

Leo: Loyalty

"I'm sorry to do this to you, Ted. You've been a very good worker and I'd like to keep you on, but I can't afford to any more." Old Mr. Gallagher looked downcast as he handed Ted his pay.

"I understand, Mr. G," said Ted. "I'm sure sorry too, but I know you're not getting business now. Well — uh — see you around."

Ted walked slowly home. This was a blow, but he'd get another job. Mr. Gallagher was the one with real problems. For years, "Mr. G's" had been the only food store in their small town. Then that huge new supermarket opened a mile away, and it seemed as though almost all of Mr. G's steady customers had started shopping there. Ted, who had worked for Mr. G. after school for two years, had seen him change in a few short months from a jolly companion to a tense, nervous, morose old man who looked beaten.

"Beaten!" thought Ted. "That's *just* how he looks. He's never seemed like an old man before, but he sure does now. Who's going to stack boxes for him, and deliver orders? He's too old to do that kind of stuff himself any more." Ted didn't tell anyone about what had happened, but was very quiet for the rest of the day, and next day at school his mind seemed to be only half on his lessons.

After school he went to Mr. G's as usual and was sweeping out the storeroom when Mr. G discovered him. "Ted!" he said in surprise. "Why — I thought I told you I couldn't afford to pay you any more."

"Oh, you did, Mr. G, but that doesn't matter. I'm not all that broke" (actually, Ted didn't know where the money for next Saturday's movie was coming from) "and I'd like to stay on and help out for a while.

After all," Ted grinned, "you don't want me wandering the streets getting into trouble, do you? Hey, there's a customer. Don't let her get away!"

Mr. G found himself strangely choked up when he tried to talk to Ted, so not much more was said, and Ted finished his work and went home. That evening, however, Ted's father got a phone call about which he said nothing, but he rested his hand fondly on Ted's shoulder for a long moment when he got back to the supper table. After Ted had gone to bed his parents talked until very late.

Next evening, Ted's parents went to a special meeting of the town civic club, and he was too busy with homework when they got home to ask them what had happened. Then came the weekend, and Ted didn't get back to Mr. G's until Monday. He walked in to find four customers in the store, one lady just leaving with a huge bag in her arms. Ted stared for a few seconds before he remembered and said, "I'll carry that for you, Mrs. Ames."

When they got to her car she said, "You're a fine boy, Ted. We're all very proud of you."

Ted didn't know what to make of that, so after he had closed the car door he shrugged his shoulders and went back to the store. Another customer came in, and Mr. G seemed almost as busy as in the old days. He had no time to talk to Ted, who was so busy himself that he was almost late for supper.

This time he wasn't quiet at all. "You should have seen the customers Mr. G had today!" he almost shouted. "Bet he took in more money than he did all last week. The supermarket must have been closed."

Ted's parents looked at each other, and his father said, "No, the supermarket wasn't closed. They're doing plenty of business with people for miles around. But it took a very fine high school student to make us

realize that some things — or some people — in our town are more important than a modern supermarket.”

Ted suddenly sensed what his father was getting at, turned red, and busied himself with his food.

His father smiled. “Don’t be embarrassed, Ted, Your loyalty to Mr. G taught us all a lesson. Mr. G has served this town well all these years, and his service, and his products, are just as good now as they always



were. There’s nothing wrong with shopping at the supermarket once in a while, and new people in town will probably go there all the time, but Mr. G’s old customers are sure going to see to it that he stays in business!”

Ted’s face lit up. “That’s great! Then that must be what your special meeting was all about.”

“Yes,” said Father. “After Mr. G told me what you had done, I decided that the whole town could use a lesson in loyalty.”