

The Gift (14)

The ringing of the telephone jolted the old man back to reality. He had been browsing through some material that Pastor Kielman had given him that morning when they had met for breakfast and made it to the phone only a second or two before the answering machine would have picked it up.

Grumbling to himself for not having taken the phone with him when he sat down he reached out and picked it up. "Hello," he said slightly winded.

"Hello Mr. Michealson, this is Janet from next door. I hope I'm not disturbing you," she said sensing that he was a bit out of breath.

"Oh no my dear," he chuckled. "I was in the chair reading and these old bones just don't move like they used to. Forgetful as I am I didn't take the phone with me when I sat down."

"Well, that is a relief." Janet paused very briefly and then continued on with the reason for her call. "I was wondering if it would be possible for you to come over and sit with Ruth for a few minutes? She is feeling pretty lousy from the Chemo and doesn't want to be alone but I just realized that I have to get her prescription filled soon; otherwise I'll have to wait until tomorrow."

"Boy, my appointment book is pretty full, Janet, but I suppose I could squeeze you in," the old man said sarcastically, glad for an opportunity to help even if it were something simple like this.

"Are you sure?" asked Janet half laughing. "I would hate to disrupt your busy schedule!"

Both of them laughed then and the old man answered as he feigned looking in an imaginary planner, "It looks like I can fit you in between reading and taking a nap. If that doesn't work maybe I can work you in between a nap and reading." Knowing how bored the old man could get sometimes they laughed once again, both thinking how good it felt.

"I really appreciate it Mr. Michealson," said Janet, still attempting to stifle her giggles.

"It really is no problem," he said as he began looking for his shoes and coat. "I will be over in a few minutes." Hanging up the phone he set it back in the charger and went

about putting on his shoes and coat. As he walked towards the door he stopped and looked towards the pamphlets he had been reading through. Should he take them? Well, if Ruth wasn't feeling well it would probably be a good time to continue looking at them.

Upon arriving at the VanVleets, Janet had given him the run down of the day thus far and after checking on Ruth, who was sleeping in her bedroom, had been on her way.

Settling into a chair at the kitchen table he began to page through one of the pamphlets. As he did so he couldn't help but feel a bit strange to be here. That would not have been the case had the family been there but for some reason it just didn't feel normal, alone except for Ruth sleeping in her room. He supposed it was because he had only been in their house a few times and never really saw much more than the kitchen and the family room. Having set the pamphlets down on the table he decided to explore just a bit.

The first thing that struck him as he walked down the hallway and peeked into the various rooms was how neat and clean everything was. It was by no means an extravagant or overly large house but the way it was decorated gave it a very warm and comfortable feel.

In the hallway were a number of family pictures arrayed on the wall, each telling a small part of a larger story. As he looked at this collection of photographs he heard a faint call from upstairs.

As quickly as his old legs would carry him he made his way up the stairs to the doorway of Ruth's room.

"Mom?" she said softly as she lifted her head slightly off her pillow and looked in his direction.

"No my dear," he said as he made his way into the room. "It's Mr. Michealson from next door. Your mother had to go to the store for a minute and asked me to sit with you while she was gone."

"Oh yeah," she said as she lay her head back onto her pillow. "I remember now."

"Is there anything I can do for you?" he asked as he sat down on the chair that her mother had positioned next to her bed.

"I...I just don't feel very well," she said wishing that her mother were here.

Unsure of exactly what to do he simply sat next to the bed in silence as Ruth closed her eyes again. After a few minutes, as if in answer to Ruth's unspoken wish, the sound of the back door opening announced the arrival of her mother home from the store. Not seeing the old man downstairs she immediately headed upstairs to Ruth's room.

Looking up as she entered the room the look of concern on the face of the old man was all the explanation Janet needed.

"It's the chemo," she said softly as she sat down in the chair that the old man had vacated and now offered her. "The doctor said she was probably going to feel sick for a while." Reaching over she placed a hand on Ruth's forehead. "She'll be alright in a while."

"Well, ok then, I guess I will get going," he said feeling a bit out of place. "Is there anything I can do for you before I go?" he asked as he moved towards the door.

Janet looked at him and smiled slightly. "No, I think we are all set. Thank you so much for coming over and sitting with her while I was gone."

"No problem at all Janet," he said as he returned her smile. "Anytime there is anything I can do please let me know."

"We will," she said as she bowed her head to him in a gesture of thanks.

At a bit of a slower pace than he had ascended the steps he now made his way back down. Having reached the bottom of the stairs he headed to the kitchen only to be stopped as his attention was once again captured by the collage of pictures that hung in the hallway. There was something that just didn't seem right about them but he couldn't immediately put his finger on what it might be. They were the typical pictures that adorned the walls of so many homes; parents, grandparents, and the children. And then he realized what it was. There, set in a frame off to one side was a picture of a much younger Jack and Janet holding a newborn baby. Next to the picture was a poem.

*Oh how we prayed the Father,
That He would give a child.
And in His boundless love He did,
If only for a while.*

*We prayed that He would give you health,
And asked for mercy too.*

*That He would grant our one request,
And bless our lives with you.*

*And yet His will is not as ours,
Far deeper than the sea.
He took you home to be with Him,
A precious jewel to be.*

*You were with us for so short a time,
And yet our love for you is great.
In hope we gave you back to God,
And fell upon His grace.*

*Although we miss you greatly,
And an emptiness remains.
God's love has bound our broken hearts,
And grace from day to day.*

*Now in patient expectation,
We wait for that great day.
That Christ will reunite us all,
The name of God to praise.*

*And in the years to come,
We'll never lose our love.
Because the love we love you with,
Is ours from God above.*

*So rest in Jesus's arms,
Our precious little one.
And until we meet again someday,
His will be always done.*