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Quick Obedience

By Mrs. Paul E. King

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The earth smelled fragrantly clean and the air, crisply-cold, held a hint of frost in it. Steve inhaled long deep draughts of the exhilarating, refreshing goodness. His breath, when he exhaled, came out in little wisps of gray. It was the time of year he liked best of all. His senses all seemed keener . . . sharper . . . and his footsteps became definitely and decidedly faster.

The crisp, biting, brittle air had a pronounced reaction upon his metabolism, he soliloquized happily, dragging his feet through the thickly-spread leaf carpet and making deep furrows in it. Everything, he was sure, was at its beautiful best when fall arrived and went on full-color dress parade.

The acrid smell of burning leaves gave impetus to his now slowly shuffling feet. Repositioning his armload of school books, he hurried ahead, knowing where the deliciously-pungent aroma was coming from; none but old Mr. Witherspoon and his equally aged neighbor, Mrs. Sarah Longspout, burned leaves in the community anymore.

Steve smiled. He was thankful to be a part of a small community instead of a big city where, come fall, he would never smell and feel what he did now. Maybe burning leaves upset and polluted the ecology and maybe it didn't he thought, but one thing was sure: he loved what he smelled, and as always, (for so long as he could remember) he would get in on the enjoyment of the yearly task.



Oblivious of time and of the routine chores awaiting him upon his return home from school, Steve obeyed his sense of scent and soon found himself in Mr. Witherspoon's well-manicured yard.

"I'll take the rake," he called pleasantly, stacking his books in a neat pile on the porch step.

Mr. Witherspoon leaned wearily against the split-rail fence that surrounded his lawn. Extracting a bright red handkerchief from his hip pocket, he mopped the perspiration from his face and forehead.

"You rest a while," Steve said kindly, taking the rake and going to work.

Patting Steve's broad shoulders and thanking him profusely, the old man shuffled up the porch steps and sat down in the swing, heaving a great sigh of relief.

"Guess I didn't realize how tired I was!" he exclaimed to himself, watching Steve as his strong arms made quick work of what to him had become a slow and untiringly-tedious task since the years had crept up on him.

"Oh, for the strength of youth!" he said aloud, recalling his good years. Then, with a smile on his face, he quoted, " 'Bless the Lord, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless His holy name...

" 'Who satisfieth thy mouth with good things; so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle's.' "

"I'll do Mrs. Longspout's, too," Steve called, hurdling the split-rail fence with ease and landing in the neighbor's yard with a broad grin on his ruddy face.

"You're a good lad!" Mr. Witherspoon exclaimed, watching the long, easy strokes of the rake doing a thorough and speedy job on his neighbor's lawn. What would he and Sarah Longspout do without Steve? he wondered, recalling the countless times the young man had stopped by and helped them. And always when they needed him most, the aged man mused silently. But then, that was the way God did things for His children, he thought happily.

Sarah's voice broke into his pleasant thoughts.

"Your phone's ringing," she called loudly across the fence.

"Yeah? What did you say, Sarah?" he asked, cupping a hand to his ear.

"She said your phone's ringing." Steve repeated the message loudly and clearly.

"Oh, it is, is it? Well, I'd better answer it then," and Mr. Witherspoon shuffled inside.

Finishing the work at hand, Steve stood back and watched the piles of smoldering leaves. The blue-gray smoke curled upward in a straight course, settling, finally, in a misty haze over the small community and its surrounding area.

"You sure take a load off our shoulders," Mrs. Longspout said, standing beside Steve and staring into the slowly-burning leaves. "If I could manage that compost pile at the end of the garden, I wouldn't burn the leaves," she confided. "Seems such a waste."

"I know what you mean," Steve answered. "Dad and Mother use ours for compost. But I'm glad you and Mr. Witherspoon don't anymore. I like the smell of leaves burning; it's a sure indication that fall is here. There's something kinda' wonderful about watching the smoke as it curls and spirals upward, making little smoke signals by the slightest puff of breeze. It's relaxing, too."

Drawing her heavy shawl tightly around her slender shoulders, the aged woman agreed, adding, "I guess I'm getting more and more like these maple trees, Steve . . . : ready for my 'shedding' day; when this mortal shall put on immortality. O, what a day that will be! What a day!" she exclaimed jubilantly with shining face.

"It will be a wonderful day, that's sure, Mrs. Longspout; and the beautiful thing about it is that no one needs to fear that 'crossing over' period. Not when they belong to the blood-washed crowd. My grandmother, months before she died, talked mainly about Heaven. She actually prayed for the Lord to hasten the day when she could 'go Home,' as she phrased it."

"Your grandmother was a saint, Steve. She led me to Christ many, many years ago. She was in close contact with Heaven and..."

"A message for you, Steve," Mr. Witherspoon called across the fence, interrupting the sentence.

"What is it?" Steve asked, hurrying to the man and handing the rake to him.

"That was your mother calling. She said she was sure you'd be here, helping with the leaves. You are to go to the drug store and pick up the prescription the doctor called in for Mrs. Evans."

"Mrs. Evans is sick?" Steve asked quickly, thinking of the frail-looking little mother who had so recently moved next door to them. "Who's looking after those three tiny children?" he wondered out loud.

"That I don't know," the soft spoken man replied. "I only know that you're to go after the prescription, your mother said."

"Thanks," Steve said, turning and hurrying away. "I'll get the books on my way home," he called across his shoulder.

For some reason, the face of the new neighbor seemed to haunt him. Her sad eyes, sunken cheeks and sallow color sent shivers of fear through him. Suppose something happened to her, who would care for the children? And what about her husband; where was he? Was she a Christian? Ready to die???

On and on the questions raced, back and forth across his brain, quickening his footsteps to a fast, even and steady run.

The quaint little bell on the door of the drugstore rang as Steve entered, signaling to the druggist that he had a customer.

"This way, Steve, my boy," the middle-aged Mr. Johnson said, motioning Steve to the back of the store. "It's ready and waiting for you. Your mother called a short while ago; said you'd be down to get the prescription."

"Thanks, Mr. Johnson. I'll not chat this time; I'm sure Mrs. Evans needs the medicine badly."

"You couldn't be more right, Son. Hurry along now; there'll be another time for one of our pleasant chats..."

The little bell tinkled merrily as Steve passed through the door and out to the street, the pinched face of the new neighbor ever before him, and when he reached home and his mother met him at the door, he knew something was seriously wrong.

"Will . . . will she live?" Steve blurted the one question that had plagued him ever since he was told to go after the medication.

"We hope so," was his mother's sad reply. "Peggy and Lois have the children in their bedroom, entertaining them. They seem quite happy. Bless them! Doctor Blackwell found out where the husband works; he called him. He's on his way here now. Seems he had some last minute things to attend to and couldn't leave the day the movers moved them here. But here, give me the medication. I'll be caring for Mrs. Evans. The girls will get supper for your father and you and the three little children. I'll call if I need any of you. Pray that God will use me to reach Mrs. Evans for Christ."

"I will; I promise, Mother!" Steve exclaimed, hurrying to his bedroom before doing his evening chores.

Several days later Doctor Blackwell called him. "It was your swift obedience that saved your neighbor," the doctor said.

"I... don't understand," Steve said truthfully. "Simply stated, Steve, if you had been like so many young men whom I know, and dawdled around and failed to get the prescribed medication immediately after receiving your mother's message, Mrs. Evans would now be a corpse instead of being well on her road to full and complete recovery. Every minute counted. I called to compliment and commend you on your swift obedience."

Long after the receiver was put in its proper place, Steve sat thinking. It had seemed like such a little thing, going after a doctor's prescription. Yet a life had depended upon his action. It was a sobering thought; one that made Steve shudder.

Suddenly he bowed his head; with grateful heart, he thanked God that he had learned from infancy and childhood days the joy, beauty and delight of swift obedience both to God and to his parents. His action regarding Mrs. Evans' prescription was a carry-over of his immediate parental and godly obedience, and, in her case, it had proven to be a life-saving obedience and an open door for witnessing.

With a light heart, Steve hurried outside to carry the leaves which he had raked earlier back to his father's compost pile.

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THE END