

# RUBY

by,

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Genre:

Religious/Spiritual Literature

She didn't cry. Anyone in her shoes would have, but she didn't cry. She had made a promise more dear to her than money, more dear than life. Her grandson didn't understand. As he sat at the speckled formica table, eyes red and swollen, he couldn't understand why she seemed unaffected by the news. "Why," he asked, "why haven't you cried?" It had been almost three months since the day that will live in infamy. December 7, 1988.

Her face was yellow, even her eyes. Her gait slower, her smile not as bright. As they approached the hospital, the car passed the zoo. This was where she would take him after every doctor's visit. She thought it was the balm, the reward for having to endure the shots. And to the young boy it was incredible...monkeys, peacocks, goats he could touch, and even a black panther. He didn't even mind the smell or that almost every time, a stone would find its way into his sandals. He would stop suddenly as if bitten by a scorpion and hop on one foot until the stone was gone. Today as they passed the zoo, he wished it was he who would get the shot. But they weren't going to the hospital for him.

Downtown parking was so intimidating. They only came into the city for the doctors. So each trip was complicated by the fact that not only did they risk an accident or getting lost again, but someone was inevitably in poor health. The buildings all looked the same. Hundreds of symmetrical windows with no faces peering outside. Concrete everywhere you looked, no semblance of home to be seen. As they circled the parking deck and finally settled on a spot, silence enveloped the car. No one dared speak their true thoughts and no one was brave enough to lie.

If only the physician had that problem. "Ruby, our suspicions were correct. We've detected pancreatic cancer. You have about six months."

He doesn't remember much after that except for the daily bartering with God to somehow save her. She was too good, too many people depending on her. They were just now getting to the good part of their relationship. He cried as these thoughts circled in his mind. He sobbed in the morning on the way to school, prayed between every class, and turned the radio off on the drive home just so he could devote even more time to prayer.

Though he was hopeful, he knew this might be her last Christmas and he wanted her to have everything she wanted. For years, she had been asking for a crocheted collar. *One of those that look like a doily underneath an old lady's lamp.* Ruby really admired the women at church who had them. The pianist always wore one, no matter what dress she had on. And the preacher's wife had started wearing one almost three Christmas' ago. When he actually started looking for it, they were quite easy to find and only cost about twelve dollars. He didn't know if he was feeling nauseous because of his nerves or the realization that he could have bought this gift for her before it was so obvious that he thought she was dying.

That was just one of the thoughts beating in his head as he cried. Why her, why me, why now, why couldn't I have been better to her, does she know how much she is loved? The steam from the gravy began to congregate on the back of the stove. That coupled with watching the biscuits seemed to be as important to her as anything else going on right now, but he was at his breaking point. "Why aren't you crying?" he shouted, "why haven't I seen you cry?"

Ruby led him into the living room and took her normal place on the couch, reclined like they are in all those Rubenesque portraits but for a very different reason. The weight of the cancer on both her mind and her liver tired her to the point of almost never sitting straight up. With an almost silent sigh, she told him the story she didn't need to tell.

“When I was 26, Dick, Edwina, your mama and Roy were already here, I had been married to your grandfather for a couple years and I was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer. I was given six months to live. I came home from the hospital and wept tears of sorrow, anger, and fear. I had a husband who wouldn’t be able to take care of my babies. I couldn’t leave them, I didn’t want to leave them. I was so young. I cried out to God, ‘Lord, if you will allow me the time to see my babies old enough to take care of themselves, when you call my name, I will happily come home.’”

This was not the answer he expected to hear. He thought she had been crying when no one could see her, that she maybe trusted someone else with that part of her pain. Or maybe, that she was totally numb to her death sentence. But he never dreamed she was only keeping her word.

“Then, I went back to the doctors and as they performed more tests to figure out just what the best treatment would be, they told me that I didn’t have cancer anymore. All the tests showed that I was clean. Free. They had never seen anything like it before. I was healed. Well, they used the word *cured*, but I knew I was healed. I really didn’t give it much thought. As soon as I got home, I went about my regular work and didn’t tell anybody what had happened to me. I knew my prayer had been answered and I would see my babies until their teenage years.

That was 38 years ago. Long before you or your brother or any of your cousins came along. So when I went in this time and he told me I had pancreatic cancer, I didn’t need to cry. I didn’t have any questions. I only had an answer. Not only did God let me see my children raised, but their children – you, and more things than I ever imagined. How could I in the sight of my Heavenly Father cry and ask why? The only ‘why’ I might have is ‘why did you give me

so much?' I've done all I could do to repay him over the years and the only tears you may see from me between now and then are tears of joy and thanksgiving for living."

He only thought he had been sobbing for the last few months, now he knew what real tears were. He was amazed at the quiet woman he thought he was smarter than, the uneducated lady who in his eyes hadn't accomplished a lot in her life- he would surely do more. And as quickly as she had told the story, she raised herself from the couch and went back to the kitchen.

And though she hadn't asked him to, there was something so incredible about her story that he didn't tell anyone about it. It was their secret. An unspoken understanding between a woman and her grandson. He had another eight weeks with the lady he now deemed amazing and ironically, those were not as hard as the previous ones had been. As the family car followed the hearse to the cemetery, his usually silent father commented, "You know, it's not fair that the first time Ruby gets to ride in a Cadillac is the day we bury her." And to the young man, no truer words could have been spoken.