

A Special Gift

"Wake up! Do you know that it's Mother's birthday?" a voice rang in my head and I felt someone vigorously shaking my shoulders.

"I'm up!" I yelled. "Stop shaking my shoulders, it hurts." I opened my eyes to find my brother, John, staring at me with wide eyes. "Why do you look so worried?" I asked, yawning and stretching my arms.

"I completely forgot it is Mother's birthday! I haven't even prepared anything for her!" he exclaimed. "Have you? I hope you did, or we'll be in trouble."

Slowly, it dawned on me the implications of what my brother was saying. I gasped, the recent lethargic feeling fading away as I realized the situation that we were in. "Oh no," I said.

My brother groaned. "You forgot it is Mother's birthday too, right?" I nodded. "Mother went out to meet a client and she said she was going to come back before lunch, which is in three hours' time. We've got to act fast, I'm sure she's expecting gifts and cakes from us," my brother said.

Panic rose in my throat as I thought of a way to get out of this sticky situation. Nothing was prepared! Mother was going to feel upset, and it was all my fault. If I had remembered that today was her birthday, this would never have happened. I racked my brain, trying to find a proper solution. How could anyone forget it was their mother's birthday? It was too late to either make a card for her or put up any decorations, or order a cake. We also did not have money to buy her a gift.

"Alright, we need to calm down and think of a proper solution," I said slowly as I got out of bed and walked into the kitchen. There had to be something there that we could make to replace the cake. Rummaging through the cabinets, I tried to calm myself down. We had three limited hours, and there was no time for me to panic. I wanted Mother to feel happy and have a

memorable birthday. However, due to the fact that I had completely forgotten the occasion, I highly doubted that she would enjoy it. Imagine not getting presents on your birthday plus your children forgetting it! How disappointing is that? I bit my lip and continued searching the cabinets for something. That was when I noticed a packet of biscuits, and an idea soon formed in my head.

“John, I have an idea!” I exclaimed, a slight smile forming on my face. “It isn’t the best, but it’s better than nothing.” I told him what I had in mind, and after I finished, he looked at me incredulously.

“That’s a weird idea, but I guess Mother wouldn’t be that upset if we went ahead to make that,” my brother said.

An hour later, we successfully prepared a biscuit cake. After several failed attempts, we had stacked the biscuits on top of each other and managed to make a “biscuit house”. My brother and I pumped our fists into the air, glad we had accomplished making a “cake”. We also prepared Mother’s favourite coffee using her Espresso Machine. However, slowly, a negative thought came across my mind. “What if Mother doesn’t like it?” I asked, looking down at my feet. “I mean, biscuits aren’t unique. They have a bland taste compared to birthday cakes. And the coffee we prepared is something she can drink daily without us specially making it for her. She’d be so disappointed!”

My brother sighed and placed his hand on my shoulder. “I’m sure if she knows that we’ve put in effort to make this, she’d be happy. **It’s an unusual gift, but it’ll be a special gift from our hearts,**” he said gently. “But if you’re still worried that she’ll be unhappy, we could apologize to her, and make sure to leave out the part where we forgot it is her birthday,” he added sheepishly. I nodded.

“I’m home!” a voice exclaimed from the doorway. I jumped, surprised that Mother had come back home so fast. Had time really flown by so quickly? Looking at my brother, I whispered to him, “Do we surprise her with the cake now?”

“Obviously, what else would we do?” he replied, raising an eyebrow. I gulped and took the plate of biscuits from the table.

I took a deep breath, sure that Mother would not like the biscuit cake. However, although it would never be as good as an actual cake, it was better than nothing. As I walked out of the kitchen with my brother trailing behind me holding the cup of coffee, I smiled and shouted, “Happy birthday Mother!” I showed her the plate of biscuits in my hands. “This might not be what you were expecting, and I’d understand if you feel disappointed. I’m sorry we couldn’t give you a proper cake...”

Shock and surprise first flashed across her face, soon replaced by happiness and ecstasy, and then replaced by confusion. “Jenna!” she frowned. “What do you mean? Why’d you think I’d be disappointed?”

“Are those biscuits?” She asked, before I could answer her question. She dropped the bag she was carrying in her hands and rushed towards me. “Is that a house you tried to make? And is that my favourite coffee that I smell?” she questioned, admiring the plate of biscuits and taking the cup of coffee from my brother’s hands. Looking at my mother’s reaction, I felt relieved that she was not upset and let out a breath I did not know I had been holding. She had a bright smile on her face and seemed far from disappointed.

“You’re not upset? Aren’t you expecting a proper cake and gifts?” my brother asked, looking down at his feet.

Mother stared at him, her expression softening as she said gently, “John, I’d never be upset.” She patted both mine and my brother’s heads. “I know both of you have put in effort into making this unique cake and coffee for me and tried to make my birthday special, which I appreciate. But the best gift that I could ever ask for is for both of you to celebrate my birthday with me.” She grinned at us. However, I did not reciprocate the smile. If Mother knew we had forgotten her birthday, I was sure she would feel hurt

"M-mother, as much as I don't like saying this," I started, noticing my brother looking at me and shaking his head, not wanting me to say what I was about to. However, it was better to tell Mother as I knew I would be forever ashamed if I did otherwise. "W-we had forgotten it was your birthday today, and we're truly sorry. We did try our best to make this biscuit cake and coffee, though..." I closed my eyes, awaiting Mother's angry shout or the hurt expression on her face. Surprisingly, in contrast to what I had been expecting, she laughed.

My brother frowned. "What's so funny?"

"I found.... the looks on both.... of your faces when you told me... was funny," Mother said in between giggles. My brother and I simply stared at each other, not understanding what was so hilarious. Finally, Mother regained her composure. "Children, I forgive you for forgetting my birthday, and if you were thinking that I was expecting gifts from you, you're wrong," She said. "The most special gift I ever received was both of you. I don't need a proper cake or an expensive gift to make my birthday memorable. The ultimate gift is for you to celebrate with me, understand?"

I breathed a sigh of relief as I placed the cake I was holding on the table and ran forward to hug Mother.

The best gift that a mother could ever ask for and want, I realised, was for acknowledgment for all that she had done for her children, or in my mother's case, to spend quality time with her children. Simply being able to spend quality time with family made her birthday enjoyable.