The Empty Box

anonymous

Even though it was only September, the air was crisp and children were already whispering about Christmas plans and Santa Claus. It made the already long months until Christmas seem even longer. With each passing day the children became more anxious, waiting for that final school bell. Upon ringing everyone would run for coats, gloves, and the classroom door, racing to see who would be the first one home: everyone except David.

David was a small boy with messy brown hair and tattered clothes. I had often wondered what kind of mother could send her son to school dressed so inappropriately for the cold winter months without a coat, boots, or gloves. But something made David special. It wasn't his intelligence or manners for they were as lacking as his winter clothes, but I can never recall looking at David and not seeing a smile. He was always willing to help and not a day passed that David didn't stay after school to straighten the chairs and clean erasers. We never talked much, he would simply smile and ask what else he could do, then thank me for letting him stay and slowly head for home.

Weeks passed and the excitement over the coming Christmas grew into restlessness until the last day of school before the holiday break. I can't recall a more anxious group of children as that final bell rang and they scattered out the door. I smiled in relief as the last of them hurried out. Turning around I saw David quietly standing by my desk.

"Aren't you anxious to get home David? I asked.

"No." he quietly replied.

Ready to go home myself I said, "Well, I think the chairs and erasers will wait why don't you hurry home."

"I have something for you," he said. He pulled from behind his back a small box wrapped in old paper and tied with a string. Handing it to me he said anxiously, "Open it!"

I took the box from him, thanked him and slowly unwrapped it. I lifted the lid and to my surprise saw nothing. I looked at David's smiling face and back into the empty box and said, "this box is nice David, but it's empty."

"Oh no it isn't," said David. "It's full of love. My mom told me before she died that love was something you couldn't see or touch unless you know it's there…can you see it?"

Tears filled my eyes as I looked at the proud dirty face I had rarely given attention. "Yes, David. I can see it." I replied. "Thank you."

David and I became good friends after that Christmas and I can say that with the passing years, I never again let the uncombed hair or dirty faces bother me, and I never forgot the meaning behind the little empty box that sat on my desk.

merry christmas