



Mark was an 11 year old orphan who lived with his aunt, a bitter middle aged woman greatly annoyed with the burden of caring for her dead sister's son. She never failed to remind young Mark, if it hadn't been for her generosity, he would be a vagrant, homeless waif. Still, with all the scolding and chilliness at home, he was a sweet and gentle child.

Mark's schoolteacher had not noticed him particularly until he began staying after class each day (at the risk of arousing his aunt's anger, she later found) to help her straighten up the room. They did this quietly and comfortably, not speaking much, but enjoying the solitude of that hour of the day. When they did talk, Mark spoke mostly of his mother. Though he was quite small when she died, he remembered a kind, gentle, loving woman, who always spent much time with him.

As Christmas drew near however, Mark failed to stay after school each day. His teacher looked forward to his coming, but when the days passed and he continued to scamper hurriedly from the room after class, she stopped him one afternoon and asked why he no longer helped her in the room. She told him how she had missed him, and his large gray eyes lit up eagerly as he replied, "Did you really miss me?"

Mark's teacher explained how he had been her best helper. "I was making you a surprise," he whispered confidentially. "It's for Christmas." With that, he became embarrassed and dashed from the room. He didn't stay after school any more after that.

Finally came the last school day before Christmas. Mark crept slowly into the room late that afternoon with his hands concealing something behind his back. "I have your present," he said timidly when his teacher looked up. "I hope you like it." He held out his hands, and there lying in his small palms was a tiny wooden box.

"It's beautiful, Mark. Is there something in it?" I asked opening the top to look inside.

"Oh you can't see what's in it," he replied, "and you can't touch it, or taste it or feel it, but mother always said it makes you feel good all the time, warm on cold nights, and safe when you're all alone."

I gazed into the empty box. "What is it Mark," I asked gently, "that will make me feel so good?"

"It's love," he whispered softly, "and mother always said it's best when you give it away." And he turned and quietly left the room.

Source: Unknown