



The Perfect Gift Selected for a Heart Well Known

by Jane Rubietta

This year, we observed the Twelve Days of Birthday, the climax being a party on our lawn for 35 close friends just at the eve of the season. Our yard was off the mosquito map, the nearby lake bracingly cool for watermelon football, and life was good. Unfortunately, as in a novel, the birthday morning—the real birthday at last—created a bit of a denouement for our birthday honoree.

In the midst of wrapping paper torn and scattered across the dining room, tissue paper wadded as from the fists of a blocked writer, it became obvious that the gifts were a disappointment. Nothing was exactly right: wrong color, size, or taste. Total misfits, these gifts did not fulfill the anticipation created by the occasion and wrapping and hoopla. Nor did they satisfy the hope snuggling quietly alongside the sadness, watching the celebration with alert eyes.

This secret sadness skulks behind so many special events: a birthday breakfast or anniversary dinner or Valentine's Day or Christmas present-fest. The not-quite sweater, the almost-blouse, the default tie, the totally off tech gadget, the who-could-even-think-of-it appliance, the total-miss wall art or car widget—they all leave a residue of sadness for not being well-known or well-loved enough in the core of our being for another to find the perfect gift.

That God-given sadness springs from a nestling hope. How normal to hope for the perfect gift, the delightful surprise—to want someone to understand the longings of our heart that we can't express or scrawl on a wish list or dream of in a present. We so badly want someone to love us by divining the perfect present, this perfect gift that says, "You are 100 percent loved because you are 100 percent known and accepted. I knew exactly what that perfect gift would be."

Will we always be left with that twinge of disappointment after recycling the gift-wrap and collapsing the boxes, that sadness crouched behind bright eyes and strong hugs and effusive thank-yous? In truth, this deeply knowing kind of gift-giving only comes from one place, the Giver of every good and perfect gift.

So like someone awaiting mail, I resolve to watch for that sneaking sadness, that longing for perfection that subtly sneaks into my soul and relationships, that can only be satisfied by the One who created it in the first place. Today I resolve to redirect that longing to its Giver, and to watch for the perfect gifts.

Starting now, I'm keeping track. So far today, the tally shows a besotted Lover offering a delightful variety of perfect gifts. The perfect sunrise—bouncing up from the horizon, bouncing off the nearby lake, bouncing into our bedroom at 5:16 this morning, like a child bouncing on the bed. “Wake up! See what I've done just for you! Look at this beauty—just for you.”

The perfect cup of coffee—is there anything so smooth, so perfectly warming and satisfying, as the very first cup, steaming, strong, a dollop of cream, first thing after a sunrise wakeup?

Now a perfect gentle soaking rain, watering the thirsty trees and grass (which I just mowed yesterday—how's that for another perfect timing gift?), and the silence that attends the rain like a lady in waiting. “Shhhhh, shhhhhh,” says this perfect gift. “Rest awhile.”

And sometimes, the perfect gift comes wrapped in unexpected paper—like the words someone shared with me with over the weekend, which prompted first anger, then pain, and then soul-searching to delve to the bottom of the package that will ultimately make me a more whole human being. Not a bad gift to offer the people around me.

With gifts like this, who wants only Twelve Days of Birthday? I'll take 365, please, all in a row. Year after year until at last I meet the Perfect Gift face to face, and hope is turned to sight, the secret sadness banished in the brilliance.

Until then, I'll be at my post. Watching and celebrating.

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