

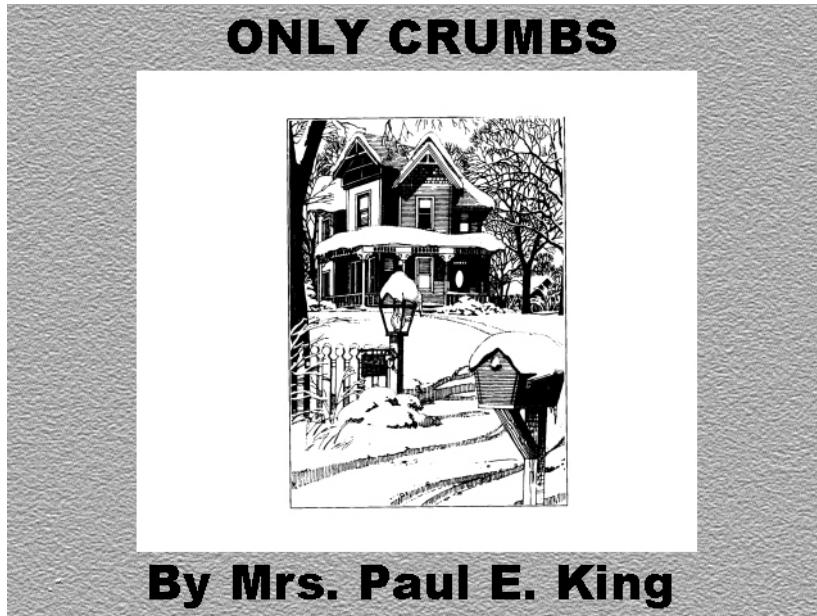
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ONLY CRUMBS
By Mrs. Paul E. King

LaraLeigh scattered the crusts of bread upon the snow-frozen ground outside the kitchen door just like Gram told her to do.

"Don't waste a thing, dear girl. Not even the crumbs." That was Gram's admonition each and every time LaraLeigh was over at her grandmother's house for a meal and helped to clear the table and do up the dirty dishes. For

so long as she could remember -- from when she was a very little girl until the present hour -- the teenager had been given the wise lesson on thrift and on "gathering up the fragments."

"Great! Great!" Larry's booming voice exclaimed derisively. "You're feeding the blue jays; that's all, Lara. You know what bullies they are. Why do you do it?"

"They're hungry too," LaraLeigh said softly. Then, in a more hopeful sounding voice, she added, "Maybe the smaller birds will still get a few bites, Larry. Oh, I do hope so. It's bitterly cold out there and they're bound to be hungry."

"Didn't you fill the feeders, Larry?" Mrs. Strathmore asked as she came into the kitchen and faced her tall son.

"I certainly did, Mother. That's one of my jobs. I try to obey orders instantly."

"I know you do, Larry. Thanks. Your father and I are proud of you and LaraLeigh."

"Mom," Larry lamented, "why does my sister always, and I mean always, have to throw those crusts to the birds? I mean . . . well, all she attracts are those thieving blue jays. Nothing else has a chance around them."

Mrs. Strathmore laughed softly. Then she said gently, "Questions. Questions! Why does Lara always throw the bread crusts to the birds? For so long as your sister lives, she will perhaps do this. Grandma Strathmore does it. She has taught LaraLeigh that it is a good thing to do; a waste-not thing to do. I like the habit, and what it stands for. Something else is benefiting by our 'scraps,' even if it is only blue jays. They need food, too, dear boy."

"But just look out the window, Mother, and you'll see what bullies and thieves they are," Larry countered stoutly. "And what a racket and fuss they make too! Whew! Nothing stands a chance around them," he remarked as he saw them zero in on the biggest crusts and eat them hungrily.

"They're beautiful birds, Larry, and I for one am grateful for their beauty on these starkly-white and bitter-cold winter days," Mrs. Strathmore said as she watched the crusts disappear along with the beautiful coats of blue.

A flurry of wings outside the window, descending like downy gray pillows, caused the mother to exclaim excitedly, "Come, Lara. Look! Look!"

Running to the window, LaraLeigh saw them: a flock of chickadees. They were feasting on the crumbs left over from the gregarious blue jays. How beautiful they were in their attire of gray with black caps and throats and white breasts! "I'm glad Gram got me in the habit of feeding scraps to the birds," she remarked happily. "I love the birds; all of them. Gram said we must never let them go hungry. Especially not in the cold of winter."

"I'm glad you're following Grandma Strathmore's example and admonition, LaraLeigh. She's a wise lady, and a godly lady."

"I always feel like I'm helping the Lord to feed those sparrows which He said He cared about and for, over in Luke's Gospel (12:6). I mean, He said that 'not one of them is forgotten before God.' So if I can be one of His helpers by giving them food, I'll be very happy."

"That's a lovely thought, LaraLeigh. Yes, a very lovely thought. Oh, before I forget, Marguerite called. She wants you to call her."

LaraLeigh watched the busy, bright-eyed chickadees, saying a soft, "Thank you, Mother." But suddenly her mind was nowhere near the lovely flock of black-capped, black-eyed beauties just outside the window. Instead, the scripture verse floated back to her brain and settled in again just as it had done for four days in a row. She couldn't get it out of her mind. No, she couldn't.

With a great flourish of flapping wings the chickadees became air-borne and, much like the down of the ripened milk weed pods, they disappeared and were gone, leaving behind only the memory of their beautiful selves. The crumbs were gone. Not the scripture verse, however; it remained fastened to Lara's brain and wouldn't let her forget that it was there -- "Cast thy bread upon the waters: for thou shalt find it after many days" Ecclesiastes 11:1.

Trembling, she ran from the kitchen into her bedroom and fell to her knees beside the bed, crying softly into the spread and saying, "I tried, Lord. I tried. She rebuffed me and scorned me and made fun of me. Just like the twelve-year-olds did, or do, in that , now class Mr. Hower asked me to teach in Sunday school. I realize those twelve-year-olds are all new, and are from unchurched homes, Lord. But Marguerite is a young adult. . . ."

"Cast thy bread upon the waters: . . ."

The command was unmistakable; the Voice was her Heavenly Shepherd's voice." Where was her heretofore immediate and swift obedience when she was sure it was His voice?

Lifting her hands and head upward, she exclaimed softly, "I'll cast it, Lord, even if she mocks and scorns me again and laughs in my face. Remove this fear, in Jesus' name, and give me the right words to say."

Wiping tears off her face with tissues, LaraLeigh went to the phone. Fear was a dreadful thing, she realized, where witnessing came into the picture. Not until Marguerite had mocked her mercilessly and scorned her so bitterly and had become downright angry when she talked to her about her soul and the deliverance that could be hers in and through the Lord Jesus Christ, had Lara experienced the kind of fear she was now experiencing. It was of the enemy, she knew. Again she pled the Blood of her Savior. Then she dialed.

"Hi," came the answer on the other end of the line. "Is this you, LaraLeigh?"

"Yes, it is. Hi, Marguerite. Mother said you wanted to talk to me. . . ."

"Will you be home within the next half-hour?"

Marguerite asked seriously. "God willing, yes."

"I'll be over. See you then." The line went dead.

LaraLeigh put the receiver back in place and collapsed in a nearby chair, wondering what the always popular Marguerite wanted. Closing her eyes, she thanked God that her fear was gone. From the moment she

obeyed and heeded His Voice, all fear left her. Mocked, scorned, made fun of, laughed at, little matter, so long as she was obeying the gentle but persuasive command to, "Cast [her] bread upon the waters" -- of Marguerite's heart, yet another time. How many times had she done this, she wondered silently as she recalled her many attempts at reaching the girl with the message of salvation.

Maybe her "bread" would be only crumbs, compared to those less shy than she; those who knew better how to witness and testify. But crumbs were still bread, weren't they? And crumbs fed birds the same as the bigger, more choice pieces of crusts did. Even now, because of an abundance of crumbs, a flock of lovely chickadees was deriving strength and body heat because of those "fragments." The crumbs would help to sustain them during the very cold period, she knew.

The doorbell rang. It was Marguerite. She wasted no time in getting over to the neatly kept Cape Cod house. As she let her inside, Lara noticed that Marguerite had been crying. Throwing her arms around the girl, Lara asked gently, "What's wrong, Marguerite?" Then, like a mother comforting her child, Lara said, "Don't cry. Please, don't. Jesus knows all about what's troubling you. He loves you, Marguerite, so do I."

Grasping the words and holding on to them tenaciously, it seemed, Marguerite said brokenly, "You're the only one left who does love me. I really blew it this time, Lara. I thought I was so smart. . . ." Her sentence, unfinished, trailed along with her heaving shoulders that shook with her sobs.

LaraLeigh held her in her slender arms and wept with her, praying silently for guidance and help.

Marguerite drew a tissue from her skirt pocket and wiped her tears away, saying, "you won't love me, LaraLeigh. No you won't: not after you know what I did."

"Oh but I will!" came Lara's instant reply. "Didn't the Lord Jesus love me in spite of all my sins? And didn't He love me enough to die for me because of my sins and for my sins? Oh Marguerite, Jesus loves you too. So do I."

"Sit down, please. I must unload. I feel I'll die unless I can find help. And peace," Marguerite said. "you're the only one I feel can help me."

"Not I, Marguerite; Jesus. He truly knows all things, and He's waiting, even now, to help you."

"Remember the hit and run accident that made news three weeks ago?"

"Where the little girl was hit and had to be taken to the hospital with a broken leg and fractures on her arm?" Lara questioned.

"I did it, Lara. I'm the guilty one. A friend of mine from up north came to see me. We went for a ride in her car. She let me drive it. I was speeding. It was a beautiful car and ran like a dream. I never saw the little girl come out of her driveway on the bicycle until after I realized I'd hit something. By that time, I was terrified and almost paralyzed with fear. Karla looked back and when she saw the bicycle she told me to gun the car. I did. No one saw what happened and Karla left for home immediately. But I'm haunted, Lara. Day and night, my conscience troubles me. Sometimes I feel like I'll go crazy. From the time you told me at the store that Jesus loved me so much that He died to save me, and that only He could forgive me of my sins and give me peace in my soul, my conscience has been troubling me every time I do anything wrong or say things I shouldn't say.

"I've managed to silence it, though, until this time. It's impossible to do it now, Lara. It screams at me, it seems, telling me I'm guilty, guilty, guilty, which I am. Oh, what will I do? Always, I've managed to cover and conceal my wicked and sinful deeds and doings. This time my conscience won't let me rest. Please, can you help me? I'm afraid I'll lose my mind unless I get help."

LaraLeigh sighed. "First," she said softly and kindly, "you only thought you concealed your sins and wicked deeds, Marguerite: to God's all-seeing eyes, nothing is hidden or concealed. He sees everything. Everything! Someday, unless these so-called hidden sins are confessed and covered by the blood of God's Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, they will be 'proclaimed from the housetops' and all the world will hear of them, according to the scripture. Worse still, your soul will burn forever.

"To find peace of mind, and rest from your haunting conscience, you will have to confess what you have done, Marguerite."

"Oh, but I can't do that, Lara. What will it do to my father's business? Worse still, what will he think of me? And Mother too, for that matter?"

"There is no other way, Marguerite. You will have to confess what you have done -- to the Lord, to the police and to the girl's parents. It's the only way to find rest and peace for your soul. If you will do this, your conscience will not bother you. Not over this, I mean."

Marguerite's face was white with fear. "I can't do it!" she cried as she buried her face in her hands. "I . . . I'll go to jail. I'm sure I will. Oh Lara, what will I do? I thought I was so smart; that I could get away with anything. I'm trapped. I'm haunted by the fact that I could have killed that little girl. What will I do?"

LaraLeigh sighed again. Tears swam in her eyes. "The only way out is by confessing and telling how it happened and what you did," she said softly, adding, "Oh, Marguerite, if you could only realize, and believe, that what I am telling you is the truth, for it is, you would do it willingly and then you would find sweet relief from your guilty conscience. It will be step number one toward getting to God and becoming converted. Jesus wants to save you and to help you. I'm not the most eloquent at saying what I want to say or what I'd like to say, but I promise you peace of soul and mind if you will come to the Lord Jesus and give Him your heart and confess your sins. He will then help you as you make the confession to the police and to the parents of that little girl."

Marguerite's sobbing subsided. The room became deathly silent. Suddenly, she said, "You're right, Lara. Pray for me, please. It's time I changed. I can't run from God forever. I'm ready for Him to take control of my life. I've made a mess of it. Then, after we're through praying, maybe you'd be willing to go with me to tell my parents and the police and the child's parents. . . ."

LaraLeigh nearly gasped. Her, so shy and timid! But she said encouragingly, "Yes, Marguerite, God willing, I'll go."

Marguerite dropped to her knees, weeping. Lara knelt beside her and led out in prayer. Crumbs, she thought joyously, were still bread, and bread

was a life-giving staple. Yes, God could use mightily the testimony (crumbs) of the timid and the shy when it was filled with the Holy Spirit.