

A Mustang AND A Prayer

Delbert Wright walked a circle around the 25-year-old used car and could barely contain his excitement. The sky-blue 1966 Ford Mustang was exactly what he wanted. As an experienced buyer of used cars from family and friends, he knew he needed to keep his reaction hidden, but he couldn't stifle the feelings bubbling inside.

by CHRIS FABRY

DELBERT'S FRIEND from early childhood, Rexford Chambliss, shook his head. "I see that look. That's the same smile you gave that pitcher from Lakewood High in our last game, senior year. Threw you a hanging curveball in the bottom of the seventh."

Delbert ran a hand across his whiskered face. "I don't think I ever hit a ball that far before or since."

"It's probably still rolling in the woods somewhere." Rexford laughed. "Cars like this one can bring back some good memories."

"I always dreamed of driving this," Delbert said. "Never could afford it."

"Well, now you can. And with a little TLC, you'll be the envy of all the classic car crowd."

Delbert opened the passenger door and inspected a tear in the upholstery and some cracks in the dashboard. "That's not why I want it."

"Really? You looking for a long-term investment? Something that will pay dividends in 20 years?"

Delbert smiled. "Exactly. But not in the way you think."

Rexford crossed his arms. "Enlighten me."

Delbert opened the trunk and saw the rusty tire iron and the flat spare. "You know my son, Darren?"

Rexford raised his eyebrows slightly. "Mm-hmm."

"He's at that age where he could go a lot of different directions. I've been trying to figure out a way to reach him."

Rexford looked away. "From what I hear, he's already going in some bad directions. No offense."

"None taken."

"And you think buying him this car is going to straighten him out?"

"No, I'm not buying it for him. I'm hoping to work on it together. Restore it to its original condition. My experience is that when you have something in front of you that you're working on together, it can lead to conversations you wouldn't have otherwise."

Delbert knelt at the rear of the car and inspected the exhaust. A coat hanger held it in place, but the muffler was rusted through.



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“I know you’re going to need to replace that tailpipe,” Rexford said.

“I was hoping to find a car that would need a little work, but not too much.”

“This is the one.”

“I want to be able to ...” Delbert stood with a grunt and rubbed the back of his neck. “You haven’t heard what happened to me, have you?”

Rexford squinted. “You win the lottery?”

Delbert laughed. “No, but I kind of won the spiritual lottery.”

“What does that mean?” Rexford’s voice sounded tentative, like he was nervous just asking the question.

“You know I had a wild side when we were younger, right?”

Rexford gave him a look. “It wasn’t just a side, Dell; ‘wild’ was through and through and all the way to the bone. I remember the time when you ...” Rexford was off telling a tale Delbert didn’t want to remember. But Rexford’s version of it was surprisingly close to the truth.

“I’m a different man than I was back then,” Delbert said. “And it all started about a year ago when I went to church with my wife.”

“Oh boy, here it comes,” Rexford said with a sigh.

“You asked.”

“All right, keep going.”

“I always thought religion was a crutch. I believed in God, but I figured if He left me alone, I’d return the favor. But something happened last year. Life brought me to the end of myself. I realized I needed God. And then I realized He had been chasing me all along. I was hungry for something that would satisfy. It was like I had a hole ...”

Rexford put up a hand. “I get it. I don’t need a sermon, Dell; I need cash. Besides, what’s religion got to do with my Mustang?”

Delbert pursed his lips and gave a dip of the head. “I’ve tried to reach my son and let him see the change in me. I want him to find what I have so bad I can taste it. But there’s distance between us.”

“That’s nice, Dell. Now what about the car?”

Delbert continued without missing a beat. “I was reading my Bible a few weeks ago and suddenly got an idea. I’m not sure if it was from the Lord or my own imagination, but I could see Darren and me leaning over a car’s engine, the hood up. And it was a ’66 Mustang just like this one.”

“So my car is an answer to prayer?”

“It might be. I had this sense that if Darren and I could spend some time together, getting our hands dirty after I come home from work and he comes home from school, something good will happen. What could be better than working on a car and seeing it brought to life? That’s what happened to me. I went from something headed for the junk pile to something brand new inside.”

“You don’t look brand new to me,” Rexford said with a smirk. “You look like you could use four new tires and an oil change.”

Delbert laughed. “I’m thinking this might be the way God will grab his heart and give him a desire to follow Jesus. That’s what I’m praying.”

Rexford closed the hood. “You think that story is going to make me lower what I’m asking?”

“I didn’t tell you that to influence the price.”

“What does your wife think of this big idea?”

“She does her best work about people’s souls on her knees. She wore out three throw rugs on

me before I came around. But I think she sees the value in doing this with Darren.”

“Speaking of value,” Rexford said, “you know what I want for it, right?”

“I do. And I also know it’s got more miles than a one-way trip to the moon.”

They haggled like that for a good 20 minutes, two old friends going back and forth. Delbert pretended to walk away, and Rexford told him to turn around. Then Rexford retreated to the porch with a hangdog look. In the end, Delbert went up from his well-researched price, and Rexford moved slightly lower. They both shook hands and smiled. Rexford removed the license plate and handed over the keys, a signed title, and a bill of sale.

“I’ll bring Darren back later and surprise him. Let him drive it home — if that’s OK with you.”

“That’ll be fine.”

Delbert paused by his own car. “Can I ask you something?”

“I get the feeling you’re going to ask, whether I say yes or not. Go ahead.”

“I remember you used to go to that little church near the high school when we were younger.”

“Stopped going there a long time ago.”

“You go anywhere else?”

“Nope.”

“Where are you with God?”

“Delbert, worry about your son. I’ll deal with God in my own way.”

“I understand. But I need to warn you.”

“About what?”

“I told my wife I was coming over here. She’s going to put you on her prayer list.”

Rexford shook his head and waved as he walked into the house.

Delbert pulled away, looking at the Mustang in his rearview. As he drove, he prayed, *Lord, You know my hopes and dreams. You know I want this car to bring Darren and me together. Draw him closer to me and give him a desire to draw close to You and give his heart to You. I ask that You would set him free from what’s holding him back. Use me, use that car, and whatever it takes to get him to*

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understand his need for You. I pray this believing You have the power to do all of that and more.

Delbert stood at the front door, watching for Darren that afternoon. The school bus stopped near the house, but Darren wasn’t on it. He watched and waited until his wife called him for dinner. As he ate, he listened for his son’s footsteps that didn’t come. When darkness fell, Delbert had the feeling that the journey he was on was not a sprint, but a long walk of faith that was going to force him to hope and believe in a power and a love greater than his own.

Lord, use that Mustang however You want. And give me the faith to trust in Your timing and not my own. ☪

CHRIS FABRY is an award-winning author of more than 80 books, including *Saving Grayson* and his latest, *The Forge*. Chris is also host of *Chris Fabry Live on Moody Radio*. Find out more at ChrisFabry.com.



THE FORGE

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