

A Simple Gift

By: Teresa M.

I had just turned five. Life was great. I was a happy kid with lots of friends and a loving family. Then the day after my birthday, news came that Mom had cancer. I didn't really know what that meant, but I remember Dad kept telling me, "Mommy is going away." Before I knew it, Mom was gone. For years, my life was filled with an emptiness that could never be filled. Then one day that all changed...

"Darrell, remember that I won't be home tomorrow morning," Dad informed me as he was getting ready for work. "Don't be late for school." His left eyebrow raised up as he gave me his serious look.

"School starts late tomorrow because of teacher conferences," I said, grinning as I focused on his eyebrow. "It shouldn't be a problem."

Dad came over and ruffled my hair as he walked out the door. A gentle sigh escaped my lips as I remembered my mom. She used to ruffle my hair all the time when I was little. Now here I was, twelve years old, and I could still feel her fingers running through my hair like it was yesterday.

In the morning, my mind started racing as I stuffed my mouth with cereal. I just had to visit my best friend, Lucas. Actually, he was my only friend, and he was in the seventh grade just like me.

More importantly, I needed to get a gift for Dad's birthday. I'd been thinking about it for days. When I left my front door, I was greeted by a huge sign in front of my yard:

Garage Sale →

I followed the signs and sure enough, there was this small house with a nice, old lady standing outside.

"May I help you?" she asked with a gentle smile.

"Yes, please," I replied, smiling back. "I'm looking for something for my dad's birthday. Anything cheap is fine."

"How much money do you have there?" she asked.

I shrugged my shoulders. "Ten dollars," I replied.

She showed me a little rack of objects in the corner of the garage. When I looked, a shiny, golden watch caught my eye. It looked beautiful, and I just knew that my dad would love it.

"How much is the watch, ma'am?" I asked, picking it up in my hand.

“Twenty dollars.”

I sighed, but before I could say anything, the old lady placed a gentle hand on my shoulder.

“No, no. It’s okay. Go ahead and take it for ten,” she chuckled softly. “I found it on the ground not too long ago, so go ahead.”

“Thanks so much,” I blurted out, smiling brightly. I gave her ten bucks and strode out carrying the watch.



As I walked out, my eyes landed on a man walking towards the garage sale. His eyes locked with mine as he gave me a dark look. I felt like he wanted something from me. I kept walking, but a bit faster while trying to ignore his eyes as they followed me.

At home, I looked at the beautiful watch. On the back was an engraving:

For my love: L.S. From: M.S.

“Oh well,” I thought. “Dad won’t mind.” I placed the watch in my backpack and began biking to school. I noticed a little, black car that was driving so slowly you could barely tell it was moving. Wherever I went, it went.

My heart pounded as I raced towards school. I parked my bike, and the man stepped out of his car. Fear took over as he started walking towards me. I turned and ran into the school. Goodbye strange man, and goodbye creepy, black car.

By the time school was done, my heart rate had dropped considerably. I had told Lucas about the strange man, and we both decided that it was just my super active imagination. Shaking my head, I laughed how I had creeped myself out. Then my breath caught in my throat. I saw the exact same car waiting in front of the school!

I threw myself onto my bike and raced homeward. “It’s the watch,” I told myself. “There’s something about that watch!”

I twisted my head back to see if the car was still there. Sure enough, he was right behind me. The next thing I knew, my bike hit a rock in the road, and I found myself laying in the street. My elbows were stinging and bleeding. My eyes met the eyes of the man as he came out of his car.

“This is it,” I thought. “This is how I die.”

The man started running towards me. I closed my eyes and waited for the end. Instead, gentle arms pulled me onto my feet. This made no sense.

Finally opening my eyes, I recognized it was the same man from the garage sale.

“You’re not kidnapping me?” I asked, my voice barely above a whisper.

The man looked completely surprised. “What? Of course not!”

“Why are you following me?”

A soft look entered his eyes. “I’m trying to get something back that someone special once gave me.”

“Is it the watch?” I shakily asked, pulling it out and showing it to him.

Wetness filled his eyes. “Yes,” he said under his breath as I gave it to him. “Thanks so much, kid. I’m sorry if I scared you. I didn’t mean to.”

“It’s okay,” I replied, breathing easier. “What’s so special about it?”

“I’m Lincoln Stanwood. My wife recently passed away. Myra... Myra Stanwood. She was the love of my life.” He took a deep breath and continued, “The last gift she gave me was this watch. When I lost it, I never stopped looking for it. Then I saw you with it at the garage sale.”

It all made sense now.

“You still love her with all your heart, even though she’s gone,” I gently asked. “Don’t you?”

Tears started flowing down his face. “Of course,” he gently replied. “Holding the watch makes me feel closer to her.” His hands gripped the watch tighter.

Strangely enough, I felt that I had a connection with this man. “My mom passed away when I was five. I know how you feel.”

“I’m sorry,” he said softly. “You know that she still loves you, right?”

“Yeah, everyone tells me that.”

“Well, it’s the truth. Those we love never go away.”

His words reached my heart as memories of my mother flooded in.

“Thank you,” I whispered.

He smiled and winked at me. On the way home, I thought about how deeply this man loved his wife, and I thought about how deeply my mom loved me. This was going to be Dad’s birthday present: The story of today, of how I realized I still have people that love me, of how I *still* have a loving family that I thought I didn’t have anymore. I just never knew it.



