

THE GIFT

Even at thirteen years of age, Jocelyn had beautiful smooth skin and deep brown eyes that always had a twinkle. Her teeth were not perfect, yet her broad smile brought joy to those around her. Her hair was dark, and thick and it had a gentle wave to it. It had never been cut and reached past her knees. It had the shine of healthy hair. Usually, it was her hair that people noticed first.

She shared a bed with her sister Julie who was two years older. Being the youngest in the family had its benefits and disadvantages.

On the plus side, her older siblings pampered and protected by her. They always made sure they took care of her.

What she did not like, was that all of her things were hand-me-downs. Her clothes had small holes, little tears, and rips that her mother had sewn the best she could. She wanted new clothes, but she knew she would have to wait. The family was not able to buy many new things. Christmas was coming and she knew there would be something nice under the tree just for her.

The weather was getting colder. It had been a long hot summer, typical of where she lived, but now winter was coming and everyone wrapped themselves in warm coats with woolen scarves around their necks.

Jocelyn remembered how her grandmother would sit for hours in her favorite chair knitting something for each of the kids. The things she made were always special. Her favorite was the knitted pink hat with a small yellow flower that her grandmother had made just for her. She wore it all winter long. She was very proud of it.

When her grandmother died during the summer, each of her five siblings were allowed to choose something to keep as a remembrance. Jocelyn chose her grandmother's

brush. It had white bristles with an ivory handle covered in silver. It was the most amazing thing Jocelyn had ever seen. She brushed her hair with it every night in front of the mirror on her dressing table.

Jocelyn's mother Ray-Anne was from Barbados in the Caribbean. Her parents had come to America looking for a better life. She still had a hint of her accent, which the children loved to hear. She told stories about her childhood in Barbados. Life there was so different from the life she had now.

Her father Joseph was the great-grandson of slaves from Alabama. They had moved to Detroit after the Civil War looking for work. He worked in a factory on the assembly line. The work was hard and the hours were long, but he did not mind. He was providing for his family. He was a gentle man and when he came home from work, he would make sure that he spent time with each one of his children.

Before they went to bed, he would read a story from the Bible to them. He did not have more than an eighth grade education, because of this, he encouraged his children to do better than he had. He wanted all of them to go to college and get fine jobs.

It was a family with a lot of love to share.

Her oldest brother Jayden had already graduated from college and was an engineer. He helped the family when he could. It was especially difficult when her father was laid off from his job during the financial crisis. The family managed to survive and things were now improving.

Her oldest sister Jasmine was married and had a young son named Tyree. It was always fun to have Tyree over to the house. He was very energetic and loved to make trouble for the family. He had a lot of energy, but overall he was a good boy.

Her other sister and brother, Julie and Jordan, who were twins, were in high school. They did not have a lot of time to spend with the family. Jordan was good at sports and played football and basketball for his school.

Julie spent most of her time with her friends.

Jocelyn, being the youngest, spent most of her time at home. She was good in

school and had many friends who she loved to talk to on the phone or text. She was a normal teenager.

It was Thanksgiving and many of her relatives were coming to visit. Her mother prepared a large traditional Thanksgiving meal with turkey, mashed potatoes, green bean casserole, white bread, and sweet potatoes.

After the dinner, the family sat in the parlor and listened as Jocelyn played Christmas songs on the piano. Most of the time the family sang along and then they would laugh as they shared stories of the past. It made everyone happy and laughter filled the room. Jocelyn loved this time of year. The holidays always made her so happy.

The next day the family went to buy a Christmas tree to put in the parlor. The whole family climbed into the van and headed to the nursery where they purchased a tree every year.

When they arrived, the owner greeted them and took them to the back of the lot where he had saved a tree just for them. Everyone agreed it was the prettiest tree they had ever seen.

Jordan and her dad tied the tree to the top of the van, and then headed home.

It was cold and it had snowed during the night. A blanket of white soft snow covered the ground making the holiday feel just right. The decorations on the street lamps fluttered in the wind reflecting the colors of the tinsel. Jocelyn just stared out the window of the van and sighed in the comfort of the season.

Suddenly there was a loud noise, a crashing sound. Jocelyn looked up just in time to see a red car come flying at them. She hit her head on the seat in front of her and that was all she remembered until she woke up in the hospital.

As she looked around the room, she realized that she was alone. Her vision was not very good so nothing was in focus.

“Hello, is anyone there?” she yelled out.

The door burst open and in walked a nurse.

“Oh, you’re awake. This is good. Hold on a moment, I’ll get the doctor,” she said

as she turned to leave.

“Don’t go! I don’t want to be alone!” Jocelyn screamed, but the nurse walked out anyway.

Jocelyn’s head hurt. She looked down at her arms and there were tubes taped to her wrist. She looked up and saw a bottle of water hanging over her head, and there was machine with bright lights that was beeping.

She looked back at the door and it opened slowly as the doctor entered, reading a chart.

He approached the bed and the looked up at her.

“Well young lady, you’ve got quite a bad bump on your head. Do you remember anything?” he asked.

“We were coming home from buying a Christmas tree and then we hit something. I’m not sure about anything else,” Jocelyn answered. “How’s the rest of my family?”

“It seems that your memory is OK,” the doctor stated as he wrote something onto the chart.

He seemed to be a little distracted.

Jocelyn waited until the doctor looked up from his reading and then asked again, “How’s the rest of my family?”

“Everyone is going to be OK. Your dad is hurt the most. He broke both legs, a couple of ribs, and he has a concussion. He is in surgery right now. The rest are doing fine. You and your dad are the only ones here at the hospital.

“Your mother would like to see you. She is right outside. Are you up to it?” the doctor asked.

Jocelyn nodded her head and then her mom walked in.

“How are you doing baby?” her mom asked with tears in her eyes. “We were so worried about you.”

Jocelyn looked at her mother. She had cuts on her face and a cast on her right arm.

“Are you OK?” Jocelyn asked.

“I’m fine. A broken arm and some cuts from the glass. Otherwise, I’m fine.” She answered.

“What about the others?” Jocelyn inquired.

“They’re all doing well. They’re all worried about you. They’ll be by to see you later,” her mother told her as she sat in the chair next to the bed and watched Jocelyn as she fell asleep.

“She’ll sleep for a awhile. We gave her a sedative. It will help her recover faster,” the doctor explained.

Jocelyn remained in the hospital for four days. When she got home the entire family was waiting for her.

Her mother had fixed a big supper for the family.

Jocelyn face was black and blue from the accident. She had broken her nose so both of her eyes were also dark. The doctor had told her that when they fixed her nose they, did a little extra to make it perfect. It would take two or three weeks before the swelling would go down and then she would see her new nose.

The first thing she wanted to do was take a shower. It felt good to let the hot water flow over her head. Her hair had been pulled back in a ponytail since the accident and looked bad.

After her shower she sat in front of her mirror and brushed her long hair. It was so much shinier now without the blood and oil that had built up in it. She sat for a long time brushing her hair and thinking about how lucky she was to be alive.

The next day the family went to the van to take out the things that had been left behind.

When Jocelyn saw the van she could not believe that anyone had survived. The front of the van was completely gone. She found out that in order to remove her father, the firefighters had cut the front of the van off.

Jocelyn saw where she had hit the seat in front of her.

There was a lot of blood on the seat. On the floor, she found her pink knitted hat

her grandmother had made for her.

“Mom, I found my hat!” Jocely yelled out.

It was dirty and wet. She picked it up and held it close to her chest. She was happy that she had found it.

When they returned to the house, the family sat in the parlor. Jocelyn’s mother began to speak.

“Your father is going to be in the hospital for a while. Luckily his insurance is going to pay most of the bill, but in the meantime, we won’t have much money, especially for Christmas. We have some savings, but when you father was out of work, we had to use most of it. Things are going to tough until he can go back to work.

“Your brother has offered to help us as best as he can. I’m going to look for a job starting on Monday. We’ll all need to do our part.

“We’ve been in bad times before. We’ve survived and we’ll survive this as well.

“I’m going to visit your father this afternoon. While I’m gone I want each one of you to think about what you can do to help out. We’re a strong family. I know you can find a way to save money. I love you all,” mother finished her talk. The family all gave her a hug and cried.

“We love you mom,” they all said.

Jocelyn went to her room. She sat on her bed trying to think of a way to help her family. She lay back and closed her eyes and began to cry. There was only one thing she could do. She didn’t want to, but she knew she had to.

She went down to the parlor and found her pink hat. She took it to the kitchen sink and washed it the best that she could. There were a couple of small stains on it, but it looked much better than when she found it in the van. She set it near the fireplace so it would dry.

She looked around the parlor and it made her sad that she did not see a Christmas tree. It just wasn’t the same, especially with her dad not there reading his stories and singing the Christmas songs with them.

She ran to her room and changed her clothes. It was cold out so she made sure she would be warm enough. It was a long walk to town.

When she returned to the parlor her sister Julie asked, “Where are you going? Mom said we were supposed to think of ways to help out the family while dad is in the hospital.”

“I have an errand to run. I’ll be back before dinnertime. I’ll see you then,” Jocelyn responded. “I have something important to do.”

Jocelyn put on her coat and then placed the damp pink knitted hat on her head. She said, “Bye”, as she walked out the door.

It was a cold and windy as she walked along the sidewalk. It had been shoveled, but the wind was blowing the snow back onto the path. Jocelyn’s cheeks were turning red.

It took about fifteen minutes for her to get to the edge of town. It was uplifting to see the decorations in the windows. If it hadn’t been so cold she would have stopped and looked inside each one of them. She had something she had to do so she continued to walk.

When she got to the café, she decided to go inside and get warm. She sat down in a booth and rubbed her hands together.

“Jocelyn, is that you?” Paulette the waitress asked.

Jocelyn looked up at her and answered, “Yes, it’s me.”

“Wow, I heard about the accident. Are you OK?” Paulette asked seeing Jocelyn’s face.

“I’ll be fine in a few weeks,” Jocelyn replied.

“Can I get you something? It’s really cold outside,” the waitress inquired.

“No thanks. I just came in to get warm,” Jocelyn said as she rubbed her hands together trying to warm them up.

“OK, if you change your mind, let me know,” Paulette said then walked away.

Jocelyn sat for a while thinking about her dad. She decided that she would go with

her mother the next time she went to see him. She missed him a lot.

“Here, this is for you. It’s on the house,” Paulette surprised Jocelyn as she placed a cup of hot chocolate in front of her. “I think you need it.”

Jocelyn looked up in surprise. “Thanks. I appreciate it.”

Then she sipped the hot chocolate. It felt warm inside.

As she sat in the booth, she thought about what she was going to do. It was not going to be easy. In fact it was going to be the hardest thing she had ever done.

The clock on the wall said it was almost four o’clock. She needed to leave and finish what she had started or it would be too late.

She took a deep breath, buttoned up her coat, put on her gloves, and got up to leave.

“It was nice seeing you again. Come back soon, OK?” Paulette smiled as she waved goodbye to Jocelyn.

A small smile is all Jocelyn could make and then she left the café and walked toward her destination.

She looked quickly into the windows of the shops until she got to where she was going. There was ding from a bell as the door opened. She had never been in this shop before. She had come there a few times with her mother.

A nice lady approached her.

“May I help you?” the lady asked.

“I think so,” Jocelyn replied.

“Do you have an appointment?” the hostess asked.

“No, do I have to have one?” Jocelyn answered.

“It’s not required. I think I have an opening in ten minutes, would you care to wait?” she asked.

“I guess so,” Jocelyn answered as she looked for place to sit.

“Would you like some hot tea while you wait?” the lady asked.

“That would be nice. It is really cold out there,” Jocelyn responded with a smile.

“May I ask what happened to your face?” the lady asked a bit shyly.

“My family was in a car accident. I broke my nose. I should be OK in couple of weeks,” Jocelyn informed her.

The lady left and then brought her a cup of tea. Jocelyn took off her gloves and held the cup with both hands. The steam rose from the cup and warmed her face. Tears began to flow down her cheeks. She was having second thoughts, but she knew this is what she had to do.

Fifteen minutes went by, and the lady came back.

Jocelyn looked up at her.

“We’re ready for you,” she said as she pointed to the door, motioning for Jocelyn to follow her.

She got up slowly and followed the woman. She took off her pink hat and put it into her pocket.

The walk home was even colder than when she left her house. Jocelyn didn’t notice it much since she was crying and thinking about her family. She pulled her pink hat down as far as she could over her head to keep it warm.

When she arrived home, she walked into the house she took off her gloves and put them into the pockets of her coat. Then she hung her coat on the rack by the door.

When she turned toward the parlor, everyone was there. They were talking, but as soon as they saw Jocelyn, the room went silent. No one said a word.

Jocelyn sat down at the piano and began to play. Tears were streaming down her cheeks. Her family got up and hugged her.

“What did you do?” her mother asked.

She took off her pink knitted hat and placed it on the piano. There was a gasp from her siblings. Then she reached into the pocket of her dress and took out an envelope. She handed it to her mother.

When her mother opened the envelope, she found three hundred dollars.

Jocelyn looked up at her mother, and with tears in her eyes she said, “I did it for

our family mom. I cut my hair so the family can have a wonderful Christmas. I love all of you so much!”

Her family sat and hugged her. No one knew what to say.