

November 13, 2016

5<sup>th</sup> grade, age 10

### The Best Gift

Saguaros lining the dirt street stood tall like giants as the wind whistled through the open doorway where Karen stood. Her mother briskly led Mary, her little sister, out the door.

“Our rehearsal won’t be done till late, so you need to prepare dinner in addition to your regular chores,” instructed her mother. Karen sighed as she looked at the untidy house.

“It sure doesn’t feel like Christmas without presents or decorations,” grumbled Karen as she swept and cleaned the house. By noon, she was slowly sauntering toward town to bring lunch to her dad at the construction site of the new Alhambra Hotel. Having presented him with his food, Karen turned toward home, stopping at the nearby general store to peer into the display window at the latest 1894 fashions. Oh, how she longed to wear that new gown this Christmas! Gazing back at her father, who was sitting casually on the balcony of the hotel, she continued ambling home. She had traveled only a few feet further when she heard a deafening cry. She spun around and saw her father lying face down on the ground.

Racing back to his side, she cried, “Papa, are you okay?”

“Go get your mother, quickly,” her dad whispered painfully.

Running with all her might, she quickly reached the small meeting house two blocks away. As she approached the building, she spotted her mother. Karen cried out, “Mama! Papa’s had an accident and needs your help!”

Her mother grabbed her sister’s hand and followed Karen toward the hotel. She instructed her husband to be taken home and sent Karen to fetch the doctor. With tears streaming down her face, Karen obeyed and raced down the street toward the doctor’s office.

Karen burst through the door and blurted, "My papa fell and needs your help!" The anxious doctor quickly grabbed his medical bag and followed her to her home. Moments later the doctor examined her father and concluded, "He has a broken leg and a concussion. Keep him in bed for four weeks."

"Now we can't even have Christmas because there won't be any extra money," Karen wailed.

Mama pulled Karen aside and whispered, "Papa's health is more important than Christmas or presents. You need to think about what is really important during this holiday."

Karen decided to go for a walk to think about her mother's words. As she reached the edge of the citrus groves, she noticed a sign advertising, "Seasonal Help Wanted."

"Maybe I could make some extra money myself this Christmas," Karen decided as she walked into the office to speak with the farmer. Moments later, she had gotten the job!

Each day, Karen woke up at sunrise to pick oranges before completing her daily chores. It was hard work but was worthwhile because she knew she would make her family proud. Late at night, she sewed together pieces of cloth from an old apron to make her sister a rag doll. She polished a geode, which she had found in the desert, and replaced an old pin with this glittery, purple stone for her mother.

After working for three weeks, Karen finally had enough money to buy her dad's hat just in time for Christmas. She skipped happily to the store. She saw the beautiful dress she had wanted, but knew what she wanted to buy even more.

"I would like to buy that hat," Karen proudly stated.

The shop owner laughed mockingly, but seeing her serious face replied, "You want this one? Do you realize how much money it costs?"

“Yes, sir,” Karen responded as she plopped her earnings down. She tapped her toe with nervousness as the man counted the coins.

“One cent short,” he sneered.

Karen fought back tears as she was sure she had counted right. She turned to go. Her hand reached in her pocket. She smiled. The missing penny, which was stuck in the bottom corner, was handed triumphantly to the man. He passed her the hat with a smile.

Karen could hardly wait for Christmas morning. The next day, as they ate breakfast, Karen laughingly ran to her room and retrieved the presents she had worked so hard to give to her astonished family. This Christmas was one to remember for Karen sacrificially gave up her own desires for her family and learned that giving to others was the best gift of all.