

642 Words

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The Man Next Door

by

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Moving to Falls View wasn't Sammy's first new home, but he missed his friends. He missed his old house with the fields and forests all around. From his spot high in the tree above the deck, Sammy could survey the houses crowded along Main Street. A wooden fence separated his yard from the creepy house next door, a huge three-story with wide porches along the front and back. The backyard was shaded with trees, and a tiny creek curved among them until it disappeared into the deeper forest beyond.

Sammy's classmates shared stories about the house and the older man who lived there. He didn't know if their tales were true, but Sammy was eager to catch a glimpse of the mysterious stranger at 222 Main Street. The rusty gate sagging across the walk in front displayed a single word: Talon.

The screen door creaked. Mr. Talon, carrying a stick and wearing black boots, stepped into the yard. He was big, and Sammy was terrified when the man turned toward him. Sammy's spot in the tree was well-hidden, but he scrunched down behind the leaves and waited. The older man retrieved a rake and gathered leaves into piles.

Mr. Talon raked with one hand and Sammy realized the stick was a cane. Sammy's neighbor needed it to help him walk.

Something stirred inside Sammy. Mom and Dad read the story of the Good Samaritan during devotions at supper last night, and Sammy had an assignment to help a neighbor in some way. Mr. Talon might be a good choice, but what about all the stories? Sammy's fears convinced him to search for another neighbor to help.

He climbed down the tree thinking about Zacchaeus, a little man who displayed big courage seeking Jesus. Sammy had trusted Jesus as His Savior last summer. Would Jesus expect Sammy to be brave and help Mr. Talon? A Bible verse flooded his mind as he set the table for supper, "Be kind and compassionate to one another..."

Sammy pushed his green beans around the plate with his fork but few made it into his mouth. Mom felt his forehead.

"Sammy, what's wrong? You've hardly touched your food."

Sammy shared the terrible stories he heard about Mr. Talon and the man's attempt at raking leaves.

Dad put his hand on Sammy's shoulder.

"Son, I met Mr. Talon, and he's very nice. Those stories sound made-up to me. People often assume bad things about neighbors they don't really know. After supper I want you to go meet Mr. Talon."

"Yes, sir."

Sammy stepped slowly along the sidewalk, his heart filled with fear. As he climbed the steps to the old house he prayed.

"God, please help me to be brave."

Sammy knocked and waited.

The door groaned open, and Mr. Talon stared at him. Sammy's heart pounded.

"Yes?"

"I'm Sammy. We moved next door."

"The tree climber. Wondered when we'd meet. You don't believe all those stories people tell about me, do you?"

Mr. Talon face lit up with his laugh. Sammy's heart was not pounding quite so fast.

"I wasn't sure."

"Sammy, this house is not haunted, but it does creak a lot. And so do I."

Mr. Talon joined Sammy for a walk around the yard, and he knew the name of every plant and tree. The older man pushed leaves from his flower beds using the cane. Sammy could wait no longer. He had to help.

"Mr. Talon, I can rake the leaves. I'm pretty strong."

"Sammy, I'd like that just fine. But only if I can share something with you. You can come over and enjoy my woods anytime. Deal?"

"Yes, sir!"

Sammy's fear was gone, and he had made a new friend. He burst through the front door.

"Mom! Dad! God took away my fear. Mr. Talon is so cool."