

# The Gift (11)

The time had come. For a couple of days now he had struggled with the news of Ruth's cancer and had been unable to completely come to terms with the situation. Particularly he had much difficulty grasping how God fit into this. For what seemed like the millionth time he wished that Jenny were here. She would certainly have known the answers to the multitude of questions swarming around in his mind.

He had even briefly thought to himself that he would have to ask Jenny...only to realize immediately that she was no longer there. How often, he wondered, would that happen in the years to come? She would never be there again. Never again would she come to him.

And so, he had decided that the time had come for him to go to her.

With an anxious spirit he went outside and picked some of the nicest looking flowers from the Autumn Glories that Jenny had so tenderly planted a few years prior and after retrieving his keys, his coat, and a hat he made his way to the garage. Halfway through the doorway he realized that there was one other thing he needed.

His heart beat rapidly as he shut the car door and turned toward his destination. He was certainly anxious. There were also the feelings of apprehension. More than anything however there was the feeling of deep and profound sadness. A feeling that had begun to envelop him on Saturday and now had completely closed around him.

There was yet no stone in place, just a simple marker with her name on it along with the date of her birth and the date of her death. The outline of the sod that had been removed could still be seen in the grass.

Standing there in front of her grave he gazed down at this marker for a long time without really even seeing it. Memory after memory passed before his mind. Some of them, as they had when he had shared them with the young man not so long ago, made him smile while others brought the tears to his eyes once again. In a way he had felt silly coming here because he knew she was not really here. He knew that she would not be able to talk to him. He knew that she would not be able to hear him. And yet, even knowing these things, standing here next to her grave he felt at least the beginnings of a sense of calm that he had not felt since she had died. In a way he felt near her again. The same way he had felt when he held her Bible to his chest. The same as when he smelled the scent of her perfume as it remained on some of her clothes in the closet.

He looked around then half expecting and half hoping that that young man would be standing watching him. But there was no one that he could see. He was struck then at how different everything looked. How everything had changed in the short time since he had last been here. The leaves that had been ablaze in glorious color only a few weeks before now lay scattered over the grass and the tomb stones; the trees that once held them were now bare and stark against a cold, gray, and cloudy sky. There were no birds that he could see nor were there squirrels running playfully up and down and around the trees.

With a sigh he sat down on the recently replaced sod and gently laid the Autumn Glories he had picked at home next to the marker bearing her name. Out of nowhere came the overwhelming and seemingly unbearable need to hold her one last time. To take her in his arms for but a moment, to feel her warmth, her embrace. And under the gray autumn sky that mirrored his soul at the moment, he cried. It was not the uncontrolled and mournful wailing as at times before but it was the simple weeping of a soul filled with profound sorrow.

He wasn't sure how long he had been there but in time, when the tears seemed to have eased and the sorrow abated, he retrieved his handkerchief from his pocket and wiped away what tears remained. Suddenly he realized that he felt better. Oh, the sorrow still remained but he felt as if his soul had been unburdened, even if only a little. And so he took the old tattered Bible that he had set on the ground and opened it to that same passage he had read a number of days ago, Romans 8:24-39, and read it aloud, though in a soft voice. He read it again and again until he could almost recite it from memory.

And then he began to tell Jenny all that had happened in his life since she had gone. He told her about all the cards he had gotten in the mail and about the calls from so many friends, mostly of hers, expressing their sorrow and desire to help if they could. He told her of the VanVleets and how they had been so helpful and of the difficulty they now faced. He told her of the things he had done around the house and how beautiful all her flowers looked. He talked for what seemed a long time and even though he knew very well he was simply talking to himself, he felt much better.

“Oh Jenny,” he finally said. “Oh, I wish you could be here to help me understand. I think I believe in God but I just don't know.” He bowed his head then and shook it slowly from side to side. “I just wish you were here to help me.”

Overcome by his feeling of helplessness and not knowing what else to do, he slowly rose up to his knees, folded his hands, and prayed.

“Oh God, I don’t know what to do. Please help me. Help me to understand. Help me to know what I believe. Help me to see the way that I must go. And if it is possible, heal this hurt I feel in my soul. Amen.”

As the day wore on he finally picked himself up and grudgingly walked back to his car. Before he reached for the door handle he turned to look one last time to where his beloved lay. Then, as the sadness of leaving her touched his heart he wondered for the first time, at least that he could remember, what she was experiencing right at that moment. It was his sincere hope that she was happy. And yet, even though that was his hope, the thought of her being happy while he himself was in such turmoil and grief was almost too much to bear.

“And yet, life goes on,” he said softly to himself as he opened the door to the car and carefully got in. “Like it or not, life goes on.”

He drove through town and though his original intention had been to go home, without really realizing it he found himself parked along the road in front of the church that his wife had attended for so many years. It was really the last place he wanted to go or had even considered as a destination and yet here he was.