

The Birthday Gift

by,

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Genre:

Psychological Literature

She put Hannah in the baby seat, struggling with the squirming child who whined in that way children kept out too long do. Her little fingers kept pushing her away, crying plaintively, “I wanna do it myself.”

The sweat ran down the back of her neck. The latch finally clicked into place. You had to be an engineer to get the damn things on! How had she ever done this for five children? She shoved the ice bag out of the way from the drive-thru. Bought fifteen minutes ago and already melting in the sweltering heat! Her watch said 1:30, and they had only been running around a couple of hours on errands for Jennifer’s birthday party tonight, but it felt like eight. Three minutes down and Emily was already zonked out in the other car seat. Two year olds could sleep on a bed of nails!

At that second Mary realized she’d left her package at the counter inside. She looked up but couldn’t see much through the accordion shade on the dashboard and the tinted glass. The old lady who worked in the shop must have gone in already after letting them out the back.

Yelling for her was useless—she was nearly stone deaf. She figured three yards to the back door of the shop, another two to the back counter. Only fifteen feet to the package. So near and yet so far. Hannah was quieting down now, consoling herself with the thumb in her mouth. Thank God at least the girls’ hair ribbons were the day’s last errand.

Hard to believe her daughter was thirty today! Everything had to be perfect—the food, the flowers, the girls’ outfits. The oppressive heat made her long to be home, to put the little ones down in a cool room until Jennifer returned at 6:00. They’d probably nap a while, then a couple hours of crafts—they could make Mommy a birthday card! Everybody else should be there by 7:00. She considered the deserted parking lot of the fabric store, wondering how much longer they’d stay in business with no one sewing anymore.

What a hassle to unsnap these contraptions, wake up Emily, and remind Hannah how hot and miserable she was. She'd risk it. Making certain that she locked the doors just in case someone went shopping for a small child, Mary made a mad dash for the back door. As she nosed past the front of the car, she caught an impression of red from the passing SUV in the second before it hit her.

There at closing, as she cautiously emerged into the darkened parking lot, Mildred tripped over the body, thrown against the back door, in a puddle of congealed blood, the keys to the van still clutched in her right hand. The noises from the tinted, shaded, van had died down to whimpers by 4:30; had ceased by 6:00. Dripping water from inside formed a small puddle of water under the car.