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## Youth Short Story Category – 2<sup>nd</sup> Prize 2021

# A PRECIOUS GIFT

By Erin Hicks

It is a curious thing, hope. It can spring out from the unexpected or bleed out until there is nothing left but the mere shell of what once was. Often taken for granted, the true wonder of it can be overlooked. But for a few special souls, it is never truly lost. This is true for a newborn dewdrop, recently released from the sky itself, when heaven's tears rained down to the ground. He is pure, so naïve with no doubt or anger in his heart. He is being sent down to earth with a very simple instruction, yet it is one that carries much responsibility. To gift the creatures and the beings of earth, bringing them relief and hope. He must gift them the very essence of life; water. But the weight this difficult task holds does not yet pull down the young dewdrop. He feels nothing but excitement, of wonder. His heart is whole for he yearns to learn the secrets of life, the intricate balance it provides.

As he witnesses with curiosity the blurred shapes speeding towards him, he longs to discover what it is that is so bright and unique down below. The word floats weightlessly to him, as though carried by the wind. Colour. His heart swells, repeating the word, his little

secret to keep safe. Colour. There were so many, some dark, some light, all beautiful.

Colour.

Plink. A soft landing, something snugly like a warm blanket. The warm petals of a young Dahlia flower, its fragile weight beaten down by the rays from the brilliant buttery sphere above. Again, a new word is brought to him from the wisps of air. Flower. He decides to share his gift, bringing new life to this silky blossom. He giggles with joy, splashing around the now moist surface of the delicately sun-warmed petals, enthralled. Bright rays from above beam downwards, catching on his smooth translucent body. The wind whispers in his ear; Sunshine. Spinning around, golden drops cast off from inside him until he mirrors sunlight itself.

He journeys on, searching merrily for his next adventure. The lush greenery around him hums with life, creating a delicate symphony that swells with the breeze and dances with the swaying dandelions. The wind murmurs in his ear. Music. He is moved by the emotions it stirs from within, somehow able to capture the joyous feeling he experiences, his heart soaring as freely as the brilliant clouds above him.

A large oak, old as time itself stands imperiously before him. The little dewdrop is in utter awe at its regal limbs that stretch towards the sky and provide shade to a community of critters, from families of wary wren to the tiniest marching ants. Sitting upon the crackled bark, a new word sails in with the breeze. Sharing. The tree provides a home, the birds spread the acorn, worms fertilize the soil; everyone has a role, and everyone shares the benefits. He watches this unfold and has the urge to do his part. So he gifts them, and the weary tree's leaves rustle with a cacophony of gratitude.

As he travels through delicate brooks, regal tree branches and fields of flashing dragonflies he witnesses the hatching of a baby bird, and learns new words, new meanings, new joy. Each occurrence is more precious to him than gold, and he keeps the words as a symbol of each memory close to his heart. Colour. Flower. Sunshine. Music. For many months, the little dewdrop sparkles on, eyes still wide with wonderment, not once taking the beauty around him for granted. He continues to give his precious gift, because he sees the world from a view that many do not. He sees the spiders spinning their intricate webs, the way the

green grass shimmers in the evening light. He sees the rich soil, giving life to hidden seeds, and gifts them in order to bring life. He sees the way the honeybees lovingly collect the miniscule pollen from exquisite fields of pure daisies. Joy. Laughter. Life. Family. Sharing.

He carries no regrets and takes genuine delight in sharing his gift. But the little dewdrop begins to dimmish, as the more he gives, the less he ceases to be. Over time new thoughts began to form in the little dewdrops head.

What will happen to me when I have given all I can?

Where do I go if I am no longer needed here?

He pondered this deeply, as the uncertainty bloomed within. Would he disappear? Just cease to be? He did his best to banish these heavy thoughts, but they followed him everywhere, a dark shadow, that no amount of sunshine could extinguish. Each translucent stream, each delicately crafted petal, seemed dimmed in comparison. They had lost their shine. Every new acquaintance seemed distanced, as though separated by a veil that only he could discern. He did his best to soldier on, trying to hide his sorrow as to not bring others down. But the thought was there. And it only grew. To the world around him, he smiled, laughed, danced and gifted. It was only when he was alone that his exterior turned a shade greyer, when the charade of happiness was not necessary.

On his journey, he chances across a feeble old soul. A mole aged beyond his years, who lives a life swathed in the heavy cloak of sorrow. As the little dewdrop pauses to gift a dying shrub, the mole calls out hoarsely. Although his eyes provide no sight, he senses the sadness brewing within the dewdrop's heart. The mole is hesitant to share his knowledge. He knows the answer, there is no doubt in his head. But it is his heart that holds the words back, stopping them from rolling off his tongue. The little dewdrop hangs before him, on a tiny bridge, hovering between joy and sadness. The mole regrets that it will be his words that will ultimately seal his fate, sending him to the other side.

“You will disappear. There is a place, a graveyard for beings trapped by sadness like you. Once imprisoned in the grey sea, you remain there for all of eternity, a single drop in the vast mass. Surrounded but utterly alone, alive but not fully living. Be careful young one, for each hopeless thought condemns you further; any gift may very well be your last.”

The little dewdrop hovers in silence. And for a fleeting moment he feels so... empty. No joy, no sorrow, just the numb sense of finality. He sees the moles lips still moving, but no sounds seem to reach his ears. Then he hears it. Through the silence a single word registers.

Alone.

That is his destiny. No love, no sharing. No escape. He had finally been given the answer to his fears. Despite yearning the truth all that time, he now craves the blissful ignorance he once detested. How poetic, he thinks, the ghost of a smile playing on his face. I am the gift of life. Yet the more I give, the more I lose. The silence breaks, and now every tiny sound seems magnified. The pain crushes him down, squeezing the breath from his lungs, and he watches it dance away from him. Do not leave me, he yearns to cry. I do not want to be alone.

The very next dawn brings a field of marigolds, their bright petals drooping in the parched earth. The little dewdrop performs his final gift. As the flowers are restored, he offers a small, sad smile. Then he holds his head high, greets the new day, and whispers a final word. Goodbye.

Darkness. Cold, grey, empty. He looks around, slowly taking in the shadows that engulf him. So this was his grave, was it? Voices seemed to swarm around him, the sounds garbled and disjointed. Shapes floated by, oddly blurred and supple. The little dewdrop realized with a heavy heart that he was not actually by himself. Not really. He was encircled by other wasted souls, trapped in the vast ocean that was salty with heaven's tears. Surrounded, yet alone. He realized with a start that the greyness around him mirrored his own complexion. Once a clear sunny blue, he was now a deep grey, as the joy had been lost. Gone forever.

He hovered, numb to all sensations. How long he was there he did not know, for time did not seem to matter down there. Nothing really seemed to matter down there at all. He refuses to dream of his glorious experiences, for the dull ache of pain is still too sharp for him. But over time, gently, gradually, he allows himself to look back at those precious moments with fondness. Small details come to his mind; the glorious changes of the maple leaves, the velvet fur of a squirrel, the warm sensation of sunlight. He is still alone and grey, yet his heart slowly accepts his fate, gaining gratitude for the short time he did have beyond

the surface of the cold, deep sea. And in this acceptance, a new seed of hope begins to grow, that he might one day feel the sun's rays warm his face again.

Colour.

Ah, that wonderous thing. He misses it so much down there, in his watery grave of grey. So he closes his eyes and dreams. In his mind he pictures the sapphire tones of the endless sky. The rustic brown bark. Fern-green blades of grass, burnt-orange leaves, crimson fields of poppies swaying with the wind.

Colour.

How dull he has become. No colour left. He misses the translucent blue that changed with the weather. Sometimes the palest of aquamarines, other times a deeper azure. He wills the colour to return, he wants it with all his strength, to feel the calming ripples of blue to dance across his complexion once more.

Colour.

The little dewdrops eyes fly open. Was it he imagining it? He could have sworn he saw a thin ripple of colour swim across his skin. His eyes widen, hope brimming from within. Picture it again, he wills himself. And another ribbon of light dances across him. His mouth opens, and a breathy laugh escapes, as he hardly dares to believe. Slowly, shades of blue begin to swathe his skin, casting out the grey and erupting like a field of fresh iris flowers. His smile grows until it cannot fit on his face any longer, stretching as long as a horizon over an ocean. I will return, he decides. Because that is where I belong.

He begins to arduously fight the greyness that holds him, travelling to where the sun's long rays embrace the water's surface, and the weightless clouds adorn the sky. The dewdrops smile grows, his heart full of warmth, as he spies his old friend's golden glow once again. Each blanket of greyness he leaves behind, each layer of sadness, lightens his heart and causes his colour to turn brighter and clearer. Finally, he breaks free, erupting from the surface like a tiny, glimmering jewel. Warm, golden beams welcome him, engulfing him in their snug embrace. How he missed his friends, the crafted blossoms, the crisp blades of grass, the rugged mountains and young, soft hills. But now as he stands here, with a gentle

breeze waltzing around him, and the scent of orange blossoms greeting him, his heart swells with contentment. He has been restored. All ready to continue in the spreading of his gift. But this time, he will not succumb to the clutches of despair, as he now knows not to let the uncertainty take over. For he holds the precious gifts of joy and wonderment. Spinning in the bath of sunlight, the little blue dewdrop whispers a thank you to his world. For giving him hope, and courage. And for reminding him that nothing in life should be taken for granted, for it truly is a precious gift.