. Hammond's doing over-time today and..."

"Of course I can, Sis. In fact, I'll be glad to get you. It just happens that I'll be cramming for an exam anyhow; so I'll cram until I must get you, and who knows, I may just get an "A" plus out of Mr. Hetrick."

Vicky laughed, "Impossible!" she declared. "Positively and absolutely impossible/He's never given an "A" plus in all his natural life. So I have been informed by graduates from years back, and I doubt you'd become his 'first'. It just might be the setting of a precedent for him, Vance. But he is a great teacher and one really learns from him. I guess this is all that matters. I know some teachers who give good grades but are exceedingly dense and unclear in what they're trying to get across to their class."

"Right you are, Vicky DeeAn, but you can be sure my tears wouldn't be tears of sorrow if he did decide to set a precedent and gave me an "A plus" in that exam. At any rate, I'm really studying for the exam and, Lord willing, I'll still be up by eleven o'clock. I'll come over to get you. Stay indoors until I get there."

"Thanks, Vance, you're the greatest. And this will take a load off Dad and Mother's shoulders, I know."

"It will be a great help to your father," Mrs. Marsden admitted. "Especially since he must get up so early for work anymore. Thanks, Vance. And, Vicky, be careful. I'll be praying for you, dear."

"Thanks, Mother. See you later, God willing." Vicky walked slowly down the street to her twice-a-week baby-sitting job. Her blue eyes were clouded and her face wore a troubled look. She should have told her mother, she thought, and asked her opinion. But no, that would never do, she reasoned; she was old enough to know what she ought to do and, as things now stood, there was no way she could baby-sit with Mrs. Hammond's three children after tonight.

A tear slid out of Vicky's eye and stole down her cheek like a thief on silent feet. She hated to give up the job; she did. Not that Mrs. Hammond paid much; she couldn't. She had such a very little herself, and everything she earned seemed to go into paying off the hospital bill for her late husband. Working in the Bougain-Villa Tea Room as a waitress didn't net an overabundance of money for the woman, she knew. And Mrs. Hammond herself had confided to her one day that if it wasn't for the tips she received waiting tables, she couldn't make it with the three children.

Caring for three-year-old Kendra, four-year-old Kevin and five-year-old Kellenda wasn't exactly easy. They were always into some mischief, it seemed. What one didn't think of, the other did. They could think of a dozen or more things they wanted after they were put to bed, and they were literal question boxes when they were awake, chattering incessantly. She had precious little time for studying whenever she took care of them, but she loved them dearly and deeply and did it for Jesus' sake.

Mrs. Hammond needed her desperately, she knew, and she had hoped and prayed . . . earnestly and agonizingly.., for her employer's salvation, but the small, dark-haired overworked and much-too-thin little mother seemed never to be moved by spiritual things. Each time Vicky had mentioned that she was praying for her and that she

wanted her to attend church with her, Mrs. Hammond countered with, "There are too many hypocrites in the church, Vicky dear. You? You're all right; you're different. In fact, I only wish the world had more people like you and your family. But no, church is not for me; I couldn't tolerate all those hypocrites congregated together under one roof. It would stifle me. The so-called Christians are every bit as lustful for money as are the ones called sinners."

And Vicky, knowing it was useless and unscriptural to argue, said kindly, "We have a wonderful church, Mrs. Hammond; God meets with us from service to service and our people are wonderful."

She left tracts every week and told or read Bible stories to her three small charges, whose mouths generally could be silenced by her vivid and dramatic account from the Bible. The children sat on the edge of their seats, eyes large and wide with wonder and awe as Vicky, roaring like a hungry lion, related the fascinating account of Daniel being thrown into the lion's den. The incident of the baby Moses, in his handmade, well-pitched ark-bed in the river with hungry and ferocious crocodiles, never failed to elicit squeals of excitement from Kellenda: "Hurry, Vicky! Hurry!" she would exclaim impatiently. "Make the king's daughter find him before a crocodile gets him."

Vicky's heart ached within her breast. The children had wound themselves tightly around her tender heart. She really would miss them and their mischievous ways, she realized with new clarity, but Mrs. Smith's call that very morning had seemed to be of God. Baby-sitting the well-behaved, properly-disciplined five-year-old Michelle Smith would be quite a relief, and it would pay her two dollars more per week for the once-a-week job . . . four hours on Saturday only., as compared to her present employment. She would have far more time to study, too, since Michelle played silently and contentedly most of the time with her pretty toys in a large, airy, sunny and cheerful toy room. Then, too, the Smiths were religious people-devout Christians really, whom she knew and respected deeply. There would be a common bond between them; they loved the Lord like she did and each belonged to the same church.

She would have to tell Mrs. Hammond tonight, she decided, hurrying down the street. It would be hard for her to find another baby sitter, she knew, because of the small amount of money the job paid. But Mrs. Smith would be waiting for her call, to let her know what she planned to do; so she would have to ask to be released from the three little live-wires. She'd be silly not to take it, she told herself; it was far better in every way, and any of her friends would jump at the chance. In fact, it would be no problem at all for Mrs. Smith to find another sitter. But she, Vicky Marsden wanted it herself. Only it would be so hard to tell Mrs. Hammond.

The children made a dash for her as soon as she came in the door. Each one trying to outdo the other, they cried, "Vicky, Vicky, tell us a story. Tell us a story. ' "

"In a minute," Vicky said, stooping to hug each little noise-maker to her heart. "I need to talk to your mommy before she leaves."

"Mommy, Vicky's here," Kevin shouted, tearing down the hallway after his mother.

Vicky's heart hammered inside her chest and she wondered just how she could best break the news to Mrs. Hammond.

The petite woman appeared suddenly. Putting a shawl over her shoulders, she said, "I must hurry, Vicky dear. The childrens' supper is waiting on the stove. Don't let them get the best of you." She smiled suddenly and her brown eyes lit up. "You're a splendid girl, Vicky. I don't know what I'd do without you. Maybe someday I can make it up to you."

Vicky opened her mouth to speak, to tell her that she wouldn't be coming back after tonight, but the words stuck in her throat. She swallowed hard. I'll tell her when she comes home, she decided, watching as Mrs. Hammond kissed each of her offspring then hurried away.

The minute the car drove away it seemed as if the house turned upside down. Kevin and Kellenda yelled and chased each other around the room like cattle in a roundup, throwing pillows in the air and rushing forward, simultaneously, to see who could catch the falling pillow first. Kendra cried, declaring emphatically that she was hungry, her chubby little arms outstretched all the while toward Vicky.

Gathering the curly-headed Kendra up in her arms, Vicky took the still-warm food off the stove and put it in serving dishes, threatening the two older children with the sad news that there would be no story unless they quieted down and washed their face and hands and hurried to the table to eat.

By the time the meal was over, the dishes washed, and the laughing children were bathed and tucked snugly in their beds, Vicky's head ached. What a relief it would be to take care of quiet, well-mannered Michelle, she thought, sighing. "Story, Vicky! Story!" Kevin shouted.

"We were good!" Kellenda exclaimed, her arms reaching up from where she lay and encircling Vicky's neck. "I love you, Vicky!" she added, her dark brown eyes alight with love for her baby-sitter.

"Wove ooo, too," Kendra declared, crawling over her five-year-old sister and sitting possessively and contentedly in Vicky's lap.

"I love you, too," Kevin said, getting quickly out of his bed and snuggling up beside Vicky, whose eyes misted over with sudden unshed tears and whose arms encircled all three little ones.

"Tell us about Daniel in the lions' den," Kellenda said, snuggling close to Vicky's side and heaving a tired sigh at the same time.

"No!" Kevin shouted. "I want the three Hebrew children in the fiery furnace. It's my turn to choose. Vicky promised the last time she was here."

"Sh-h, Kevin," Vicky soothed. "Not so loud; none of us is deaf, dear, so you don't need to shout."

"But you promised..."

"Yes, Kevin, I did promise, and tonight I shall tell about Shadrach, Meshack and Abednego first; then maybe we'll even have time for Daniel and those big bad lions that forgot all about being hungry because God shut their mouths."

The children snuggled even closer as Vicky gave them the only Bible lessons they ever heard or received. They listened not only with their ears but with their hearts as well. Vicky's throat felt tight as she looked at the shining, cleanly-scrubbed faces and the night-clad bodies of the three little ones whom she felt God had entrusted into her care for spiritual guidance and up-bringing. Perhaps they would never again hear about Jesus and His mighty power, she thought with pain shooting through her heart.

Well, I can still come to see them, she reasoned silently. And it may even be that Mrs. Hammond would finally give consent for her to stop by and pick the children up for Sunday School, she thought -- a thing not granted up to this, her final day of baby-sitting.

Finishing story number three . . . one for each child . . . and kneeling in prayer and praying with them before tucking them into their little beds, Vicky hurried to the kitchen to clean and wax the floor. This was not part of her job, but she did it for Jesus' sake, hoping and praying that her employer's heart would be moved upon by God through her acts of kindness and Christian love and that, eventually, she could win her to the Lord.

"Vicky, I'm thirsty. I want a glass of water." It was Kellenda.

Oh, dear, Vicky thought, not again! She had hoped that just this once they would go to sleep without starting their "wants." Now they'd probably tear their beds apart and she'd have to make them all over.

Hurrying into the room with water, she said softly, "You must settle down now and go to sleep, just as Jesus would want you to do. This is why He made the night, so we could sleep."

"But you're not sleeping," Kevin protested.

"I will be when I get home to my bed," Vicky replied. "And now you must get to sleep so I can do some much needed work for your mommy before she returns home."

"But, Vicky," Kevin continued, "I want a goodnight kiss; you didn't kiss me good-night."

"You forgot me, too," Kellenda chimed in. "And you even forgot to kiss Kendra goodnight."

"I kissed her when I put her in her bed," Vicky said. "And look at her; she's sound asleep while both of you are chattering like magpies. Here's your kiss, Kellenda," she soothed, stooping over the bed and hugging the girl close to her heart and kissing her on the tip of her tiny little nose. "And one for you, Kevin; and a bear hug, too. And now, goodnight."

"Oh, Vicky, you're sweet and I love you." It was Kellenda again. "And mommy loves you, too."

"Yes, she does," Kevin added quickly. "And we know a little secret, Vicky. Only, we're not supposed to tell in case Mommy is too tired to come to church Sunday morning."

"Kevin!" Kellenda scolded. "Now you told! You weren't supposed to."

"I didn't tell it all," Kevin defended quickly, adding, "It's because you're so good, Vicky. 'So much like Jesus,' mommy says. And... and she said..."

"She said that anybody who would take care of us for such a little bit of money," Kellenda shouted above Kevin's unfinished sentences, "must have something very special. There! Now that's what mommy said and what we weren't supposed to tell," the child said, speaking with the voice of authority, the voice of the oldest, giving her brother a look of reproof and rebuke.

"You musn't say any more," Vicky said quickly. "Jesus said you are to obey your mommy, and to honor her."

"What does 'honor' mean, Vicky?" This from Kellenda.

"An... and what's a maggie pie?" Kevin asked innocently, sitting up in the middle of his bed.

"Honor means to have respect for, Kellenda. That means that you love your mommy so much that you want to do what she tells you to do, or you don't want to do what she says you musn't do. And a magpie, Kevin, is a bird that is noted for its incessant chatter."

"But I'm not a bird!" he protested in hurt pride.

"No, honey, you're not a bird; God made you in His image. It's just that you chatter so much. Now go to sleep," she urged, tucking them in again and hugging them soundly before retreating to the kitchen.

Her cheeks burned with shame. What would Mrs. Hammond think when she learned that she, Vicky, had thought of accepting Mrs. Smith's offer because it did pay more money, and require far less time, too? And what would the mother believe if she learned that Vicky was anxious for a bit of reprieve from all the noise and the commotion made by her three children? Would Mrs. Hammond really and truly come to church if she quit her job when the little woman depended upon her so fully and so trustingly?

She dropped to her knees beside a kitchen chair and prayed. She had an obligation to a soul . . . Mrs. Rachael Hammond. The thought was startling; the revelation was bright. No, she dare not . . . must not . . . tell the woman what she had planned to do. She would never win her to the Lord if she did so. Furthermore, hadn't her Divine Commander promised that if she sought first His kingdom and His righteousness, that all her earthly needs would be supplied?

Feeling as if a great load had fallen off her young shoulders, Vicky hurried to the telephone. "I'm sorry, Mrs. Smith," she said, speaking into the mouth-piece, "but I won't be able to take care of Melissa. Mrs. Hammond needs me and.., and I want to win her to the Lord. Jenny or Marilyn will be glad to do it, I'm sure."

Mrs. Smith sounded disappointed. "I really, want you, Vicky. You are so dependable and spiritual."

There was a long pause on the line; then the woman said brightly, "I know what we'll do; I'll ask Mrs. Hammond if I may pick her children up and bring them over here while you watch Michelle, too. You take care of the Hammond children on Saturdays, right?"

"Yes. Yes, I do," Vicky said, realizing suddenly that the baby-sitting hours were the same for each family on Saturdays.

"Michelle needs other children to play with," Mrs. Smith was saying. "And she has so very many toys, too. It would be a lesson in sharing for her and a delight as well, and I'm sure the Hammond children would enjoy playing with Michelle; she's kind and loving and so lonely for playmates. I'll drop by Mrs. Hammond's house sometime next week, the Lord willing. John and I've called on her several times since you turned her name in as one you'd like to see visited. She thinks most highly of you, Vicky. You are the Bible which she never reads, literally, but yet reads by careful observation all the time when

you're there. Let's both pray about it. If she consents willingly, Vicky, what do you say? Will you baby-sit Michelle, Lord willing?"

"Only if Mrs. Hammond's agreeable to the arrangement. Then I'd love it."

She felt happy as she hung up the phone and finished covering the clean kitchen floor with wax. It was as though she had cleared her conscience and her heart, she thought. Oh, the feeling of right-ness was wonderful. What clear channel it gave to one's heart for the Holy Ghost to move and work through. And what "open lines" to Heaven's throne too, she mused, feeling blest and happy in her soul.

Stopping by the partially closed bedroom door, Vicky peeked inside. Kellendra and Kevin were sound asleep, their bodies draped like a wet dishrag partly over the bed and partly in the bed. Kendra, in her humped position and posture, looked like a land turtle with its head turned sideways, flat on the ground and dead-to-the-world in sleep. She lifted the limp forms of the two older children up to the middle of the beds and pulled the sheet around their relaxed bodies, then kissed them again and hurried to the living room where she cleaned and dusted and brought beautiful order out of utter chaos.

She had just settled down with her English book when she heard the door open and Mrs. Hammond's voice, "Vicky dear, I'm home."

Vicky looked at the clock in surprise. It was just 9:20. "You're early, aren't you?" she asked. "Or has your clock stopped?"

Mrs. Hammond laughed. "I'm early, yes; and no, the clock hasn't stopped, dear. My hours have been changed." The woman's face was beaming. "Saturday stays the same. Through the rest of the week, like tonight, I'll go in earlier but get home earlier, too. You'd have to come here right after school, Vicky, but it wouldn't be so late for you to get home. You'd have time for studying when you get home. Friday night's a big night anymore for the Tearoom restaurant. Up to eight o'clock especially."

Vicky's heart felt light. That would mean that the little ones could play outside, she thought, and expend some of their God-given energy chasing after balls she'd toss to them or ropes she'd turn for their small feet to jump over.

"I have an even greater surprise for you, Vicky," Mrs. Hammond continued. "I . . . I've decided that the children and I should be going to church. We need to learn about God, and . . . and I need to do something about my soul. Your life is so sweet and so beautiful, with God's love flowing through every part of it, that my barriers have all been broken down. Will you come by and go with us on Sunday?"

"Will !! Oh, Mrs. Hammond, if you only knew how happy I am!" Vicky felt dizzy with joy. At last, God was answering her prayers.

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THE END