

The Gift (13)

The room, though a bit smaller, was not much different than most every other hospital room. Neutral colors adorned the walls and floor giving the room a false sense of warmth, at least as far as the patient was concerned. She was cold.

Ruth lay in the bed with the blankets pulled up to her chin, slightly elevated so that she could watch the television in the corner if she so chose. Her mother Janet sat in a chair to her left reading a book. They had played cards for a while but the lack of sleep the night before had caught up with her and she had decided to try to rest.

She had been quite successful at putting the thoughts of today aside in her mind the previous day as she had been busy with homework, supper, and chores. But once she had finally lain down in bed and closed her eyes she couldn't stop thinking about it. At her appointment three days before with the specialist to whom their family doctor had referred them it had all seemed so abstract and detached, but now, knowing that her treatments would begin the next day and the effects those treatments would have on her body brought her fears to the fore once again.

It wasn't even so much the possibility that she could die from the disease that bothered her. That was partly because this didn't seem to be the immediate concern of the doctor and partly because that was a reality that she just had not attempted to wrap her mind around yet. Sure, she knew it was a possibility but in her mind that was something to be dealt with down the road. There were other more immediate concerns that occupied her mind at present.

First there were the treatments and how they would affect her. When would her hair begin to fall out? How would it grow back? How would her friends at school react? How much school would she miss?

Then there was the surgery that would follow a couple of weeks later and what the outcome of that would be. Would she lose her leg? Would they be able to save it? How much therapy would she need? Would she be able to play softball in the spring? Would she be able to walk down the aisle at her wedding someday?

Each time she closed her eyes all of these thoughts seemed to rush at her out of the dark and assail her mind one after another. She tossed and turned for some time until she finally got up and made her way downstairs to see if her parents were still up.

She found them sitting on the couch in the family room watching the news. This in itself surprised her somewhat because very seldom were they ever up this late. Apparently she was not the only one having trouble sleeping.

Her father noticed her shadow and turned to face her. He was not at all surprised and in fact looked almost as if he had expected her.

“Can’t sleep, huh?” he asked as he slid over and patted the couch in between him and Janet. “Have a seat.”

Walking past her father Ruth sat down on the couch, sat back, and sighed. Looking down at her hands folded on her lap she said, “I’ve been tossing and turning ever since I went to bed...but I just can’t sleep. All these thoughts keep going through my mind and I can’t make them stop.”

Her father put his arm around her and her mother took one of her hands in her own. “Well, it isn’t like you have anything on your mind, right?” her father said with a smile. “Cancer, chemotherapy, surgery, school; I can’t imagine why you would have trouble falling asleep.”

“Boy, when you put it that way it all sounds so petty, doesn’t it?” Ruth giggled as she playfully slapped her father’s leg. “Last time I come to you for sympathy,” she said smiling the smile that said just the opposite.

Laughing along with her husband and daughter, Janet had to put in her two cents worth. “So, now you know what I have to put up with every day!”

“Oh, come on you two,” Jack said in mock dismay. “No fair to gang up on me! If you keep it up I am going to go upstairs and get the boys out of bed so I have someone on my side.”

“Jack VanVleet, you most certainly will not!” Janet said sternly. “As riled up as you had them earlier I didn’t think they would ever fall asleep!”

They all laughed then remembering the wrestling match that had taken center stage in the family room only a couple of hours before.

After a moment of silence Ruth stood up, turned, and sat on the floor in front of her parents. “It’s not that I am really scared,” she said as she picked at the carpeting. “But there are just so many unknowns. There are so many questions that I don’t have the answers to. It’s so hard to wait.”

“Oh honey, I know it is,” said Janet as she sat down next to Ruth and hugged her. “You know, Mr. Michealson said something to me the day that your dad and I went to see the doctor and it has stuck in my mind.” Janet moved over to the couch next to where Jack sat and snuggled up against his legs so that she could face Ruth. “He told me that what the doctor had to say at the appointment was a bridge that would have to be crossed. That made me wonder just how many bridges lay out there that we would have to cross but it also put things into perspective for me. The fact is that there are a lot of bridges that we will come to. Some of them will be in good condition and will be easy to cross; others will hardly be bridges at all and will take a gigantic leap of faith to walk over.” Looking into the questioning face of her daughter she continued. “I guess I realized that all those bridges that we can’t see yet aren’t worth worrying about. We will take them one at a time and by God’s grace we will cross them together.”

“I know mom,” said Ruth looking from her mother to her father, a bit of irritation in her voice. “I know that God will give me and all of us the grace we need when we need it. But knowing that doesn’t take away the unanswered questions. They are always there ready to pounce when I let my guard down.” Laying back on the floor of the family room she stretched out and let out a long sigh. “I just wish that everything could go back to the way it was.”

Not knowing it, Ruth had just put into words the thoughts that each of them had been thinking. If only everything could go back to the way it was. If only life could go merrily on. If only there was another way to cross this river, another bridge they could walk across.

Now, laying in the bed and watching as the IV slowly dripped, she knew that would be impossible. For the first time she realized with great clarity that her life would never be the same again. Closing her eyes she prayed silently that God would give her the grace to be content in the way he was leading her and the grace also to face each bridge she came to with faith and the assurance that God was in control. And then she fell asleep.