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## Thanksgiving Is For Sharing

By Mrs. Paul E. King

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Craig Master's skates cut across the glassy ice with grace and ease: backward and forward, forward and backward; in large circles and small circles; figure-eights and fancy patterns; this way and that way. He liked to skate, yes he did better almost than he liked to eat, he thought, watching his breath as it came out in little wisps of frosty-looking gray-white.

It was a perfect day for skating. The ice was shiny-smooth like a mirror and the air was brittle-cold. It bit his fingers, stung his cheeks, nibbled at his toes and nipped his nose. It was just the way he liked it for skating, he thought, wishing for all that was within him that Barry was here with him.

Remembering Barry's words, Craig groaned. "I guess Thanksgiving'll be just like any other day at our house," Barry had confided in him. "Dad's leg's not healed enough for him to go back to work yet, and Mom's about as nervous and frustrated as a new colt when you try putting a saddle on it. Day before yesterday I overheard her tell Dad we're almost out of food. So I know there won't be turkey on our table. Guess we'll be lucky to have French-toast even!"

Had he detected a note of bitterness in Barry's voice? Craig wondered, skimming across the glassy surface with perfect equilibrium and marvelous ease.



He skated to where spruce and hemlock grew in abundance. Then he climbed up the snow-crusted bank and sat on a tree stump to think Barry's situation through. The Bible mentioned about seeing one's brother have need, he knew, but he didn't see how he could do anything about it -- not without a job.

Craig dropped his face into his hands and groaned. Oh, if only he could find work, he thought, hurting deep inside his chest. But jobs were scarce and hard to come by in their small village, and without a car the prospect of getting employment in the city was out.

He closed his eyes and prayed, asking God to somehow help him locate work. No sooner had he uttered the petition than Mr. Shaw's face came before him -- his face and his snow-covered driveway and sidewalks. Mr. Knepper's, too.

Craig jumped to his feet. All but stumbling down the bank to the ice, he skated up the river toward home, making the two mile stretch in record time. He had never known either Mr. Shaw or Mr. Knepper to need help with keeping their sidewalk or driveways clean; but he was sure of one thing, and that was that God had let him know they would be needing his help this time.

Unlacing his skates and slipping into his shoes and boots, Craig hurried down the snow-packed village streets until he came to Hiram Shaw's neat house.

The snow lay deep and thick on the man's driveway, his lawn and sidewalks; the pure, sparkling whiteness was unmarred by footprints of man or animal. Instinctively, Craig knew something was wrong. Mr. Shaw was meticulous with his property, keeping the beautifully landscaped lawn well manicured and weed free all summer long and the sidewalks and driveway clean and free of snow in the winter.

He waded through the snow to the front door and knocked, feeling anxiety mount up inside him.

When Mrs. Shaw opened the door a bare crack, he knew his fears were founded.

"I'm sorry, Craig," she called from behind the barely-open door, "but you see, I must not get chilled; Hiram and I both have pneumonia. He is the sicker of the two of us and can't leave his bed. Come in, my boy, the door is unlocked. I'll leave so I won't get chilled when you open the door wide."

Pulling his boots off, Craig set them on the porch then stepped inside.

"I wish you would have called Mother," he told Mrs. Shaw who sat in a rocking chair, bundled up in a heavy Afghan.

"We have been too ill to do much of anything, Craig. But oh, I am glad you have come; we need groceries, and the driveway and sidewalks must be shoveled. Would you consider doing it? We'll pay you well."

"That's why I came," Craig said. "I'll gladly do it, Mrs. Shaw."

"Only if you allow us to pay you!" the woman said with finality. "All summer long you run errands for us and would take no money, but not this time; the only way you are hired is with the understanding that we pay you..."

Her sentence trailed. Leaning her head against the back of the chair her eyes never left Craig's face.

"It's a deal," Craig answered, laughing a deep, pleasant kind of laughter.

Mrs. Shaw closed her eyes and sighed. "Oh, thank you, Craig. Thank you!" she exclaimed. "This is such a relief to us. Hiram's going to be a long time getting well, the doctor said, and there'll be no shoveling snow for him this winter. We were praying for the Lord to send us a dependable young man; you are our answer to prayer."

Craig stood in awe at the workings of God. He was their answer to prayer? Did he dare tell them his side of this beautiful answer? Did he? or would it be divulging the information Barry had related to him in confidence?

Choosing his words carefully, Craig replied simply, "And this is an answer to a prayer I prayed less than an hour ago, Mrs. Shaw. Now, if you will allow me the privilege of praying with Hiram and you, I'll begin work immediately after prayer."

"You're so good!" the frail-looking woman declared, leading the way to her husband's room.

True to his word, Craig began work immediately after prayer. First was a trip to the grocery store; then he tackled the enormous job of clearing the long, wide driveway and the sidewalks, leaning wearily but happily on the shovel when the task was finally completed, five hours later.

From her chair inside the window, Mrs. Shaw watched as Craig worked. When he was finished, she tapped on the window and motioned him inside, thanking him profusely and pressing a crisp bill into the palm of his hand. "You'll have steady work, Craig," she reminded him.

"Thanks, Mrs. Shaw. I'll be here in the morning, the Lord willing, to check on you," Craig promised, hurrying down the street to the Knepper's house.

He wouldn't be able to work too much longer, he realized, for it was almost supper time at home and he must not keep his family waiting; but he could see if Mr. Knepper needed him, he mused silently as he walked.

A light was on inside Ben and Sue Knepper's house when Craig opened the gate and started down the sidewalk to the front door. The sidewalk was shoveled part way along the side of the house but no where else. Wondering what could have happened, Craig pushed the door bell and waited.

"Why, Craig, how nice of you to come!" Mrs. Knepper exclaimed, throwing the door open wide and welcoming him inside.

"I was wondering, if something is wrong; that Ben's sidewalk's not shoveled?" he asked.

"Do you want a job?" Ben Knepper called from the kitchen.

"You sick or something?" Craig asked quickly. "I mean, well, it's just not like you and Mr. Shaw to let the snow remain on your driveway and sidewalks for very long."

"I'm not sick," Ben answered, half-limping, half-hopping from the kitchen into the living room; "not exactly, that is," he said. "I fell on the sidewalk while shoveling snow and sprained my ankle. The doctor said to take it easy and stay off the foot for a spell. Reckon you'd be interested in taking the job on until I can do it myself again, Craig? I'd sure appreciate it. Never could stand a messy, snow-packed sidewalk or driveway. Why have it tracked indoors when it can be cleaned off?" Ben added with a question.

"You sound like my mother." Craig said, laughing lightly. "Sure, I'll shovel it for you. I'll finish the sidewalks now, then get your driveway tomorrow morning, God willing. No school this week -- teachers' meeting and Thanksgiving Day."

"We're in luck then," Ben declared, heaving a sigh of relief.

"Not luck, Ben, Providence. Divine Providence." Ben gulped and toyed with a pen from his shirt pocket. Never a religious man, he didn't know what to say. Coming from Craig's lips, however, he knew it must be so, whatever its hidden meaning. "You just got yourself a job," he replied in an emotion-packed voice, adding, "I'll pay you well."

A silver-yellow quarter moon hung his upside-down lantern in a clear, star-studded sky by the time Craig had finished the sidewalk and a portion of the driveway nearest the garage and hurried home.

"Charles called," his mother informed him as he entered the kitchen. "Said for you to call him when you got home; something about going skating with him tomorrow, I believe."

Hanging his heavy jacket on a hanger inside the hallway closet, Craig said, "I can't do it, Mother; I promised the Shaws and the Kneppers I'd help them, God willing. They're unable to get out right now..."

"That's fine, Craig. Always be a man of your word, but do call Charles and let him know."

"Sure will; and say, that beef stew smells super delicious."

"You're hungry again?"

"Starved!" came the laughing rejoinder. "Good!" Mrs. Master exclaimed, dropping dumplings into the bubbling stew. "By the time you're finished talking to Charles, the dumplings should be done."

All through the supper hour, Craig's thoughts kept wandering to Barry. What did his friend's folks have to eat? he wondered, feeling all choked up inside his chest. Suddenly he thought of the bill Mrs. Shaw had given him and his heart leaped for joy. He wouldn't need to wait till Thanksgiving to do his almsdeed; no indeed; he had money now!

When supper was finished, Craig asked to be excused, stating that he had an errand to do before bedtime.

Hurrying to the closet for his coat, he extracted the crisp bill from where it lay in the warmth of his pocket.

"Twenty dollars!" he exclaimed in an awe-filled tone of voice. "Twenty dollars!"

Closing the living room door quietly, Craig hurried outside, feeling as if he were dreaming. Twenty dollars wouldn't buy the world, he knew, but it would help to put some food on the Crane's table.

He would have to buy wisely and carefully, he mused, chuckling to himself over the fact that this would be a 'first' for him. Staples, like dried beans, potatoes, flour, sugar, rice, macaroni, corn meal and a box of American cheese, would have priority on his list, he decided, mentally calculating the approximate cost of the food items.

The moon put a silver mantle over the earth and the snow crunched and squeaked beneath his feet as he hurried to the little grocery store in the very heart of the small village.

Once inside, he collected the items into a grocery cart, making sure that his purchases didn't exceed fifteen dollars since two dollars belonged to the Lord for tithe

and three would go into an envelope for missions. Then he hurried to the check-out counter, feeling great and wonderful inside his heart.

"Did you bring anything to take these home in, Craig? Young Johnny's sled perhaps?" Mr. Harney the grocer asked, totaling the bill.

"I sure didn't," Craig answered, looking at the sacked groceries.

"No problem," Mr. Harney said in his soft, kind voice. "I keep a sled handy for just such emergencies. You'll find it standing on end at the back door; use it, and return it whenever it's convenient, Craig my boy."

"That's sure kind of you, Mr. Harney, and I'm truly thankful. I'll have it back to you this night yet," he promised.

Never, in all his almost eighteen years, had Craig's heart felt like it did as he pulled the groceries across the crusted snow to the Cranes' home. The back porch would be the best place for unloading them, he mused, seeing it was dark back there.

As quietly as possible, he carried the groceries to the door. Then, pulling the sled a safe distance away from the house, he hurried up to the door and knocked loudly, leaving the porch as soon as he did so.

Waiting only long enough to see that his gift was discovered, Craig vanished in the night, pulling the now empty sled behind him, back to the store owner's house.

His newly acquired jobs kept him busy; each day saw a new accumulation of snow on the ground; and when Craig made his Thanksgiving purchases and took them to his friend's home the night before Thanksgiving, he knew the real meaning of Thanksgiving. His heart experienced the greater joy of the day -- that of sharing.

Following the same procedure which he had done earlier in the week, Craig unloaded an abundant supply of good things to eat., turkey and pumpkin pies included. Then he vanished into the night.

The Cranes need never know whom their kind benefactor was, he soliloquized joyfully, taking a leisurely walk home in the crisply-cold night. God knew; that was enough reward.

Feeling that, truly, he had done his alms as unto God, Craig's happy heart burst out in song.

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THE END