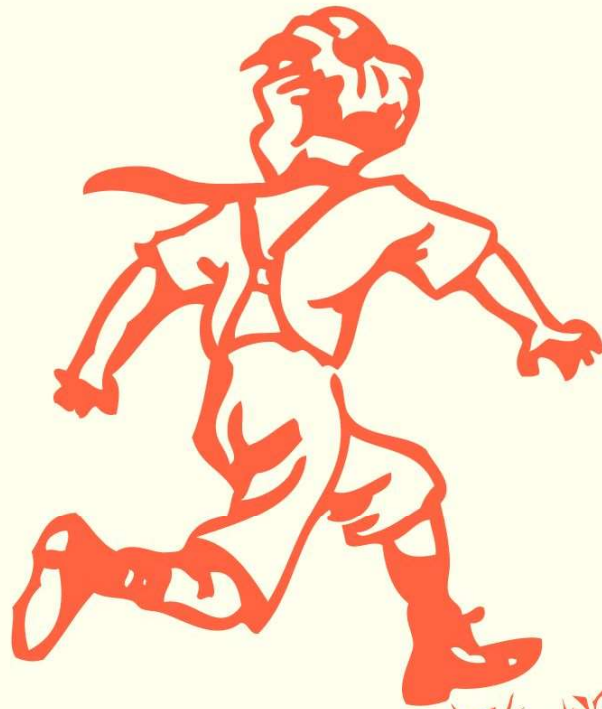


TAMMERA MART

QUICK ON HIS
FEET



Quick on His Feet

In a flash he was gone. I knew it as soon as I stepped out the back door. He was nowhere in sight. Panicked, I ran to the gate. The latch was not in place. Another quick scan of the backyard revealed my deepest fear a reality. My zealous two-year-old had escaped and headed for the four-lane highway that kept a continual flow of speeding traffic in front of our house.

My heart pounded wildly and I was in tune to nothing but my child in danger. I ran out the gate, rounded the corner of the garage, and nearly collided with my elderly neighbor. In his arms, my son looked no worse for the wear.

"My old heart can't take this," he said through a strained voice. Lines etched his stone-cold face. "He was right at the edge of the curb, ready to step off."

Distraught, embarrassed, and humiliated, I muttered a thank you, grabbed my child, and hurried into the house where I collapsed into a chair and held my son tightly to my chest. I sobbed.

The near tragedy was no one's fault, but I couldn't help but think, *What if...?* I had no way to ease the sense of doom that lingered in my heart. Forrest came over to see how I was doing. Too embarrassed, I wouldn't talk to him. I could only imagine what he thought of me as a mother.

Several days passed. I continued to ignore Forrest. On occasion, I offered a short wave, but mostly I pretended not to notice him sitting passively on his front patio. In my opinion, the old man had been out of line. What right did he have to judge my parenting? Accidents happen, even to the best parents.

However, my conscience wouldn't let it go. The way a worm eats delicious fruit, conviction gnawed at my mind, revealing the dark truths that lurked below the surface of my bravado. Fault existed there, because even though Forrest had saved my child, I wouldn't talk to him.

Two weeks after the incident with Adam, Forrest sat alone on his patio. I worked in the yard and struggled with my desire to approach him. It's tough the way pride can leash itself around you in an attempt to hold you back from the truth.

An old proverb came to mind. "When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with humility comes wisdom." I closed my eyes and sighed. I thought I was above pride, never submissive to it.

Setting aside my gloves and yard tools, I approached my neighbor. "How are you, Forrest?"

"Just fine. How are you?" He didn't smile, just rocked easily in the wrought iron chair.

We carried on a very simple conversation. Finally, I broached the subject that brought me to his patio. "I never really thanked you properly for saving Adam; I was embarrassed."

Then, he did smile, barely. "I know, but those things happen."

Was it that simple? I stood there, confused. "I felt like you thought I was terrible parent. I thought you were angry."

"Nope. Just scared. I have a bad heart, you know." I did know. In fact, Forrest had a hard time getting around anywhere fast, yet he managed. I shook my head, wanting to laugh at myself. I had wasted two weeks allowing pride to rob me of this man's genuine kindness, not to mention the inner turmoil I had caused myself.

"You're not a bad parent," he said. "I never thought that. I've seen bad parents." He continued to rock in that rhythmic motion, content. It didn't take me long to realize that Forrest wasn't as gruff as he seemed.

On a lighter note, I asked, "What I really want to know is how you were able to get to Adam so quickly?"

He didn't ponder long, just shrugged. "I have no idea," he said. "I'm just glad I was there."

"I am too." I shook my head, amazed again at how God works. He not only brought to surface the pride that I unknowingly harbored, but he allowed, for a few split seconds, a usually slow old man to be quick on his feet.