

# The Gift

by Kyle Scot Martinez

The old man always sat in the same porch chair. The chair was rickety, tattered, beat up, and torn like it had been moved from one place to another over and over again until finally, the chair had decided it had enough.

*I'm falling apart on you aren't I? You've had me and known me for years and years. Why do you keep me? Why don't you throw me away with all the other junk? It's time for me to go. Please let me go.*

The old man just smiled as if he knew what the chair was saying. He gently touched the wooden arm rest and massaged it. Reading the minds of inanimate objects had become his most recent vocation of late, and it helped him pass the time. Besides, he wasn't actually having a conversation with the chair. The chair was talking to him, but he wasn't talking back. That, he thought, would be Looney bin time. If his daughter and her pompous lawyer husband ever found out *that*, they would find an excuse to make him sell the house and move into a rest home. No thank you very much. The old man had all the rest he needed these days--too much so, in fact.

Right next to the old man's chair was another porch chair. It was identical to his--the second of a matching set. This chair hadn't been occupied for 4 years now. It had traveled around and been moved from place to place just as much as his chair. However, this chair was still in pristine condition. The old man saw to that. Only the best wood oil to rub into the chair's armrests. He cleaned the seat cushion of the chair daily, and wiped down the rest of the chair with a fine cloth.

The chair's cushion was in very good shape for being sat in all those previous years. The matching set of porch chairs were now 30 years old, to the day. This was the anniversary of the chairs. He would celebrate tonight for the chairs, and the chairs would welcome him.

The cushion itself was hardly deflated or used. As if the woman who had sat in the chair never held weight. A woman not bound to

the laws of gravity. A woman who floated in and out of the chair with gentle precision and grace. Gentle precision and grace were not the old man's strong suits. He knew that. The woman who previously occupied this chair knew that too.

The woman didn't care about any of that.

She cared much more for little things like if he was hungry, or how his day went. Had he enough sleep the night before? What time does Scotty get back from baseball practice today?

The pristine chair began to speak.

*You know what I want you to do.*

The old man looked away from the pristine chair.

*You never could ignore me, though you tried and failed many times.*

The old man suddenly rose up from his own chair and walked the five paces necessary to reach the white-railed wooden porch fence of his house and looked directly into the empty early-morning street.

He leaned against the railing.

*Or turn your back on me.*

The old man faintly heard the clatter of metal baseball cleats coming from down the paved street. It was a familiar sound. The sound belonged to a kid about seven houses away from his own. The kid was ten years old. The old man only knew his age because they talked every once in while--he and the kid. They had gotten to know each other since the kid had moved here in the neighborhood about five months ago.

The kid didn't have any brothers or sisters as far as the old man could tell. The old man once had two brothers and one sister. Once had, because they all had died of various causes. Richard in a car accident. Carol of alcoholism. Grant from a heart attack. The old man was old now, but back in the day he was the youngest. Funny how things change so radically, he thought to himself.

The old man waited for the kid to come into a range where he could hear his voice.

"So, have a game today I see?" said the old man.

The kid looked a bit startled to see him. He stopped walking and stood in the middle of the suburban street at 8:30 AM on a Saturday all empty except for the two of them, old man and young kid conversing.

The kid adjusted his glove under his right under arm.

"Yeah, we play the Red Sox today." the kid said, looking away shyly.

The old man smiled as if to comfort the kid. He took off his reading glasses and removed a handkerchief from his back pocket. He began to wipe down the glasses.

"So what's your team's record now?" he asked

"15-1. If we win 1 more game, we clinch the Minor League Division. But...I'm still not hitting good. I think I need a different bat. The one I use isn't mine and it's too big for me. I don't like choking up." said the kid, a little bit down.

The old man shook his head up and down slowly.

"Yes, the right bat is important. It can make the difference between getting hits and not getting hits." he said.

"Yeah, I guess so." said the kid.

In the five months since he knew the kid, the old man had never bothered to ask his name, and the kid had never asked him his own. It made no difference. He was an old man speaking to a kid. Names were not important in these kind of matters.

"Well, I don't want to hold you up. Have a good game and win it." the old man smiled again with world-weary lips.

"Ok, we will! We have a really good team." the kid smiled back.

The old man nodded in agreement by fact of the team's record.

The kid nodded back and waved goodbye.

"Bye." said the kid.

The old man waved back.

The sound of clanking cleats arose once again headed down the street to the field where the kid played.

The old man watched him for some time and marveled at how fast time goes by. The kid, he had noticed, had grown at least two inches

from the five months ago when he had first saw him. Not only that, but the kid seemed to have put on about ten pounds also.

*He must eat constantly.*

Sitting back down in his chair, he remembered his own son's baseball adventures. Little Scotty (that's the only way he could remember him, he died of cancer at 12 years old) was one hell of a baseball player. He made all-stars at age 11, with a team that had nothing but 12 and 13 year-old on it. Hitting, fielding, pitching-- Little Scotty could do it all. Though Scotty was his son, he was one heck of a nice kid, too. Scotty was very respectful. He never talked back, and was always there for anyone that needed him, even at 11 years old. Scotty used to wash the family car without even being asked. Afterward, Scotty would come in the house and take a quick nap. Whenever Scotty was taking a nap on a lazy Sunday afternoon, you could be guaranteed that there would be a sparkling green Oldsmobile sitting in the driveway.

*I'm not going away.*

The old man looked at the pristine chair.

"I know." he finally said, out loud.

That day, the kid's team did indeed win their 16th victory, clinching their division.

The team celebrated with pizza afterward. The handshakes of parents and coaches were abundant and spirits were high as the team felt an apparent bid for the city championship on its way. The kid felt a part of something, and that was different for him. He still needed to work on his hitting, but he was improving. The bat, he had ultimately decided, was just too long for him. He needed a smaller size. All the kids on the team had their own bats and his Mom said she just couldn't afford to buy him one right now. The glove had put her out close to thirty dollars, and that should be enough. Use one of the team bats--they're fine.

Fine.

As the old man prepared his TV dinner and began to slip back into his lazy chair, Little Scotty entered his mind again. He remembered

the handwritten note that his son had given to him a few days before he died:

*Dad,  
I know you are upset about me dying so young. It's okay, I have accepted it and want you to accept it too. I am sorry for all the things that I have ever done or said or when I argued with you or when I was bad. I always wanted you to be proud of me and I hope you are. Tell Mom it's OK too. Besides, I'm going to be with God now and he will take care of me.  
Love, Scotty.*

Getting up and shaking, the old man walked into the kitchen and removed his TV dinner from the microwave oven. The microwave was very dirty with food splatters inside. He wasn't good at cleaning anything--she had taken care of all that. He did have a maid come over occasionally, but that was only once a month or so. Other than that, he was on his own.

*What's your decision?*

As if to answer, the old man used his fork to stir the carrots cooler in his TV dinner. He didn't much like carrots, but that's all they seemed to put in these damn things. Carrots, carrots, carrots. *She* never cooked carrots for him, she knew "he didn't much like them." TV dinners, Wheel of Fortune, and Derv Griffin was his nightly routine. Not necessarily in that order. He kept on forgetting what came first or last. These days, they all seemed to run together as one--all bland, all with no taste whatsoever.

*I liked Merv Griffin.*

The old man smiled inside, beside himself. He went back into his lazy chair, turned the television on, and began to eat.

*The emperor must dine.*

As the kid walked home, he looked around at how the street had changed. It was now 3 PM. There were people out mowing their lawns, kids playing waffle ball in their yards, and the faint smell of barbecue-something-or-other coming from a few backyards. As he approached the old man's house, he was disappointed to see that he was not sitting in his chair on the front porch. The kid wanted to tell

the old man that his team had won, and clinched the division. The kid wanted to tell the old man that he was right—that a bat can make a world of difference. Oh well, I will tell him tomorrow, the kid thought. As the kid entered his own house; he found it to be empty.

He glanced at the refrigerator with an individual yellow sticky pad note on it.

*I had to run some errands. Back by five.—Mom.*

Notes on the refrigerator were his Mom's favorite form of communication. The kid thought about this for a brief moment, then opened up the appliance door to see what was in the fridge. He had already forgotten about the four slices of pizza an hour ago, and began to partake of a nice piece of cold chicken leg.

The kid grabbed a soda out of one of the compartments.

His mother had insisted on buying him diet soda, saying the regular kind had too many calories and wasn't good for him. The little secret his mother did not know, was that he went straight to the sugar jar, procured a thin spoon, and poured the poison (as his mother called it) carefully directly into the opening of the soda can. Swished the poison around a little bit for good measure and, Walla!

---Instant UN-diet soda.

*A kid's gotta do what a kid's gotta do.*

The old man was awakened by a sound from the television. A war movie was on. One of those old Audi Murphy movies where he's the hero and everyone else are chumps. Tanks, grenades, machine guns, all ringing in his ear at the same time. As he lay reclined in his easy chair, the voice came again.

*I miss you. Do it for me.*

The old man muted the TV and went deep into thought. He could see his own reflection from the glass of the old-style television he had owned for years. It seemed in reality, he owned nothing anymore—his objects owned him.

The old man arose from his chair with a creaky noise.

He went into his bedroom.

Glancing at the closet he himself had built years earlier, he went and stood directly in front of it. He opened up the sliding wooden

doors. It was mostly empty. Up in the back portion of the closet underneath a lot of old clothes he never wore anymore, was a package in wrapping paper that hadn't been touched in many years. It had a big red ribbon on the top of its silver wrapping, with a card attached. He took the package down, put it on the bed, and gazed at it. The old man took off the card, and without reading it, threw it in the wastepaper basket. The old man grabbed a spare piece of paper and pen from his desk and wrote a note on the paper and put it under the ribbon. He then placed the package square in the middle of the bed, got down on his knees, and prayed.

The next morning, the kid awoke to the usual smells coming from the kitchen of his house. Bacon frying, eggs being scrambled, the usual Sunday morning fare for the kid's household.

The kid entered the kitchen.

"Looks who's up." his mother said.

Yawning, the kid smiled.

"Go sit on the couch, I have something important to tell you."

The kid looked at her quizzically.

"Ok."

The kid went and sat on the couch wondering what trouble he was in this time.

What did he do? Not clean his room again? Did he forget to take out the trash? No, he definitely remembered doing that on Thursday, just like always. Well, okay, not *always* but most of the time.

His mother sat beside him on the couch.

"I don't know how to tell you this, so I am just going to say it." said his Mom.

She paused briefly, and then blurted:

"Mr. Perkins is dead, Trent. He shot himself last night."

The kid gave his mother a blank stare.

"Who? Who is Mr. Perkins?"

"The older gentleman down the street you always talk to."

Another blank stare, this one more serious.

"What? Why? When did this happen?"

"I told you last night. I considered not telling you at all, but he left a package for you. The police gave it to me opened because they had to inspect it--being the seriousness of the matter. There's also a note, addressed to our house. He didn't know your name either?" she asked, surprised.

His mother handed the package to him with the note attached.

The kid felt a tares of electric current go through his body. He took the package from his Mother and began reading the note.

The note said:

*"I bought this bat for my son Scotty on his 12th birthday. Scotty was always small for his age, that's why we called him Little Scotty. I never gave it to him because; well, because things happen kid. I think you could use it to improve your hitting, you look about the same size at 10 that he did at 12. I know it's wooden, but using a wooden bat will help you in the long run. That's what the pro's use. I am sorry if you don't understand what I did kid. Maybe one day, you will."*

*Your friend,*

*Mr. Perkins.*

The kid took the bat out of the package and his eyes opened wide with nausea and amazement.

*The bat felt right to him.*

Two weeks later on a bright sunny day, the kid hit a home run and two singles.

Two weeks after that, the very first year he had ever played baseball--his team won the city championship.

Twenty years later, Trent (formerly the kid) gave the wooden bat to his own child--a ten year old boy, new on the block.

Trent 's son asked his Dad where he had gotten the bat from?

Trent replied, "From my friend down the street--Mr. Perkins."

END

