

## His Only Gift

The city had been under a thick layer of snow for a few days. From a distance, it looks akin to a fairytale town, white rooftops, silent streets, and a sky heavy with clouds though people had been struggling for proper supply of bread and butter. From time to time the snowfall keeps accelerating as if it wants to break the back of the people who stood like warriors under it on the streets.

Mr. Kingston, garbed in a neatly ironed black suit and a hat dusted with snow, was one of the brave warriors who was battling with this storm. Though he could not stand tall against it much and he gazed upon house no. 257, its windows shimmering with a warm golden glow.

He trudged through the snow and finally reached the doorstep of house no. 257 whose house nameplate proudly displayed Mr. and Mrs. Jameson. Though to decipher it he took out his old age glasses out of the inner pocket of his blazer. He had to make an effort to reach out to the doorbell.

A lady, garbed in a light violet woollen sweater paired with a white frock appeared.

“Who are you?” she gazed at him in surprise.

“Actually, Mrs... what is your good name?” he asked.

“Maria... Maria Jameson” she replied.

My greetings, Mrs. Jameson. The snowfall has been quite torrential of late, might I find shelter here?" he requested

In the midst of this exchange, a man garbed in a white woollen sweater and ocean-coloured trousers appeared, a glass of red wine in his hand.

"Who are you talking to ?" he asked Maria.

Mrs. Jameson pointed toward Mr. Kingston, "He is requesting to let him get in for sometime."

"What is your good name ?" Mr. Jameson gazed suspiciously.

"Hey, I am Mr. Kingston. I wanted a roof over my head for sometime until this snowfall eases!" he said.

"I see, come in... otherwise you will catch a cold" Mr. Jameson said, stepping aside to show the way.

The corridor walls were lined with photo frames from Mr. and Mrs. Jameson's wedding. Mr. Kingston's eyes lingered on one in particular. "And who might this sweet little girl be?" he asked, gesturing toward the frame.

"Our daughter, Mary when she was ten years old" replied Mrs. Jameson with a glittering smile on her face.

Mr. Jameson added, "Mary came to us through someone who... well, wished to remain unnamed and we never met that person. We never asked much, just knew she was meant to be ours."

The corridor opened into a spacious living room. At its center stood a cream-colored sofa, and near it, a fireplace above which a candle stand held three flickering candles.

Beside the fireplace was the piano, there was Mary, her fingers dancing over the piano key and the room echoed with the soft melody of the piano keys.

All of the three of them settled down on the sofa.

“This is Mary, the girl whom you saw a couple of minutes ago” Mr. Jameson said.

Before Mr. Kingston could reply, Mary smiled and said, “Yes, I’m grown up now.”

Mr. and Mrs. Jameson laughed and patted her head lovingly. The warmth in their eyes showed how much they cared for her.

A servant came in carrying a tray of tea. The cups were warm in their hands, and the steam rose into the air.

While drinking tea, Mr. Jameson asked, “Who is there in your family, Mr. Kingston?”

Mr. Kingston’s smile faded. He placed the cup back on the table. “My wife died during a serious operation... and now there is no one else,” he said in a low voice.

Mary looked at him with curious eyes. She stood up and went to a small wooden shelf. She took out a framed photograph and came

back. "This was me when I was a baby," she said proudly, handing it to him.

Mr. Kingston's hand shook as he held the picture. His heartbeat grew faster. He stared at the image for a moment, then gave a small smile and returned it to her.

Suddenly, he stood up. "I'm sorry... I have to leave now. Something important has come up," he said quickly.

"Oh... alright" Mrs. Jameson said. "It was nice to meet you."

The Jamesons walked him to the door. Mary waved and said, "Come back again when the snow brings you here."

He gave a faint smile and stepped outside. The air was cold, and snowflakes landed on his hat. He walked slowly down the steps and stood still for a moment.

From his wallet, he pulled out an old, worn photograph. It was the same baby, Mary, wrapped in a blanket, her tiny face sleeping peacefully. The edges of the photo were creased from being held too many times.

He held the picture tightly, his eyes moist. In his heart, he went back to the day he had made the hardest choice of his life, leaving his newborn daughter with people who could give her a better life than

he could. He had no money, no job, and his wife was gone. The only thing he could give her then was a chance to live happily.

He put the photograph back in his wallet, took a deep breath, and walked away into the snowy night, leaving behind the truth.