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BIG DEAL
By Mrs. Paul E. King

Doug was not quite finished mowing the front lawn of the Kreishers' big yard when he saw Clifford pull up in front of the palatial home. Cutting the motor of the lawn mower he waited until Cliff jumped out of the pick up truck and hurried over to him.

"Something wrong?" Doug asked, wiping sweat off his forehead.

"Nothing ever goes wrong for Clifford Wall," Cliff answered with a broad smile as he slapped Douglas on his shoulder.

"Out with it," Doug said. "You're here for a special reason. You never leave a job unless you have a reason. And, surely, you haven't finished mowing the Stillwaters' humongous lawn already. You've only been there a couple hours."

"You're right on both counts, Doug: I have a reason for running over here. And what a reason! Am I ever in the luck!"

"Luck, Cliff?. Are you forgetting Whom it is, and was, that gave you all these lawns to mow?"

"Are you implying that yours truly had nothing to do in this, Doug? If so, you'd better rethink that one! I started out small; so small, in fact, that I mowed lawn after lawn for two and three dollars each. And every one of them with a measly little push mower at that. I worked my way up."

"But God gave you the strength to do the work, Clifford. And it was He who led you and guided you to these bigger and much better paying jobs; don't ever forget that."

"I'm too happy to further contradict your statements." Clifford replied, still smiling. "But I worked like a slave to get where I am; don't forget this either! Now, back to my reason for coming here: I'll not be finishing the Stillwaters' lawn today. The front and the sides, yes; but the wide-open back 'acreage,' as I call it, no. And they won't know I skipped doing it this week. I just got the Tudburys' lawn! Imagine it!"

"Not the W. W. Tudbury?"

"Is there another around here?" Clifford asked, smiling knowingly and smugly.

"Well . . . no."

"I'm in, Doug. I mean, in! W. W. himself appeared on the Stillwaters' front lawn just as I was coming around the house with the mower. He flagged

me down and motioned for me to stop. I did. He got to the point immediately. He wants me to mow his lawn permanently; said he had to let the other man go because he wasn't dependable. So, what I want you to do is to finish the lawn here, front and sides only. You can mow the back next week. Mr. Tudbury wants his lawn mowed today. I told him, 'Yes, Sir. Your lawn will be mowed today.'

"I . . . I can't do that, Cliff. It's not fair to either the Kreishers nor the Stillwaters. We're being paid to mow all of their lawn, not only a part of it. No, I won't do that."

"Today is different, Doug. This Tudbury deal is the biggest deal ever for me. Finish the front and sides then go directly to the Tudbury residence. I'll either be there when you arrive or shortly after you get there: The Stillwater lawn is some bigger than here at the Kreishers. And since both families have gone away for a month or two of vacation, they'll not know that we skipped a week on their back lawns."

"I can't do it, Clifford. God demands righteousness and honesty and uprightness to get into Heaven, and I'm going there whatever the cost. I won't do it, Cliff. That's sinful. It's wicked!"

"You're working for me, Doug; don't forget this. I hired you on with me because I needed a helper and knew you were a hard worker. Now do as I say, then get over to W. W.'s estate." And Cliff rushed away in the truck.

Doug started the mower, and kept mowing until the entire lawn was mowed -- front, sides and back. Then he got the weed-eater and cut down all the weeds he could find, which were few, since the flower beds and bushes were mulched heavily and beautifully with a rich organic mulch which inhibited weed growth.

Clifford was angry and upset when Doug drove into the long, neat, curving Tudbury driveway that led uphill to the enormous house. Flagging him down midway up the drive way, Cliff jumped off his idling mower and gave Doug a sound tongue lashing, saying, "You're working for me; or did you forget? I told you what to do. . . ."

"Calm down, Cliff. I have peace with God and the smile of God is upon me. My first allegiance is to Him. We committed ourself to doing the entire

lawns of our constituents, not just the front and the sides. I fulfilled my part of the promise the Kreisher lawn is finished. Completely."

"But I promised Mr. Tudbury we'd have his all done by the time he arrived home this evening."

"It's sinful and wicked to not fulfill promises already made, Cliff. And it's also wrong to take on more than you can handle for one day; especially so when the day is full to the top with long-standing and well-established commitments. You're heading for trouble, my friend."

"Who's boss of this lawn service? Look at the sign on my truck if you have forgotten," Cliff stated arrogantly.

"I haven't forgotten, Cliff. But don't you forget that someday you're going to have to reckon with God for dishonesty and for breaking you promises. I'm afraid you have forgotten this all-important thing. Now where do you want me to start?"

"Park the truck next to mine; you'll see my truck when you pull up in front of the house. There's a five car garage up there and a neat looking bungalow nearby with its own driveway. My truck's in that driveway. Now hurry. . . ."

"Thanks, Cliff."

Hour after hour went by and acre after acre of weed-free lawn was mowed. Doug saw that before long the sun would be tucked beyond the rim of the horizon for the night. He accelerated more heavily, wishing Clifford had waited to give Mr. Tudbury one of their less hectic, less full-scheduled days. But Cliff was changing. Radically so. He seemed to have no relish for the things of God anymore, and he was showing very definite and positive signs of carnality.

Doug felt a burden settle in on his heart for Clifford. How could his friend have forgotten so soon -- and so easily -- that it was in answer to the prayers of the church family that he had gotten every lawn job that was on their list? Cliff had asked the church to pray for work to open up for him. They did, and it had -- one lawn job after another, until he had had more than he

could manage. That's when he hired Doug on. Financially, Clifford made good money.

And the money, Doug thought with a heavy heart, had gone to Clifford's head. How sad. Oh, how very sad! Money, and not the Lord, was now fast becoming Cliffs god; and no amount of pleading with him about it could change him.

He had no idea what Mr. Tudbury would be paying Clifford for the job; but Doug knew it was going to be a "tidy" sum: Cliff could now be "selective" with the jobs he added to his already full lawn service.

It was almost dark when both Clifford and he loaded their mowers and other lawn equipment on to the trucks and headed home, tired -- extremely tired --and weary and hungry. Doug felt extremely thankful and grateful that they had been able to finish the entire Tudbury lawn -- as per Cliff's promise to the wealthy businessman.

He had hoped there would be enough daylight left, however, for him to go by the Stillwaters' place and finish mowing what Cliff hadn't done. But darkness overtook him and he headed homeward, feeling guilty that it wasn't finished. After all, he was a hired hand for "Clifford's Lawn Services": he had a moral obligation to fulfill what was promised--and a Biblical obligation, as well--whether Clifford believed it or not. The phone was ringing when he got inside.

"He's just now coming in the door," he heard his mother comment to the caller. "Just a minute; I'll put him on the line," she added, motioning for Doug to come to the phone.

He hugged his mother quickly then took the phone. "Hello, this is Douglas Banks speaking," he said into the mouthpiece.

"Doug, this is Hiram Kreisher. . . ."

"Oh, hello, Mr. Kreisher. Where are you calling from? Are you enjoying your vacation?"

"I'm home, Doug. We got in this morning. And yes, we had a lovely vacation with the Stillwaters. I'm calling to let you know how much I

appreciate you and your principles of uprightness and righteousness. I want you to take complete charge of my lawn, Doug. . . ."

"Th . . . thank you, Mr. Kreisher. But I . . . I work as Clifford's helper."

"I know. I know. But after hearing what he wanted you to do . . . and then finding out what he did, or didn't do I should say, at the Stillwaters' place, well, Benjamin Stillwater and I decided we want a young man whom we can trust and count on when he tells us something; a young man who is honest and trustworthy and truthful. You are our man, Doug." Doug was speechless. "If you're worrying about Clifford, put your mind at ease: Both Benjamin and I have called him and told him that as of this day, his services are finished; they are no longer needed." Mr. Kreisher was emphatic with his statement.

"I'm sorry about Mr. Stillwater's lawn," Doug apologized. "I had hoped to get it finished before night-fall; but. . . ."

"I heard everything, Doug. Mrs. Kreisher and I were resting in the Great Room. You are a noble young man. We want you to have full care of our lawn. Benjamin and I will pay you well. Will you take the job?"

"God willing, yes, Mr. Kreisher. And I thank you most kindly. God bless you."

"Benjamin will be calling you shortly, Douglas, so I'll hang up. He's greatly upset that his lawn wasn't finished. And when I told him what I heard, and why the back part of the lawn was left unmowed, he got in touch with Clifford immediately and told him he no longer needed his service, that he was going to hire someone he could trust and depend upon when he wasn't there or was there. Goodbye, Doug. I'll be expecting you one week from today, the weather permitting."

"The Lord willing, I'll be there. . . ."

After Mr. Stillwater's call, Doug called Clifford. "I'm sorry for what happened," he said truthfully. "But Cliff, please don't do this again. Not ever."

"I'll not pass up a Tudbury deal, Doug; not ever. And as for you, I won't be needing you any more. I called J. J. Thompson; he's going to help me."

The receiver clicked. Doug walked away from the phone with a heavy heart. Could it be possible that Clifford had decided to sell his soul for a big deal? It almost seemed that way.

Groaning inwardly, he went to the bedroom and fell on his knees in prayer in behalf of his friend.