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The Christmas Gift (Short Story)

By C. Bailey-Lloyd/LadyCamelot

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In a small, Southern town off the banks of the Edisto River lived a bright-eyed, skinny, brown-haired girl. Renee was a jovial child, filled with love and compassion. In everything, she managed to find some light.

Renee would take daily strolls to the riverbank where she'd gather unique rocks and stray seashells. On her way to her hidden refuge, `neath towering oaks and mossy vines, she'd pass the house where Sady lived.

Though Renee never saw much of Sady's owners, she would always stop by to pet the bulky but gentle giant. Sady wasn't any ordinary dog – she was special. Whenever Renee would come by, the tall black and tan rotty would scoop up her fringed tennis ball and toss it into the air for Renee to throw.

The oversized dog was pinned in a very small kennel, but she would always perk up when Renee was there. Renee would squeeze her tiny wrists and hands through the rusty, wire mesh and lovingly stroke Sady. In return, Sady would adore Renee with her eyes and rub her side against Renee's small fingers.

Sneaking leftovers to Sady was Renee's favorite thing to do. She knew Sady didn't get much to eat, `cause she could tell from the looks of her that mealtime must've been meager helpings of Ol'Roy dog food. Never the matter, Renee would bring strips of broken beef jerky, Vienna sausages and anything she could swipe from her fridge. Before leaving Sady, Renee would gather fresh water from the River and fill Sady's empty water bowl.

As Autumn leaves began to fall, Renee had noticed that Sady was becoming thinner and lankier, but she couldn't come as often because School took precedence over her walks to the river refuge. One day, Renee asked her Pa if he'd talk to the owners of Sady and see whether they'd like to give her the big dog. 'What'r ya gonna do with such a big dawg?' asked Pa.

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'Oh, I don't know, Pa. But I'd feed her and love her,' she added, 'that's all Sady really wants,' she continued, 'her owners aren't ever there, and it just seems wrong to keep her pinned in that little fence.'

Pa shook his head, and he cupped his hands around Renee's chin, 'Pun'kin, we ain't got the kinda money to take care of such a big dawg. He'd eat us out of house and home.'

Renee pushed Pa's hands away from her face and said matter-of-factly, 'first of all, he ain't a he – she's a she, and Sady would never do that.'

With that, she trumped off to her room. Downhearted, she slipped on her shoes and coat, and made

her way out the door.

'Where ya goin?'' Pa asked.

'I'm going to see Sady,' Renee replied, 'somebody's got to love her.'

Pa didn't try to stop her. He figured so long as Renee could visit Sady, that would be enough.

Renee went to Sady's pen, but Sady didn't run to the fence edge as she normally did. She was laying in the corner, head low to the ground and she barely lifted her eyes when Renee called to her. 'What's the matter, girl?' asked Renee.

It had been about a week since she'd last seen Sady. Now, the dog had a swollen tummy and she appeared very weak and tired. Sady staggered to her feet and slowly walked to greet Renee. Her tail wasn't wagging as much, and Renee could clearly see hipbones sticking out on the large dog. 'Come here, Sady,' she called to her, 'it's okay girl,' she pulled a half-eaten pecan log from her pocket, 'here, girl. Gotta treat for you.'

Sady peered through the mesh at Renee. Sadly, Renee stroked the sweet dog through the fence while Sady hungrily ate the pecan log. 'Pa says I can't have you, Sady. But one day, when I'm big, I'll come and get you girl,' she whispered.

Before too long, it had gotten dark and Renee knew she had to get home. When she arrived back at the house, Pa told her, 'Renee, ya really need to try to stay home more often and work on your homework,' he paused, 'you're always off with that dawg in the woods and I don't ever see ya workin' on school papers.'

Renee nodded her head, 'I know, Pa...it's just that...' she started.

'I know ya love that dawg, Renee, but schoolin' comes first,' he ended.

Knowing that she wasn't going to get her way much longer with going to see Sady, Renee stayed more at home but still made weekend trips to the riverside nearby Sady's kennel. Each time she'd see her, Sady seemed weaker and sicker. What kind of people could do this to such a lovable, huggable girl?

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Renee thought to herself.

On Christmas Day, the first snow was blanketing the grounds around Renee's house. Though money was tight and there wasn't enough for any presents, she got Pa to come outside with her to build a snowman. After about an hour of playing and laughing in the snowdrifts, Renee had a terrible, horrible thought, 'what had become of poor Sady?' she thought aloud to herself. Here she was having a wonderful time playing outside in the snow, but Sady would be all by herself with little shelter from the bitter cold.

Suddenly, Renee turned to Pa, and she said, 'Can I go and see Sady just for a few minutes, Pa?'

Pa winked his eye at Renee, 'yep...', he smiled, 'but take that old pack of bologna from the fridge with ya when ya go. Gotta get rid of that old stuff, ya know.'

Renee forced a grin and ran to grab the newly opened pack of bologna from the fridge and trotted

down to Sady's pen. As she neared the bend where Sady lived, she noticed that there were some grown men standing around the mesh wire. Hiding behind the bushes, she could faintly hear them speaking.

'I told ya to get rid of that stupid dawg,' said one.

'Yep,' said the other placing his hands on his hips, 'now what ya gonna do?' he added.

There was a bustle in the back of the pen, but Renee couldn't see what was happening. Her heart sunk. She knew for sure that something terrible had happened, but what?

At about that time, Pa walked up behind Renee and startled her, 'what'r ya doin?' asked Pa.

'Oh-my-gosh!' she gulped, 'what'r you doing here, Pa?'

'I came to see the fabulous Sady you always talk about. Why'r ya hidin' `hind the bushes?' he asked.

'There are people there Pa. I ain't never seen them before.'

Pa stroked the whiskers on his chin, '...hmmm...' he pondered, 'well, let's go on home then.'

Renee reluctantly began to walk away, but she stopped, 'Pa, let me stay just a few more minutes. Maybe they'll leave and I can go and see her again?' she pleaded.

Pa answered, 'okay – but just a few more minute, ya hear?' Pa walked back home. Renee waited about half an hour when the men got into their trucks and drove away. Quietly, she walked over to Sady's pen. It seemed that the pen had been ripped apart and there was no sight of Sady. 'Oh no,' she thought, 'Sady – where are ya girl?' she called.

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In the corner of the pen, Renee spotted a large, wooden crate. Carefully, she pulled the mesh aside and slowly crawled through to get inside the kennel. Looking from side to side, she made her way to the crate. She could hear faint, muffled sounds but wasn't sure what to make of it. Oh so cautiously, she proceeded to peer inside the crate. What she would see would change her life forever. Pulling open the broken, but ajar top, she discovered a mound of tiny, four-legged fur balls. All of them looked like beautiful Sady. 'Ah,' she whispered, 'that was your secret.' But where was Sady?

Just then, the man owner ran out the back door and hollered at Renee, 'Wudya doin' here?!' Startled, Renee ran, tripping through the wire fence to escape the harsh man. She ran so fast that she never looked back. Suddenly, Renee slipped on a slick, icy rock and plunged into the freezing ravine. One thing Renee never learned how to do was to swim.

As she struggled to keep her head above the icy currents, she tried to scream, but the water was so cold that only muffled whispers came from her little voice. No one could hear the little girl's pleas as her head bobbed up and down beneath the torrent waters. But just as she was about to give up, someone did hear Renee's calls for help.

There, hiding between the blanketed holly berry bushes was Sady. She could see the little girl in the icy waters. Sady heard Renee's unheard cries for help. Without a minute to waste, Sady struggled to maneuver her way to the frozen depths below. As soon as Sady got to the riverbank, little Renee went

under the water for the last time. Sady panicked and jumped in after the small child. Disappearing into the murky, cold waters, Sady astonishingly re-emerged with Renee's lifeless body in tow. Carefully, she swam to the riverside, pulling Renee from the water.

Once atop the wet, snowy earth, Sady dug a large trench and pushed the little girl inside. Laying atop of her, Sady tried to warm the little girl's frozen body. About that time, Pa came running over to the dog, 'Get away, dawg!' he yelled at Sady, not knowing what had just happened.

But Sady just stayed there, coveting the little girl's limp body. Licking her face, Renee suddenly coughed up a mouthful of river water. Pa raced to Renee's side, pushing the big dog out of the way, 'Renee, pun'kin!' he hollered, 'you okay?!' he added.

With that, Sady looked on with her big brown eyes. Renee opened her eyes and grabbed her Pa's neck, 'Pa,' she cried, 'what happened?'

Pa looked at Sady and then back at Renee, 'is this the dawg you were talkin' about?'

Just then, Sady gently pawed Pa's arm and nudged her way over to Renee. Lying down beside Renee, Sady softly licked Renee's blued fingers and lovingly kissed her face too.

Right after Renee was able to regain her balance, the man from Sady's kennel came up behind her and Pa with a shotgun in tow. 'Get outta da way!' the man hollered at Pa, 'that dawg is worthless!'

Pa stood affront of Renee and Sady, and sternly peered back at the man, 'Lemme' tell you something,

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Mr. I don't know who's dawg this is, but this dawg is NOT worthless and if it weren't for this dawg, my daughter would've surely drowned in that there river – so YOU get from here.'

Shocked, the man retorted, 'but, but...' he stuttered, 'she's left a mess of pups up at the house and I ain't gonna put up with all that whimperin' and whinin'.'

Renee looked up at Pa, and her eyes pleaded with him. Pa looked down at Sady, who was shivering from the wet and cold, 'I'll tell ya what,' Pa said to the man, 'I'd say I owe this dawg a lot for saving my little Renee,' he paused and contemplated a thought, 'I'll take this dawg and her pups.'

'But she's my dawg,' said the man.

'You mean, she was your dawg,' he took Sady firmly by the collar and pulled Renee next to his side, 'now, we're gonna go up to yer house and we're gonna get those pups. And then we're gonna go to my house where Renee can raise `em up `till they're old enough to go to good, and loving homes.'

'You can't do that!' said Sady's owner.

'Yes I can, and we will.'

Pushing his way past the man, Pa, Renee and Sady slowly walked to the man's house, and just as easily as she had crawled in before, Renee went to the crate and handed the pups, one by one to Pa through the wire mesh. Placing the tiny dogs inside his inner coat poach, he, Renee and Sady all went home together.

When they got home, Pa had Renee to go and change out of her sopping–wet clothing and he put on a warm, soothing fire in the wood stove. Lying beside the warmth, Renee put her arms around Sady as she nursed her pups.

Though Pa didn't have a gift to give Renee this Christmas, Sady was able to give both of them the best Christmas Gift ever. And to this day, Renee still seeks to help those animals in need thanks to the love of a gentle giant.

The moral of this story is, that Christmas is not about packages, ribbons or any material things – Christmas is about the gift of loving, caring, compassion, understanding and most of all being able to give of ones self despite what life may bring. Christmas is, after all, the season of brotherly love. Why not set the example today.

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by C. Bailey–Lloyd
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How To Save Money On Christmas Gifts

By Maria Estarellas

How many times have you spent more that you could afford on Christmas gifts for your family and friends?

How many times have you bought gifts that weren't what you were looking for and on top of that, paid top dollars for them?

It has happened to all of us one too many times.

Well, you can SAVE money on all your Christmas Gifts.

1. Make a list.

It's always convenient to make a list of all the people that you will be giving a gift to.

Make sure you know what their interests are so you get a gift that they will appreciate. It will make it special for them and for you.

2. What to buy for someone that has everything?

Baskets, candles, a good book or a store certificate can be the perfect gift for that special person that has everything.

3. Buying in advance.

Don't wait until the last minute to go Christmas shopping because you'll end up paying high prices for stuff you don't even like. This happens specially with the hottest Holiday Toys because a lot of people look for them at local stores and since quantities are limited, you won't find them unless you go Christmas shopping early.

If you decide to go a local mall, make sure you do it during the first two weeks of November. You'll avoid the majority of Christmas shoppers and you are guaranteed to find what you're looking for at lower prices.

4. Take advantage of Online pre–Christmas Sales.

Most stores offer deep online discounts (up to 70%) on toys, clothing, accessories, gifts, candles, and

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more before Christmas during the months of October and November. They even offer Free Shipping with your order.

5. Buy from the comfort of your home.

Every year, more people buy online to save time and money. By buying online, you'll be able to see every item on every gift category you're interested in without the hassle of searching a whole store or waiting in long lines, only to find out that what you're looking for is not available or is overpriced.

You'll also receive the items you purchased early, giving you time to wrap them in advance.

The Christmas Season should be spent with family and friends instead of worrying about looking for time to go Christmas shopping.

Have a great Holiday Season.

Maria Estarellas is the webmaster for

– "The Complete Website For

The Whole Family". You'll find fun things for each member of your family.

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