



Pay It Forward: A Novel

Catherine Ryan Hyde

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THE MIRACLE OF INNOCENCE

The story of how a boy who believed in the goodness of human nature set out to change the world.

Pay It Forward is a wondrous and moving novel about Trevor McKinney, a twelve-year-old boy in a small California town who accepts the challenge that his teacher gives his class, a chance to earn extra credit by coming up with a plan to change the world for the better -- and to put that plan into action.

The idea that Trevor comes up with is so simple and so naïve that when others learn of it they are dismissive. Even Trevor himself begins to doubt when his "pay it forward" plan seems to founder on a combination of bad luck and the worst of human nature.

What is his idea? Trevor chooses three people for whom he will do a favor, and then when those people thank him and ask how they might pay him back, he will tell them that instead of paying him back, they should each "pay it forward" by choosing three people for whom they can do favors, and in turn telling those people to pay it forward. It's nothing less than a human chain letter of kindness and good will.

Does his plan work? No. And yes -- it works wonderfully, but only after it has seemed to Trevor that maybe all his efforts have been for naught. The first person he chooses to help -- a homeless man to whom he gives his paper-route money so he can make himself presentable enough to find a job -- disappoints him by returning to a life of dissolution and eventually ending up in jail. The second is a lady on his paper route, old and alone and infirm, and with a garden that needs tending. No sooner has Trevor begun to help her, however, than she goes and dies on him.

The third person Trevor hopes to help is his teacher, Reuben St. Clair, a scarred, bitter, untrusting man who seems to come truly alive only when in front of his class. Trevor's goal is to match him with his mother, Arlene, a pretty, hardworking woman who has raised Trevor more or less alone, but who Trevor feels has a lot to offer the right man. It proves not to be a match made in heaven, though, and Trevor's dismay only deepens as he watches these two people come so close to achieving the connection he wants for them, only to turn away at the last moment.

Failure seems inevitable, and Trevor is resigned. What he doesn't realize, however, is that there really is a good side to human nature, and that the tiny seed of kindness and caring he planted has taken root. In neighborhoods in other California towns, and as far away as Los Angeles, there are others following the rules of "paying it forward." Soon fame comes knocking, bringing with it excitement and an unforeseen tragedy.

In the end, *Pay It Forward* is the story of seemingly ordinary people made extraordinary by the simple faith of a child. In the tradition of the successful and inspirational television show *Touched by an Angel*, and the phenomenally successful novel and film *Forrest Gump*, *Pay It Forward* is a work of charm, wit, and remarkable inspiration, a story of hope for today and for many tomorrows to come.

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