

The Whispers of Angels

by Annette Smith

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CHAPTER ONE

Just a Push

Often the scenes I witness while working as a nurse affect how I care for my family. Observing the injuries inflicted by car accidents has made me somewhat of a crusader for the use of seat belts. Because I have seen numerous cases of skin cancer, I insist that my family apply sunscreen. I keep tabs on my husband's blood pressure because I've treated men his age with serious heart disease. I can't seem to always leave my "nurse's hat" at the hospital, and occasionally I take things a bit too far.

I like to think that a busy hospital emergency room is not so different from the produce section in a large supermarket. Just as a supermarket offers items of seasonal abundance—strawberries in the spring, watermelons in the summer, pumpkins in the fall, and sweet potatoes all winter—the same could be said of an emergency room. Football injuries abound in the fall; fractured, "slipped-on-the-ice" bones in the winter; allergies in the spring; and in the summer, sunburns, bug bites, poison ivy rashes, and the most dreaded seasonal incident of all—lawnmower accidents.

The variety and severity of the injuries that power lawn-mowers inflict is amazing. The number of unwise and downright foolish things that folks do with lawnmowers to get themselves hurt is surprising.

People operate their mowers barefoot or wearing only flimsy sandals, and then mow right over their feet. In a hurry, they zoom over rocks and gravel and end up with assorted painful debris embedded in their eyes. They even slice their fingers while trying to dislodge items interfering with the cutting blades while their machines are still running.

Almost in a league of their own are the mechanically gifted yard men. These fellows dramatically increase their chances of injury by disengaging the pesky safety mechanisms built into new mowers as soon as they get them home from the store.

Injuries from lawnmower accidents can range from minor cuts and scrapes requiring bandages and tetanus shots to amputated toes requiring emergency surgery. But no matter what the severity of any particular injury, I remain convinced that *these are dangerous machines*. They should be operated by cautious adults using proper safety equipment.

Rarely have I been accused of being an overly protective mother. To the contrary, I've endured my share of surprised looks and pointed comments as my children embarked on more than a few slightly unusual, possibly precarious, parent-condoned adventures.

However, even if this time I *was* considered to be overly protective, I wouldn't budge in my decision. My six-year-old daughter, Rachel, would not be allowed to drive the riding mower while we spent the weekend at her grandparents' house. It didn't matter to me that the blade was turned off or that the gears were set low. Lawnmowers are not toys. She could not drive it.

My parental popularity did not increase when her husky, same-aged cousin Tyler *was* allowed to drive the mower. Around and around the yard Tyler drove, albeit at a pace slow enough to shame a snail, head high, back straight, carefully steering the mighty motorized machine. Rachel sat glumly on the porch, chin in hands. Tyler waved tauntingly toward her at every turn.

I stood by the window and watched them for a few minutes, then turned my attention to coffee and conversation with my mother and Tyler's more lenient mom, Martha. In a half-hour or so I stole another peek.

I was shocked and angered to see, in the distance, my Rachel perched on the slow-moving mower, smiling and waving like a queen on a coronation float as she steered up the steep hill toward the house. Tyler was nowhere to be seen.

She had *deliberately* disobeyed me. It had no doubt been Tyler's idea. I stormed out the door, set to pull her right off that machine. But I was surprised to hear curious silence rather than the loud roar of the mower. I trotted across the yard toward Rachel and realized the engine wasn't running. Still, the machine, with my daughter precariously perched in the seat, inched up the steep hill. Finally, when I reached her, I saw behind the mower, redfaced, sweating, and almost bent to the ground, her adoring and easily charmed cousin. Rachel was riding the mower all right, steering it herself and everything, but Tyler was providing every bit of the horsepower. He was pushing the heavy lawnmower, with her on it, inch by strenuous inch.

Tyler had come up with a way for Rachel to get to drive the lawnmower and hopefully avoid getting into trouble. Her look of pure joy was dimmed only by the look of obvious pride on his flushed face. Tyler figured right—no one got into any trouble at all.

Sometimes I find it enjoyable to be in an enviable position, the recipient of a coveted assignment, the person chosen to participate in some rare opportunity. I bask in the attention, the momentary praise and notoriety. But quickly, so very quickly, that position becomes a lonely one.

Being in the driver's seat while everyone else watches from the porch isn't fun for very long. The enjoyment of waving at every turn quickly becomes stale and the folks on the porch don't always wave back.

I think my nephew Tyler has the right idea: He knows that after a spin or two around the yard, it's usually best to get in the back, do a little pushing, and let someone else have a turn at the wheel.

*Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young,
but set an example for the believers.*

—1 TIMOTHY 4:12