

Christmas is a time for love

"Hush now!" screams the mother. "If you ask for that doll one more time, I'm going to lose my mind. It's too expensive; \$400 is way too much for a doll."

Worldview by Guy P. Harrison

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"But mummy, I really have to have it, please..." whines Roxanne.

The bright and beautiful 10-year-old Grand Cayman child makes good grades and generally steers clear of trouble. Her perspective on Christmas, however, needs some work.

"Mummy, it's all I want. If you don't get it for me I'm gonna be so upset. It will ruin my Christmas!"

The mother shakes her head in disgust. "Have you given any thought to getting presents for your brother and sister?" she asks. "It seems like you only care about yourself this year."

"But Mummy, it has eyes that cry and a nose that runs! It can even wet its diaper and poop too. Best of all, if you shake it hard, it throws up. It's the best dolly ever!"

The mother rolls her eyes and fades away to another part of the house.

Miss Anne, the family's helper, saw it all from the kitchen. She approaches Roxanne and gently explains that her mother is right.

"Christmas is a special time because it is a time for love," says Miss Anne. "It feels good to do nice things for other people. It's even better than getting a present yourself."

"Really? I'm not sure I believe that, Anne."

"It's true, sweetheart. I would never lie to you. Giving to others is the best feeling in the world."

Miss Anne is a hard-working 42-year-old Jamaican. Her beautiful dark skin seems far younger than her years. Her tired eyes seem far older. That Caymanian term "helper" is a small word but it says a lot. Miss Anne is the family's house cleaner, cook, clothes washer, and childcare worker. She works six days per week for \$800 per month.

Her home is a feeble wooden shack in George Town. A bed takes up most of the cramped single room. The contents include little more than a framed photo of her son, a Bible, five dresses and one pair of shoes. She pays \$500 per month in rent and wires most of whatever is left over to Jamaica to pay for her 9-year-old son's food, clothing

and school fees.

Every day after work Miss Anne jams herself into a minibus for the long ride home. It's always packed tight with the tired and sweaty bodies of Cayman's hardest working people. Every day, she stares out the window hoping to forget the fatigue and loneliness.

Miss Anne's love for her son is unusually strong; it has to be because of the distance. Jamaica may be close to Cayman on a map, but for Miss Anne it feels like the other side of the galaxy. Somehow her love makes the distance barely tolerable but a painful knot in her stomach is always there, nonetheless. She endures it all because she believes Cayman dollars will help her son escape the prison of poverty he was sentenced to at birth.

Miss Anne's son is a little boy with a big dream. On his seventh birthday, he declared to anyone who would listen that he would be a doctor one day. Miss Anne promised on that same day that she would do everything in her power to make his dream come true. Six months later she was alone in Grand Cayman.

The boy makes excellent grades and is always a perfect gentleman in class and elsewhere. Maybe he really can make the great leap from slum to medical school. Miss Anne certainly believes he can.

"Honey, let's go ahead and get her that doll," the mother says to Roxanne's father. "It's expensive, so we'll just get her that and nothing else, okay? If that doll is not under the tree, she'll be heartbroken."

"But \$400 is ridiculous to pay for a doll," he grumbled. "It's probably just \$50 in Miami."

"Come on, honey. She really wants it."

"It's crazy," he says, "but all right."

"Miss Anne, why are you crying?" asks Roxanne.

"Oh, where did you come from? It's nothing, dear. I'm just feeling a little bit sad today."

"Why, Miss Anne?"

"I miss my son. Christmas is just a week away and I'm sad that I won't be with him. I love him so much."

"I don't understand, Miss Anne, why don't you just go and see him?"

"It's not that easy, Roxanne. Airfare is expensive. I don't have enough money."

"But that's not fair," says Roxanne. "You

work so hard and you love your son so much. It's not right."

Anne forces a smile, hugs Roxanne and walks into the kitchen to begin making dinner for the family.

It is just seven days before Christmas and under a tree rests a baby-faced toy with extraordinary excretion abilities. Stoically, it waits for Christmas morning and liberation from the box.

But it never happens.

"Where is your present?!" screams the mother. "What have you done with it? Your present is missing."

Terrified, Roxanne looks down at the floor, wilting fast under the barrage. She is silent but obviously guilty of something.

"I know exactly what you did, young lady. You took it and opened it, didn't you? You couldn't wait seven more days? That's it; you get nothing for Christmas this year. I hope you are happy! Now go and get the doll so I can return it to the store!"

"I can't, Mummy," mumbles Roxanne.

"Why not?!"

"Uh... because I already returned it and got the money back for it," confesses Roxanne. "I'm sorry but I had to because..."

"Hush your mouth! You have gone way too far this time, young lady. Go to your room and don't come out until your father gets home. You are in big trouble!"

On the way home that evening, Miss Anne's minibus passes a boy riding his bike. He is happy and full of life, just like every little boy should be.

Silent tears roll down Miss Anne's face. She reaches into her handbag for a tissue but discovers an envelope.

She finds \$400 and a letter inside.

Dear Miss Anne,

This money is for you to buy a plane ticket so you can go to Jamaica and see your little boy. You will be his best Christmas present ever. You should be with him because, like you told me, Christmas is a time for love.

Thank you for working so hard all the time for us. I don't know what we would do without you. After school you are the only one there to be with me and you cook the best meals ever. I'm sorry I have never really thanked you, so THANK YOU!

I love you and Merry Christmas.

Roxanne