

## Pure Joy

A single tear formed at the edge of her eye and began to fall down the bridge of her nose, slipping into the crevice between her lips. Rhynn, fearing that her makeup was dripping, quickly ran towards the safety of her friend's truck. "Please excuse me for a moment," she mumbled in the direction of her friends. Upon collecting herself, Rhynn flipped her hair, reapplied her mascara, and trudged off in the direction of the decrepit shack. "How can this place be considered appropriate for people to live in?" Rhynn thought in anguish. Before her lay the remnants of what used to be a storage room, now turned into a house for a mother and her three malnourished children.

As Rhynn trudged towards the "house", she was again met by the rancid smell of rotten food and chickens. She began to tear up at the sight of the dilapidated house and all it entailed. There was a crate of chickens that had most likely never seen the light of day, a yard full of broken toys and dog poop, as well as a shabby couch in front of the door, placed as if protecting the inhabitants from outsiders. She bounded over the deflated basketball and skirted around the shopping cart that contained a tiny dog with bulging brown eyes and an oblivious grin. Rhynn stopped at the entrance to the house and began to creep up the steps, unsure whether to enter or just wait outside. She was met by her mother, Marianne, who almost knocked her into the mountain of useless, and most likely stolen, junk that housed the sleeping pit bull, Bianca.

"Whoa! Watch out!" Marianne cried as she tumbled down the steps. Once they situated themselves again, her mother ran her fingers through her hair and gave Rhynn a weary look,

"Rhynn, I know this is hard for you to see, but you need to pull yourself together. We are here to help Lydia, Jack, Andy, and Timmy with whatever they need, not sit and wallow in a corner," her mother scolded. Marianne gave Rhynn an annoyed look, "Do you even remember why we are here today?" Rhynn looked away from her mother and thought back to the conversation that started this whole episode.

## ~Two Weeks Prior~

She sat, entranced by "*The Song of Wandering Aengus*", her favorite poem by W.B. Yeats. Tracing her fingers over the worn binding of her book of poems, she began to recite the final stanza of the well-known poem,

Though I am old with wandering  
Through hollow lands and hilly lands.  
I will find out where she has gone,  
And kiss her lips and take her hands;  
And walk among long dappled grass,  
And pluck till time and times are done  
The silver apples of the moon,  
The golden apples of the sun.

As she was repeating her favorite lines, "And kiss her lips and take her hands; and walk among long dappled grass," Rhynn thought of a most beautiful girl in a white dress picking blades of grass out of the soft earth of a meadow.

Upon finishing reciting the poem, she caught sight of her mother peeking in through the doorway with a smile on her face. "I had no idea you could think up such things! That was beautiful," she exclaimed.

Rhynn looked up startled. "No, Mom, that was only the most amazing poet in the world... W.B. Yeats!". Her mother shrugged the comment off with a wave of her hand and began to explain her reason for interrupting. She told Rhynn that she was listening to her favorite radio station, KSBJ, when they interrupted their usual Christmas music for an important announcement,

"Are you able to help a family in need? If you can, please consider doing the Giving Tree Project," Rhynn's mother said, imitating a booming radio-announcer's voice, making her laugh. The Giving Tree Project was a list of many different families with many different needs, such as a mother with three children whose husband was in jail and who needed bunk beds for her children. Since Marianne also happened to be a single mother with three kids, this was naturally the family she chose. "So what do you think, Rhynn? Would you be willing to do this project with me?" Marianne asked hopefully.

Rhynn shrugged, "I guess it could be fun, but you have to promise you won't embarrass me, ok?" Marianne nodded her head vigorously and skipped away giddily to call her "old-lady" friends to tell them that they would be going through with the project. That following Sunday, Rhynn and her mother went to church to spread the word and ask for donations. Upon telling the members of the church about the Giving Tree, Marianne and her group of friends were besieged by people giving them donations for the family. The following week, Marianne, Rhynn, and their team of friends met to discuss the total amount of money and the items that they would be getting for the family. After several counting mishaps, they determined that their total amount of money was way over 1,500 dollars; they would have enough for everything the family needed and more!

~Present~

"Of course I remember, Mom. We're here to help bring Christmas to Lydia and her three kids: Jack, Andy, and Timmy. Ok I'm ready to help... What can I do?" Rhynn sighed faintly.

Marianne brightened at Rhynn's attitude change, "Well, can you help bring the presents in while the guys set up the bunk-bed and the little kids set up the miniature Christmas tree?". Rhynn nodded her agreement and trudged back towards the truck, thinking about her little brother and sister at home, sitting with their toys and warm beds. She thought about how lucky she was to have everything she did. Upon reaching the flat-bed of the truck, Rhynn took inventory of all that was there: two mattresses donated by Mattress Firm, a bunk bed, a platter of chicken nuggets, a miniature Christmas tree, and 1,500 dollars worth of Christmas presents for the boys and their mother.

While Rhynn and her friends were carrying everything from the truck to the house, Rhynn watched the boys (Jack, Andy, and Timmy) playing chase throughout the yard, tackling each other, and just being thankful for what they have despite their miserable living conditions.

Once all of the presents were set up, as well as the tree and the beds for the boys, Rhynn, Marianne and their friends said their goodbyes to the family.

As Rhynn and everybody else got in the truck and drove off; leaving the family calling thank-you's out behind them, Rhynn looked back at everything they had done and realized that despite the troubles she faced in her life, she still always had something to be grateful for. Rhynn slowly began to understand that life is precious, and it doesn't matter what happens to you; it only matters what you make of the situation at hand, and whether you choose to dwell on your hardships or to move on and do what you are meant to do with your life. This can be helping other people, or simply being all you can be to the extent of knowing that you are doing what you are meant to do.

Rhynn looked out the rear-view mirror at the family, and smiled while repeating the final lines of *The Song of Wandering Aengus*, "The silver apples of the moon, the golden apples of the sun." Rhynn found that things could buy temporary happiness, but they couldn't give you what really mattered, the love and joy you gain from your family. Rhynn knew that no matter how much time passed, she would always remember the family that had almost nothing but still had joy. And as Rhynn sat back in her seat, contemplating her new-found sense of wisdom, Rhynn realized that this was what helping others was about: pure joy.