



The Gift of Girl - Face

The mother sat on the simulated-leather chair in the doctor's office, picking nervously at her fingernails. Wrinkles of worry lined her forehead as she watched five-year-old Kenny sitting on the rug before her. He is small for his age and a little too thin, she thought. His fine blond hair hung down smooth and straight to the top of his ears. White gauze bandages encircled his head, covering his eyes and pinning his ears back.

In his lap he bounced a beaten-up teddy bear. It was the pride of his life, yet one arm was gone and one eye was missing. Twice his mother had tried to throw the bear away to replace it with a new one, but he had fussed so much she had

relented. She tipped her head slightly to the side and smiled at him. It's really about all he has, she sighed to herself.

A nurse appeared in the doorway. "Kenny Ellis," she announced, and the young mother scooped up the boy and followed the nurse toward the examination room. The hallway smelled of rubbing alcohol and bandages. Children's crayon drawings lined the walls.

"The doctor will be with you in a moment," the nurse said with an efficient smile. "Please be seated."

The mother placed Kenny on the examination table. "Be careful, honey, not to fall off."

"Am I up very high, Mother?"

"No dear, but be careful."

Kenny hugged his teddy bear tighter. "Don't want Grr-face to fall either."

The mother smiled. The smile twisted at the corners into a frown of concern. She brushed the hair out of the boy's face and caressed his cheek, soft as thistle-down, with the back of her hand. As the office music drifted into a haunting version of "Silent Night," she remembered the accident for the thousandth time.

She had been cooking things on the back burners for years. But there it was, sitting right out in front, the water almost boiling for oatmeal.

The phone rang in the living room. It was another one of those "free offers" that cost so much. At the very moment she returned the phone to the table, Kenny screamed in the kitchen, the galvanizing cry of pain that frosts a mother's veins.

She winced again at the memory of it and brushed aside a warm tear slipping down her cheek. Six weeks they had waited for this day to come. "We'll be able to take the bandages off the week before Christmas," the doctor had said.

The door to the examination room swept open, and Dr. Harris came in. "Good morning, Mrs. Ellis," he said brightly "How are you today?"

“Fine, thank you,” she said. But she was too apprehensive for small talk.

Dr. Harris bent over the sink and washed his hands carefully. He was cautious with his patients but careless about himself. He could seldom find time to get a haircut, and his straight black hair hung a little long over his collar. His loosened tie allowed his collar to be open at the throat.

“Now then,” he said, sitting down on a stool, “let’s have a look.”

Gently he snipped at the bandage with scissors and unwound it from Kenny’s head. The bandage fell away, leaving two flat squares of gauze taped directly over Kenny’s eyes. Dr. Harris lifted the edges of the tape slowly, trying not to hurt the boy’s tender skin.

Kenny slowly opened his eyes, blinked several times as if the sudden light hurt. Then he looked at his mother and grinned. “Hi, Mom,” he said.

Choking and speechless, the mother threw her arms around Kenny’s neck. For several minutes, she could say nothing as she hugged the boy and wept in thankfulness. Finally she looked at Dr. Harris with tear-filled eyes. “I don’t know how we’ll ever be able to pay you,” she said.

“We’ve been over all that before,” the doctor interrupted with a wave of his hand. “I know how things are for you and Kenny. I’m glad I could help.”

The mother dabbed at her eyes with a well-used handkerchief, stood up and took Kenny’s hand. But just as she turned toward the door, Kenny pulled away and stood for a long moment, looking uncertainly at the doctor. Then he held his teddy bear up by its one arm to the doctor.

“Here,” he said. “Take my Grr-face. He ought to be worth a lot of money.”

Dr. Harris quietly took the broken bear in his two hands. “Thank you, Kenny. This will more than pay for my services.”



The last few days before Christmas were especially good for Kenny and his mother. They sat together in the long evenings, watching the Christmas tree

lights twinkle on and off. Bandages had covered Kenny’s eyes for six weeks, so he seemed reluctant to close them in sleep. The fire dancing in the fireplace, the snowflakes sticking to his bedroom windows, the two small packages under the tree—all the lights and colors of the holiday fascinated him.

And then, on Christmas Eve, Kenny’s mother answered the doorbell. No one was there, but a large box was on the porch wrapped in shiny gold paper with a broad red ribbon and bow. A tag attached to the bow identified the box as intended for Kenny Ellis.

With a grin, Kenny tore the ribbon off the box, lifted the lid and pulled out a teddy bear—his beloved Grr-face. Only now it had a new arm of brown corduroy and two new button eyes that glittered in the soft Christmas light. Kenny didn’t seem to mind that the new arm did not match the other one. He just hugged his teddy bear and laughed.

Among the tissue in the box, the mother found a card.

“Dear Kenny,

I can sometimes help put boys and girls back together, but Mrs. Harris had to help me repair Grr-face. She’s a better bear doctor than I am. Merry Christmas!

Dr. Harris.”

“Look, Mother,” Kenny smiled, pointing to the button eyes. “Grr-face can see again—just like me!”

