

"The Gift"

by
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1 INT. STONE'S OFFICE - AFTERNOON

1

DAN STONE, a tough-looking, 50-ish private detective, sits at his desk in his rundown office. On the glass of his door, we read: "DAN STONE, PRIVATE DETECTIVE." The door opens, and ANGELL slowly walks in. He is a short, white-haired, stoop-shouldered older gent who looks like he has given up on life. He is dressed in a gray, moth-eaten wool overcoat and an ill-fitting blue suit that has seen its better days. His green eyes are bloodshot and marked by heavy bags.

He closes the door and, with a heavy sigh, sits on a wooden chair opposite Stone's desk.

STONE

Welcome, sir. The name's Dan Stone.

ANGELL

You're a private detective?

Stone gestures at the door.

STONE

Like it says there.

ANGELL

My name's Angell, with two "l's."

STONE

What can I do for you, Mr. Angell?

ANGELL

I've lost something, and I
desperately need it to be found -
as soon as possible.

STONE

I've found a *lot* of lost things in
my career.

ANGELL

Actually, *I* didn't lose it.

STONE

(confused)
Come again?

ANGELL

(disdainfully)
Henry did.

STONE

Who's Henry?

ANGELL

My subordinate. I guess you could call him my apprentice.

(beat)

I took a chance on him, Mr. Stone. I wish I hadn't! I gave him *one* thing to do - one *simple* thing - and he screwed it up. Now, I have to clean up *his* mess. Never again, I'm telling you. Never again!

STONE

What was Henry supposed to do?

ANGELL

Take care of the box. I thought he could at *least* do that, so I gave him the chance. What does he do? He loses it. I've taken care of it for years and *never* lost it. Not for a single second!

STONE

This box he lost is. . . valuable?

ANGELL

Oh yes! In fact, one of a kind. *Definitely* irreplaceable.

Stone opens his top desk drawer and removes a pad of paper and a pen. He closes the drawer and leans closer to Angell.

STONE

I'll need a description of the lost item.

(beat)

Is it bigger than a bread box?

ANGELL

(beat)

About half that size, I'd say - maybe a tiny bit smaller.

STONE

What kind of a box is it?

ANGELL

A brown, wooden box with a hinged lid. The hinge squeaks when you open it. It has for years.

STONE

Why don't you oil it?

ANGELL
It's all part of the box's charm.

STONE
(confused)
If you say so.
(beat)
Any markings on it?

ANGELL
No, nothing.

STONE
Could someone have *stolen* it from Henry? You said it was valuable. Maybe somebody rolled him for it?

ANGELL
No. He lost it. He admits that. It was *entirely* his fault.

STONE
What's inside the box?

ANGELL
(wistfully)
Only the greatest gift in the world.

STONE
Some electronic gizmo? This year's hot toy?

ANGELL
No, sir. The box contains the one gift every person is happiest to receive around Christmastime year after year.

STONE
An iPad?

ANGELL
(chuckles)
No. The gift I'm speaking of is much less tangible but so much more valuable: Peace on Earth and goodwill towards men.

STONE
Huh?

ANGELL

I usually take care of delivering and opening the box myself, but the boss encouraged me to delegate some responsibilities this year, even though I really didn't want to. "You're looking tired," he said. "Henry can handle it. Take a little break."

(beat)

I should never have listened to him.

STONE

(beat)

Mr. Angell. . .

ANGELL

Please call me "Archie."

STONE

Archie Angell?

ANGELL

I never liked "Arch," and "Arch Angell" is too on the nose, don't you think?

(beat)

The truth is, Mr. Stone, I'm an angel.

STONE

(disbelieving)

Like the guys on clouds? The ones with wings and harps?

ANGELL

That's a common misconception.

(beat)

I'm pretty good on the clarinet though. I really bring down the house with my rendition of "Red River Valley."

STONE

(getting exasperated)

Look, Mr. Whatever Your Name Is -

ANGELL

Archie.

STONE

I'm in no mood for gags.

ANGELL

(confused)

Gags? I'm very serious. If the box isn't found, Christmas won't be the same this year.

STONE

Christmas will *always* be Christmas.

ANGELL

Have you been out walking the city streets lately?

STONE

Of course. It's part of the job.

ANGELL

Have you noticed that this Christmas is. . . well. . . kind of *blah*?

STONE

I'm not a big Christmas guy.

ANGELL

Why not?

STONE

(beat; misting up a little)

Not that it's any of your business, but. . . uhm. . . I lost my wife, Melanie, two years ago right around this time. It's tough to fake being jolly.

ANGELL

You have my condolences.

(beat)

Please believe me though: Christmas *is* blah this year, and it's because of the missing box.

STONE

The one filled with peace on Earth and goodwill towards men that Henry lost?

ANGELL

Precisely. Until it can be found and opened - so the joy can spread all over the world - I'm afraid this Christmas will continue to be second rate.

Angell looks at the glassy-eyed Stone.

ANGELL (CONT'D)
You don't believe me?

STONE
Who put you up to this? Elaine?

ANGELL
I don't know any Elaine.

STONE
That sister of mine. . . *always*
trying to tell me what I should do -
especially for the last couple of
years.

ANGELL
Mr. Stone, I -

STONE
You can tell her from me that if I
choose *not* to celebrate December
the 25th again this year, that's
that. Case closed! When she loses
her spouse, *maybe* she can tell me
how I should behave but, until
then, she should shut that big cake
hole of hers.

ANGELL
(taken aback)
If I ever see her, I'll mention it.
(beat)
I suspected that you wouldn't
believe me.

STONE
Then why'd you come here?

ANGELL
Henry lost the box somewhere in the
Boston area. Normally, it would be
opened in Bethlehem, but he dropped
it on the way there. Butterfingers!
(beat)
I was hoping you could help me find
it.

Stone pushes his chair away from his desk and stands.

STONE
Mr. Angell, I'm *really* beat. If you
don't -

ANGELL
You can't leave now!

STONE
I'm not leaving. You are.

Angell reaches into his jacket pocket and removes a wad of bills. He fans them a bit and then places them on the corner of Stone's desk. Amazed, Stone looks at the money.

STONE (CONT'D)
That's. . . *quite* a stack of green
you have there.

ANGELL
Two thousand, three hundred, and
fourteen dollars.

STONE
Where'd you get it?

ANGELL
Did you ever hear of the phrase
"you can't take it with you?"

STONE
Sure.

ANGELL
Well, you *can't*, though some people
have tried. They gave the money to
me after realizing there's no
heavenly need for it.
(beat)
I'm prepared to give you all of it
if you can find the box.

STONE
Mr. Angell -

ANGELL
Archie, *please*.

STONE
I have no idea where you got that
money.

ANGELL
I just told you where I got it.

STONE
I don't believe you.
(beat)
(MORE)

STONE (CONT'D)

You could have gotten it in any number of ways: Drugs, robbing innocent people, burglaries.

ANGELL

(shocked)

None of the above, I assure you! That behavior would be most un-angelic.

(beat; with sudden understanding)

Oh, I see the problem now: You don't believe where I said I got the money because you don't believe I'm an angel. Right?

STONE

Bingo, and I don't need any dirty money boosting my tax bracket.

(beat)

I think it would be best if you beat it.

ANGELL

What would convince you that I'm what I say I am?

STONE

How about leaving? Flying away?

ANGELL

Aside from that.

(beat)

Give me a test.

STONE

Why should I?

ANGELL

Humor an old man.

STONE

But I don't want to humor you.

ANGELL

How about I make something appear? Would that do it? Out of thin air. Anything you like.

STONE

(tired)

If I humor you, will you go away?

ANGELL
Definitely. If I can't make what
you ask for materialize, I'll
leave. *Promise.*

He crosses his heart, fingers crossed.

ANGELL (CONT'D)
Angel's honor.

STONE
(sighs)
Hold out your arms.

Angell holds out his arms in front of him.

STONE (CONT'D)
Is that as far as you can reach?

ANGELL
Yes.

Stone taps on his desk blotter, which is out of Angell's reach.

STONE
I want you to make something appear
right here.

Angell lowers his arms.

ANGELL
What do you want?

STONE
(longish beat)
A pineapple.

ANGELL
Is that all?

STONE
I doubt you have one on you, and I
kind of like pineapple.

ANGELL
A whole one, right - not canned?

STONE
Exactly.

Angell smirks a little.

ANGELL
Would you like a hula girl to
deliver it personally?

STONE
(enthusiastically, at
first)
Hey, *that* might be a good. . . No,
no! Just the. . . pineapple.

There is a brief wind chime-like sound and the pineapple
appears with a pop, followed by a brief snippet of Hawaiian
music.

STONE (CONT'D)
(amazed)
Well, I'll be!

ANGELL
Do you want it cored?

STONE
(quickly)
No, this is. . . fine. Thanks.

Stone picks up the pineapple and looks it over.

ANGELL
Do you believe me *now*?

STONE
(uncertain)
I. . . I guess I do.

ANGELL
Do you want to keep the pineapple
or shall I put it back where it
came from?

STONE
(quickly)
I'd like to keep it.

ANGELL
All yours. Hawaii's lousy with
them. They'll never miss one.
(beat)
You'll help me find the box?

STONE
I'll try.
(beat)
You said it's in Boston somewhere?

ANGELL
That's right.

STONE
How can you be so sure of that?

ANGELL
Our scientists examined the problem
- the box's trajectory, wind shear
at the time, and stuff like that.
That's their conclusion.

STONE
Aren't you putting a lot of faith
in some dead scientists?

ANGELL
Einstein, Ptolemy, Copernicus,
Galileo. Wouldn't you believe them?

STONE
(humbled)
Good point.
(beat)
You're certain it hasn't been
opened?

ANGELL
Not with the blah state of this
Christmas so far. It must be lying
unopened somewhere.

STONE
What if someone found it and took
it home?

ANGELL
That *would* be a problem.

STONE
But if they opened it, wouldn't
that release those. . . those
things you mentioned?

ANGELL
The peace and goodwill?

STONE
That's them.

ANGELL
It would.

STONE

Then what's the problem? That's what you're looking to do. What does it matter *who* opens the lid as long as it gets opened?

ANGELL

We'd still need to get the box back for *next* Christmas. It was specially constructed many, *many* years ago for its singular purpose. Not just any box can contain such rare gifts.

STONE

So, how do we look - narrow things down? Boston's no podunk town, you know.

ANGELL

I get a warm feeling - a sixth sense - whenever I'm near the box. I guess it's because we've spent so many Christmases together.

STONE

Then why do you need me?

ANGELL

It's not always the most *reliable* sixth sense, Mr. Stone, and, as I've grown older. . . well. . .

(beat)

We may need to rely on your private detective skills more than my feelings.

STONE

(disbelieving)

So we're just going to roam the city streets hoping you get a. . . a "flash?"

ANGELL

Basically, yes.

STONE

But finding the box that way could take weeks. Months!

ANGELL
I hope not! Christmas is only *six*
days away.

FADE TO:

2 EXT. CITY PARK - EARLY EVENING

2

A light snow falls as Stone and Angell walk around looking for the box. Angell is pretty quick on his feet, but Stone is slowing down.

(NOTE: We only see Stone's left profile until stated otherwise.)

ANGELL
Come on, Mr. Stone. You're falling
behind!

STONE
(tired)
Archie, I -

ANGELL
I'm walking faster than you are,
and I'm *dead*.

STONE
You may not want to spread that
around.
(beat)
Can we stop for a minute to rest?

ANGELL
(reluctantly)
OK, but only for a minute.

Stone points at a nearby, snow-dusted bench.

STONE
Have a seat.

ANGELL
But we're running out of -

STONE
We need to talk.

ANGELL
(alarmed)
Uh oh. That's what my *wife* used to
say to me.

STONE
Have a seat, Archie.

Stone dusts off the bench with his gloves, and they both sit.

STONE (CONT'D)
It's getting late. We should stop knocking on doors and call it a night.

ANGELL
Nonsense! While we still have the strength, we should keep at it.

STONE
But people *aren't* answering their doors.
(beat)
At the last house we went to, I heard someone whispering, "Don't open the door. They'll go away."

ANGELL
We can't stop now. Christmas is getting closer every second!

STONE
And it's getting later and later at night! People aren't going to open their doors to two strangers when it's dark out.
(beat)
Whatever happened to that sixth sense of yours anyway?

ANGELL
I don't know. It isn't working tonight. . . when I need it most.
(beat)
We *can't* stop trying, Mr. Stone. It's not like anything *bad* has happened.

STONE
(surprised)
No? Weren't you the one who knocked at number 117?

ANGELL
(beat; uneasily)
I'd. . . forgotten about that.

STONE

I haven't. The guy who answered the door was built like an elm tree!

ANGELL

He was rather. . . large.

STONE

And what did you say to him?

ANGELL

I. . . uhm. . .

STONE

(prompting him; adamantly)
What did you say?

ANGELL

I said, "Good evening, sir. I'm looking for an old box."

STONE

Exactly!

ANGELL

How was I to know he was married?

(beat)

I ducked just in time.

STONE

But I *didn't*.

Stone turns. We see that he has a black right eye.

ANGELL

(beat)

Does it. . . hurt?

STONE

It's getting tough to see out of it.

ANGELL

Isn't that a small price to pay for worldwide Christmas joy?

STONE

I think we should quit for now, go to our respective corners, and come out swinging in the morning.

ANGELL

I *hate* to lose all that time.

STONE
I can call in some reinforcements.

ANGELL
(eagerly)
You can?

STONE
I know some guys who owe me favors.

ANGELL
(hopefully)
They'll help us look for the box?

STONE
Probably.
(beat)
Wouldn't more people on duty be better?

ANGELL
Of course.

STONE
You should go back to your boss then. . .

Stone motions with his head.

STONE (CONT'D)
. . . up there.

ANGELL
Why?

STONE
Maybe he can fix your sixth sense.
I think you need a tune-up.

FADE TO:

3 INT. STONE'S OFFICE - MORNING

3

An old, wooden box rests on Stone's desk, where Stone is seated. Its lid creaks as he opens it.

STONE
No, this ain't it.

PAULIE, one of Stone's ne'er-do-well friends, speaks from beside him.

PAULIE
How can you tell?

Stone closes the box's lid.

STONE
I can tell.
(sniffs)
Besides, it smells like a dumpster.

PAULIE
Where'd you get the shiner?

STONE
None of your business.

PAULIE
You should put a steak on it.

STONE
You know what steak costs nowadays?
If I buy one, it's not going on my
eye. It's going in my *belly*.

PAULIE
You could put it on your eye *first*
and in your belly *second*.

STONE
(unsure)
I don't think that would be too
sanitary, Paulie.

PAULIE
What do you think you have an
immune system for, huh? Every once
in a while, you have to give it
something to practice on.

STONE
(exasperated)
Enough with my eye. OK?

PAULIE
I was just trying to be helpful.

STONE
Where'd you get the box?

PAULIE
(uneasily)
I. . . uhm. . . found it.

STONE
 (chuckles)
 I thought you stopped "finding"
 stuff after you got paroled?

PAULIE
 A guy has to keep in practice!

Paulie taps on the box.

PAULIE (CONT'D)
 So it isn't worth *anything* to you?

Stone pushes the box across the desk to Paulie.

STONE
 Not a penny.

PAULIE
 (quickly)
 Christmas is less than a week away.
 You could give it to someone as a
 gift.

STONE
 To who? It *smells*.

PAULIE
 How about that know-it-all sister
 of yours?

STONE
 (chuckles)
 Tempting, but no thanks.

FADE TO:

4 INT. HEAVEN - LATER

4

Angell and THE BOSS, standing among the clouds, are speaking.
 The boss has a long white beard and is wearing a sparkling
 white robe.

THE BOSS
 (surprised)
 Your sixth sense isn't working,
 Archie?

ANGELL
 No, sir. Not even a little bit.

THE BOSS
Maybe all the electronics
planetside are messing with it.

ANGELL
(confused)
The "elec" what?

THE BOSS
Electronics: TVs, cell phones,
WiFi.

ANGELL
(longish beat)
I've never heard of such things.

THE BOSS
How long have you been an angel,
Angell?

ANGELL
I'm not sure. I gave up keeping
track a long time ago.

THE BOSS
When did you pass over?

ANGELL
March 3, 1856.

THE BOSS
(surprised)
That long ago?

ANGELL
Uh huh.
(beat)
Have things changed much since I
passed?

THE BOSS
(astonished)
Have things. . . ?
(beat)
None of those electronics even
existed when you died.

ANGELL
How do I work around them so Mr.
Stone and I can find the box?

THE BOSS
I don't know if you *can*.
(beat)
(MORE)

THE BOSS (CONT'D)

You'd better ask Stone for advice.
It's his era, not yours. He may
know something current you can use
in your quest. It looks like we
can't count on your sixth sense for
help this time.

FADE TO:

5 INT. STONE'S OFFICE - LATER

5

Angell and Stone are seated around the desk

ANGELL

Whose list?

STONE

Craig's.

ANGELL

Who's he?

STONE

I don't know. The guy who founded
the thing, I suppose.

ANGELL

Is that his first name or his last
name?

STONE

(getting angry)

I don't. . . Look, do you want to
get the box back or not?

ANGELL

You know I do.

STONE

OK then. With my computer -

ANGELL

Your *what*?

STONE

My compu. . . uhm. . . How can. . .
(beat; suddenly)
Do you know what a bulletin board
is?

ANGELL

Of course.

STONE

Craigslist is like a *really* big
bulletin board.

ANGELL

Oh, I see: You're going to put up a
notice that the box is missing and
how whoever found it can return it
to us.

STONE

Now you're getting it.

ANGELL

But not many people will see the
notice.

STONE

That's where you're wrong.
Thousands will.

ANGELL

You're joking?

STONE

Leave it up to me.

ANGELL

How can you be certain people will
respond?

STONE

By offering a reward for the box's
safe return.

ANGELL

Where will you get the reward
money?

STONE

From the cash you gave me.

ANGELL

But that's for *you*, for your hard
work.

STONE

If I want to give some of it away,
that's my choice. It's *my* money.

(beat)

Just because *I'm* not big on
Christmas, that doesn't mean the
world should have a blah holiday.

ANGELL
You're a good man, Mr. Stone.

STONE
Before long, we'll have people
pouring through that door.

FADE TO:

6 INT. STONE'S OFFICE - LATER

6

A long line of colorful people trail out the door - all ages, races, clothing types. Each one of them is holding some kind of box. Angell and Stone sit behind the desk, where the line starts.

LULU is first in line. She is in her 80s and speaks with a Southern accent. She is wearing a mess of colorful clothes: Hat, gloves, scarf, jacket, etc.

LULU
(prompting Angell)
Well?

Angell looks at the wooden box she has brought. He hands it back to her.

ANGELL
I'm afraid this isn't it.

LULU
But it matches the description in
the ad perfectly.

STONE
More or less.

LULU
Perfectly.

STONE
I stand corrected.
(beat)
However, it's *not* the box we're
looking for.

LULU
Do I get any money?

STONE
For what?

LULU
For coming close.

STONE
This isn't horseshoes or hand
grenades, ma'am. Close doesn't
count. There's a *particular* box
we're looking for, and the one you
brought in *isn't* it.

Lulu is taken aback.

LULU
You're rather *rude*.

STONE
Me?

LULU
If I ever need a private detective,
I won't even *think* of hiring you.

STONE
(sotto voce;
sarcastically)
My loss.

Lulu turns and starts walking away angrily. The person behind her moves up in line. Stone calls to Lulu, holding her forgotten box in the air.

STONE (CONT'D)
Ma'am, your box.

Lulu stops and turns to Stone.

LULU
You keep it.

STONE
What am I supposed to do with it?

LULU
If I wasn't such a lady, I'd tell
you.

Several of the people in line chuckle at this.

FADE TO:

7 INT. STONE'S OFFICE - HOURS LATER

7

The line is gone. Angell and Stone sit at the desk, despondent. Wooden boxes of varying types are scattered around the office.

There is a shy rap on the open door. They look up to see MARY ANN WALTERS. She is in her early 40s and looks like life ran her over and then backed up to see what it had hit. She is a lovely woman - in a plain way - and she carries a beaten-up paper grocery bag in her hand.

STONE

Please come in, Miss. . .

Mary Ann shyly walks into the office.

MARY ANN

Walters. Mary Anne Walters.

(beat)

I *may* have found what you're looking for.

She puts the bag down on Stone's desk, opens it, and removes the box inside, placing it down delicately.

ANGELL

(excitedly)

That's it! That's it!

He reaches for the box and then looks at Mary Ann.

ANGELL (CONT'D)

May I?

MARY ANN

Of course.

Angell takes the box from the desk and looks it over. He turns very happy.

STONE

That's it, Archie?

ANGELL

Oh yes! This is the real McCoy alright. I'd know it *anywhere*.

(beat)

Thank you. Thank you!

MARY ANN

You're most welcome.

STONE

Where did you find it?

MARY ANN

In my backyard. It was just sitting there, covered in a dusting of snow.

(beat)

When I saw your Craigslist ad, I said to myself, "This *must* be what they're looking for." I brought it over as soon as I could.

ANGELL

Did you. . . open it?

MARY ANN

No. I was tempted to, but I didn't.

ANGELL

(sotto voce)

Then the contents should still be intact.

MARY ANN

I have to admit that I did *shake* it once or twice, but I didn't hear anything moving about inside.

(shyly)

Was that OK?

STONE

Just fine.

(beat)

We can't thank you enough.

Stone opens his desk drawer and pulls out an envelope of cash. He hands it to Mary Ann.

STONE (CONT'D)

The reward money is -

MARY ANN

Oh no. I *couldn't*!

Stone motions with the envelope.

STONE

But this was part of the deal.

MARY ANN

You keep it. I'm just glad the box is back with its rightful owner.

ANGELL
(happily)
Time to jazz up Christmas!

Angell snaps his fingers. The hinge creaks as the box opens on its own.

There is a sudden cacophony of Christmas sounds: Christmas carol excerpts, sleigh bells, children's laughter, ho-ho-hos, and holiday movie clips. A rainbow of colors fills the room. This lasts for about a minute. Then, with a creak, the lid of the box closes on its own.

STONE
(shocked)
What the. . .

Angell is very happy.

ANGELL
It's done. The peace and goodwill have been released! They will spread from here and soon, like ripples in a pond, encompass the entire world!
(beat)
Can you feel it, Mr. Stone?

STONE
(longish beat)
Things do seem a bit different.

ANGELL
Time to head home and start filling up the box for next year. I'll take care of it *myself* then, no matter what the boss says.

STONE
(chuckles)
No Henry?

ANGELL
Certainly not!

Stone notices that Mary Ann is standing absolutely still, as though frozen.

STONE
(alarmed)
What's wrong with her?

ANGELL

Nothing. I've frozen time.

(beat)

I didn't want to have to convince
her that I'm an angel too. It was
tough enough with you.

STONE

(surprised)

You can freeze time?

ANGELL

All angels can.

STONE

Why didn't you do it last night
then, before I got my knuckle
sandwich?

ANGELL

(embarrassed)

I. . . forgot.

STONE

(flabbergasted)

You for-

ANGELL

(quickly)

Mr. Stone, I can't tell you how
grateful I am for all your help.

STONE

You're welcome.

ANGELL

As soon as I'm gone, time will
start again. The lady will be
unharmmed.

(longish beat)

Goodbye.

STONE

Goodbye, Archie.

With a *boing* sound, he disappears. Seconds later, Mary Ann
comes back to life. She looks about, confused.

MARY ANN

(suddenly)

Where'd your friend go?

STONE

He had to run.

MARY ANN
So quickly?

STONE
He's fast for his age.

Stone palms the envelope of cash, pushes out his chair, stands, and takes a few steps toward Mary Ann.

STONE (CONT'D)
Have you. . . eaten dinner?

MARY ANN
No, I haven't.

STONE
I haven't either.
(beat)
Would you care to join me?

MARY ANN
Oh, I don't want you to spend -

STONE
You won't accept the reward money.
Dinner is the least I can do to
thank you.

MARY ANN
(beat)
Then I accept.
(beat)
Do you have any place in mind?

STONE
How about Hanover's? I hear they
make an excellent steak.

MARY ANN
I've never been. Thank you.

STONE
Thank you. Just let me close this
place up, and we'll be going.

MARY ANN
While we're there, maybe you could
get a steak for that poor eye of
yours.

STONE
No, I don't think so.

MARY ANN
Isn't there something in steak
that's good for a black eye?

STONE
So I'm told.

MARY ANN
Then why not?

STONE
(beat; shyly)
I don't want anything blocking my
view of my dinner companion.

FADE TO BLACK.