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A GIFT FOR FATHER
By Mrs. Paul E. King

It was late afternoon and Harvey Wayne was on his knees in the front garden.

Harvey was not having his devotions . . . unless the setting out of seedlings can be called an act of faith; but being sixtyish and stiff in the back, he found the position the least awkward for the task.

Only a part of his mind was on the job: mainly he was comparing his own pleasant boyhood days with the present dissatisfied generation. Times certainly had changed. Yes, sir. And that not for the better, he reasoned sadly. What had brought about this change? he wondered. "In the last days . . ." the words of an aged, battle-scarred Apostle rang with certain clarity and understanding through his mind. Ah, yes, that was it. The last days!

"Could you spare me a bite to eat, Sir?" his thoughts were interrupted by a young man speaking to him.

Harvey Wayne straightened up slowly. Somehow the kinks in his back never fully vanished and disappeared anymore.

"A bite to eat? Eh?" His sharp eyes scrutinized the young man from head to foot. He didn't like what he saw. The boy's slacks and sweater were ragged and dirty. There was stubble on his pale, thin cheeks and his over-long hair looked greasy, messy and uncombed.

"What makes a beggar out of a young man like you?" Harvey asked impulsively.

The young man's shoulders drooped. He turned away without saying a word.

Harvey, sensing that he had said the wrong thing, called pleasantly after the slowly retreating figure, "There's not much food in the house; my wife's away, nursing a friend, but I could fix you some bacon and eggs."

New life stole into the young man's blue eyes. "Thank you, Sir," he answered politely.

"Come into the house," Harvey invited, leading the way to the kitchen door. "What's your name?" he asked, noting the boy would be about the same age his grandson would have been had he lived.

"Jim Barrington."

Harvey Wayne. Make yourself comfortable while I fix the food."

To the bacon and eggs, Harvey added toast with and jam, fried potatoes, a dish of canned fruit and a tall glass of milk.

He was filled with pity at the efforts of his guest to check himself from wolfing the food.

"Where will you be staying tonight, Son?"

"Under some hedge, I suppose." Jim's tone was bitter. "Same as last night and the night before."

Harvey Wayne pondered. Two nights under a hedge! He quickly made up his mind.

"You could have our spare room."

Thank you! Thank you!" Jim's face brightened.

"You should have a bath first," Harvey hinted.

"My wife has a profound aversion to dirt." He laughed softly.

Jim livened up a bit. "That would be great; almost as good as the food," he admitted.

"I'll go and get things ready for you," Harvey said making his way upstairs. He found a towel and washcloth and put out shaving gear and a bottle of shampoo.

Going to closet at the far end of the hallway, Harvey fingered the clothes of the beloved deceased grandson. Selecting a pair of good slacks and shirt, along with a bathrobe, he took them to the bathroom and hung them in a conspicuous place for Jim

"Everything's ready for you, Jim," he said pleasantly. "Here's your bedroom. I suppose you'll want to go to bed early when you've finished in the bathroom."

"It . . . it's great to have someone who understands me!" Jim exclaimed, brightening up at sight of the tub of water, bathrobe, and clean clothes. "Thanks. Thanks, Mr. Wayne," he added hoarsely in a half-whisper.

Harvey walked stiffly down the stairs. His eyes were misty with tears. The young fellow wasn't so bad after all. God had sent him here to receive help. The thought was stimulating. Harvey scarcely recognized Jim when he came downstairs the following morning. Clean-shaven, his face looked rounder and healthier though the defeated look was still in his eyes. Harvey noted, too, Jim's uneven haircut. It was not a first-rate job by any means, but at least Jim had begun to look more like a young man should look. Harvey Wayne was pleased. And the clothes were a perfect fit!

"You look refreshed and relaxed," Harvey complimented.
"I feel it too." Jim exclaimed brightly. ""Thanks to you.

They sat down to eat. Jim's manners had improved with his appearance.

"Where are you heading?" Harvey asked.

"I don't know. I . . . was . . . going home but . . . oh, I don't know . . . "

Was that a sob in the boy's voice?" Harvey Wayne looked down at the table, troubled by innate delicacy. "You . . . you've been in trouble haven't you?" His voice was soft and full of understanding.

"Yes. But I'm not a criminal. I was caught with reefers on me. But I'm having nothing more to do with the stuff."

"What made you do it in the first place?"

"Kicks, I suppose." Jim paused and then added fiercely, "No, I was a fool! A big fool!"

"Do you have a good home?"

"Mm, some people would call it that. Dad's rich. Head of a big corporation in Chicago. But . . . but Mr. Wayne, something's missing in our home. It . . . it's not at all like your home . . . like it is here."

Harvey Wayne swallowed hard. Tears brimmed up in his eyes and cheeks. Reaching across the table, he folded the boy's tender hands gently in his old calloused, work-worn hands.

"This is a Christian home, Jim. The Lord Jesus Christ rules and reigns here: this makes all the difference in the world. A Christian is a fully satisfied individual -- a complete man. Outside of Christ, one is ever seeking, yearning, searching. In Christ one has indescribable peace and joy and contentment . . . fulfillment and happiness, too."

"Is all this true? I mean really true? Could this become reality in my life? Could it? I'm so dissatisfied with my way of living until it frightens me when I think what I may do next. I left the city and wandered all this distance to get away from the old crowd . . . the gang. I want to start over, Mr. Wayne, to begin a new life, but how can I do it?"

"By giving your heart and life to Jesus Christ, my dear boy. That's the only way. Jesus said, 'Except a man be born again he can in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven.' Isaiah the prophet cried out, 'Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.'"

"Can this mean me? Truly and honestly?"

"It means you, Jim." Harvey's face was tear-stained as he made the affirmation. "The Bible says, 'If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.'"

"I want to do that right now, Mr. Wayne. I've been carrying a heavy load on my heart for a long, long time. I want to get rid of it. My past life has brought me nothing but heartache and grief and sorrow."

Kneeling by the kitchen chair, Jim Barrington repented of and confessed all his sins to Jesus. He became a new creature in Christ Jesus. His heavy load of sin and guilt vanished. His heart was filled with joy and peace and contentment, love and satisfaction.

"Perhaps it would be best for you to go home, Jim," Harvey Wayne suggested later that day.

"I dare not. Dad was furious when I was arrested. He's high in politics and the scandal shook him. He told me never to come again," Jim confided.

"What do you intend to do?"

"I don't know, Mr. Wayne. I just don't know. It would be so wonderful to live near you. I wonder. . . . "

"Maybe I could secure work here and go to church with you and Mrs. Wayne." Jim's face was beaming.

"I'll do what I can for you, my boy. But I feel that your father should know of your whereabouts," Harvey said. "This being the weekend, we'll have to wait till Monday to see about work for you."

They spent the morning gardening. It was surprising how well the boy worked. He seemed to enjoy it, too! Harvey, casting a hasty glance in Jim's direction, noted the look of peace and contentment written on the youth's countenance. The look of defeat and dejection was gone. Somehow, it seemed natural that he should thus be working by the side of the aging man.

After the noon meal Harvey remarked softly, "I'm going out for a bit. You go into the sitting room and rest for a spell. My Bible's open to St. John. It will make good reading for you while I'm gone, my boy."

Jim liked the way Mr. Wayne called him "my boy." It made him feel loved and respected; like he was a part of this wonderful family. He felt like he "belonged." He had never felt this in his own home. Everyone seemed so detached from the other, always going their separate ways to do what each wanted to do, whenever they chose. There was no real family life in the Barrington household. It was "fend for yourself. There's an abundance of money to carry you through life." But Jim found at an early age, to his utter dismay and consternation, that money cannot buy love and happiness and contentment and satisfaction.

"I . . . I called your folks, Jim," Harvey hated to interrupt but decided this would be as good a time as any to break the news to the boy.

"You did? What did Dad say? Was he angry?" Jim put the Book lovingly on the stand and searched Mr. Wayne's face eagerly.

"He didn't have much to say. He was thankful to know you're safe and well, though."

"He . . . he was?" Jim's face brightened at the bit of news.

"I gave him our address, Jim. Told him he had a 'new' son; that you were changed . . . converted and transformed by grace Divine."

"What did he say? Was he glad?" Jim's voice was eager, excited.

"He was deeply moved to hear it. I heard him blow his nose a couple of times." Jim was moved to tears.

Early Sunday morning a knock sounded at the door. Harvey answered it to find a tall man standing there.

"Mr. Wayne?" the stranger queried. "I'm Mr. Barrington . . . Winston Barrington. I . . . I've come to see my son and . . . and to thank you for telling me the truth over the phone. You spoke so kindly and the message got through to my heart. I'm here to apologize to my son for being such an 'unnatural father' as you so aptly and truthfully put it. It awakened me, rudely so, I'll have to admit, to my senses and to my responsibility."

"Come in. Come in, my dear man," Harvey Wayne said, leading the way inside.

"Dad! Dad!" It was Jim. "Happy Father's Day! My gift to you? A new boy with a new heart! I'm sorry I caused you all the heartache I did. Forgive me."

"Forgive you? Ah, Jim, my boy, can you forgive your proud father? I am the one who needs forgiven. I failed you, Jim . . . just like I failed Jeffrey, Wayne and Sandra. Do you suppose we can begin over, Jim?"

Can we? I promise to do different, to live my whole life differently. . . .

"Oh, Dad!" was all Jim could say, as father and son wept in each other's embrace and each received forgiveness from the other.

"I . . . I would like to remain here and work, Father," Jim said at last. "Mr. Wayne needs help in the garden and the lawn. He's going to help me secure employment of my own and he offered me a place to stay. I want to learn more about God, Dad. This is the place to learn. God lives in Mr. Wayne. He rules this home. May I stay, Father? I promise, by the grace of God, to be a blessing to you and to the world."

"You may stay only if I may have the privilege of sending a check each month to Mr. Wayne as a love gift for rescuing my son from the gutters of sin."

"The Lord did the rescuing, Mr. Barrington," Harvey Wayne quickly interjected. "There is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved, but by the name of Jesus."

"Well, then it shall be a gift to you because your love and kindness reached into a wayward boy's heart and reached his tender strings. Jim, you be sure to pay room and board every week."

"Indeed I will."

The church bell rang sweetly and clearly across the valley and village reminding the villagers that it was Sunday morning.

"It's time for church," Harvey Wayne exclaimed. "Let us go into the house of the Lord and worship Him."

As the trio entered the building, Harvey offered a prayer of thanks to the Lord. Not only was one soul rescued from sin and shame but a life was saved, as well. And from the confidence he had in God, Harvey knew that another soul would soon be saved . . . maybe even this morning Mr. Barrington would make his way to the altar and find the Savior of mankind.

A glorious thought filled his being with praise to God. The mortgage on his little home was going to be paid! Oh, God was good! A prayer-answering God!

His overflowing heart joined the group of singing men and women in worshipful hymns of praise to a prayer-answering God!