



Maggie's Special Gift

"Hello, Miss Penelope, I haven't seen you for sometime. Have you been away?" Mr. Fitzgerald asked in his usual soft voice.

"Yes, we've been to Bermuda on holidays."

"That's quite some distance away, isn't it. How was it?"

"It sure is far, but we had a great time, thank you, Mr. Fitzgerald." We've been back a few days. Tomorrow is my Maggie's birthday and I wanted to know if you still had that *cute little rag doll with flame red hair, big grey eyes and perfect little rosebud mouth?* I am thinking of getting it for Maggie's birthday. You know how Maggie's been hounding me to buy it. She thinks it will go well with her growing doll collection."

"I am sorry, Miss Penelope. Last night, someone broke in the store and stole some of my dolls, including that cute rag doll, and some other trinkets. Corporal Alexander came this morning and promised to do his best to recover these items. But I have this other cutie--pointing to a colourful Raggedy Ann doll. What do you think? It's different, but maybe, Maggie might like it?"

"I don't think so, Mr. Fitzgerald, she has her heart set on the other doll. In fact, she named it, Eliza."

"Eliza; that's nice. Now I feel terrible. Miss Penelope, let's pray Corporal Alexander finds the robber. I will call him later today. After, I will let you know what he says."

Meanwhile, Mr. Honeysuckle's son, Narks, was bragging to his buddies about last night's major achievement. They dared him to take some of Mr. Fitzgerald's stuff without getting caught. And he did. Now that he passed that "test," they see him as their fearless leader.

Teenager's, what will they get up to next? Do you believe this? During their long summer holidays, these lads from Butterfly Island set about to play pranks in their neighbourhoods. This is their third. The first two were not so risky. First, Brad opened the fire hydrant by the police station, and then scampered away. Next, Pinkie-noodle, went to the library, glued up pages in ten library books, left, and nobody noticed. And now, Narks' "prank."

So far, nobody found out what these kids have been doing. Will this robbery be different? The kids don't think it is robbery, but it is. They think it's fun. Will they stop their mischief? Will they be caught? Will they own up to these crimes?

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"So, what do you say, now, eh? Who is the wimp, eh? Alone, I went in, and ... bingo. I took stuff, left, and nobody found out 'till this morning." Narks said proudly.

"Hey man, where is the stuff? You better return it before Corporal Alexander finds it? I hear he is real mad. Also, I hear Mr. Fitzgerald is offering a reward to get them back." Rumbleford said.

"Guys, remember, we are in this together, so, no snitching. I am going to make sure the stuff is safe. I want to return them tonight." Narks said.

When Narks when home, boy, was he surprised. He went in the garage to the spot where he left the stuff ... and they were gone.

No worries, mate, Narks is a cool, calm, guy. He doesn't get flustered. Actually, one of his nicknames is Iceberg. So, guess what? He remained calm. He knew there must be some acceptable explanation. He felt sure his parents hadn't found them because, if they had, when they saw him enter the yard, they would have raced out yelling at him.

"Where could the stuff be?" Who could have moved them? Narks thought. After a few minutes, he walked into the living room where his Mum and Dad were sitting, having a cup of tea.

"Hi Narks, what are you doing at home so early? I thought you and the fellas were going to the movies, this afternoon?" Dad said in a jovial tone.

"We are, but first, I came home to see if you needed me to do anything?"

"That's very thoughtful, son, but we are fine." Mum said, with a smile.

After Narks left the room, Dad said, "I wonder what he's up to. Usually, he never checks to see if we "need" him. Hmm, strange, don't you think Mabel?"

"I agree Ferdinand." Mum said.

"Hello, Miss Penelope, I spoke with Corporal Alexander, and he has no clues. He thinks it is a professional job. He fears some big time crooks are involved. He will keep looking for clues."

"Thank you, Mr. Fitzgerald."

Narks went to his room and couldn't believe what he saw. On his bed, was all Mr. Fitzgerald's stuff. "What's going on?" he mumbled.

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"Having a problem, big brother?"

"Carla, wha... wha... what ... have you done?"

"Big brother, shouldn't it be 'what have you, dear darling brother, done'? How about you explaining to Dad, what you did, big brother?"

"Now Carla Honeysuckle, you listen to me. Why did you move these items from the garage, where I left them?"

"You listen to me, big brother, and listen closely. These are Mr. Fitzgerald's stuff. Are you with me so far, darling brother? What are you doing with them? Corporal Alexander was here earlier asking Dad to help him find some 'missing items' from Mr. Fitzgerald's store. These sure look like them... and, of course, there is the reward, which I could get from Mr. Fitzgerald. But, as I am in a good mood, this is what I will do for you, my darling big brother: I will keep that cute doll and you do what you wish with the other stuff. No discussions... that's your only choice if you don't want to get in big trouble. Am I clear, darling brother?" Sarcasm oozed out of Carla's mouth with every word she spoke.

Narks was furious. But, as Mr. Iceberg, outwardly, he remained calm and said, "Let me think this through... I guess, if I return all the other stuff, Mr. Fitzgerald won't miss this one doll. Okay, deal. But, you are now part of this, so, you better be quiet."

"I see nothing, I hear nothing, I know nothing, about anything. I will take my cute doll and go to my room." Carla said, as she raced off.

"Miss Penelope, something strange is happening. It's baffling even Corporal Alexander. Last night, someone broke in the store and returned all stolen items ..."

"Oh, thank you so much, Mr. Fitzgerald ..."

"Allow me to finish, Miss Penelope. They returned all stolen items, except Eliza."

"But I don't understand, Mr. Fitzgerald."

"Neither do we, Miss Penelope. Strange ... very strange, indeed. Still, I am happy I got back most of my stuff. Miss Penelope, are you sure your Maggie won't like the Raggedy Ann doll as a substitute?"

"Yes, I am sure, Mr. Fitzgerald."

Carla had a colourful rag doll collection. This new doll, fitted in well... or, so she thought.

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That night, as Carla slept, she heard a commotion coming from the cupboard with the dolls. She opened the door and the first doll she saw was her new Cute-Pie doll.

"How did she get there?" Carla thought. She returned her to the back of the cupboard where she thought she put her at first, and Carla went back to sleep.

Again, she heard a commotion in the cupboard. And again, Cute-Pie was at the front, as if ready to leave. "Oh boy, this is weird. What is going on?" Carla thought.

Carla didn't know Miss Cute-Pie was a troublemaker, with a bad attitude. She doesn't like being locked up; she likes to be out in the open. She told the other dolls she was going to set them free, and she was going to return to her "home." And so, each time Carla put her in with the other dolls, she pushed and shoved to the front. The other dolls learned quickly about her temper. She looked like an angel, but she had a temper ... It was her way or no way.

After the third time, Carla decided to ignore the disturbance, which grew louder as the night progressed. In the morning, she would tell Narks to return the doll.

"Hello Miss Penelope, this time, I have good news. Another strange happening. Last night, someone broke in and returned Eliza. I will give her to your Maggie as my special belated birthday gift. Please drop by later to collect her."

"Mum, are you sure she is mine? Maggie said excitedly. But Mum, I thought you said somebody stole Eliza?" Maggie asked, as she tried to ensure nobody could take away Eliza from her.

"It's a long story, honey, but she is yours. Believe me, she is yours.

Maggie played with Eliza all day. She put her down only to eat. Maggie was happy, really happy, because Eliza was the perfect star of her rag doll collection. Eliza was her most beautiful doll. Maggie loved her flaming red hair, big grey eyes, and perfect little rosebud mouth ... "She is so cute." Maggie mumbled, often.

Maggie reserved a special place in the front row of her doll collection shelf for Eliza. Before she went to bed, Maggie rearranged the dolls so she could see Eliza while she lay in bed. After all, Eliza was her most gorgeous doll.

All went well that night. The following day, like the day before, Maggie played with Eliza, and ignored her other dolls. Maggie continued this pattern for a week. The other dolls

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became jealous and started to pick on Eliza. But Eliza didn't care, she was the favourite and that's all that mattered.

The next day, Fredrik-a, a small, plain, but fun doll, got the rest of the dolls to agree with a plan to deal with Eliza. Not only did these dolls feel neglected by Maggie, but they resented Eliza's frequent temper tantrums ... and her preoccupation with herself.

When Maggie awoke next morning, can you guess what she found, or didn't find? Did you? Eliza was missing.

"Come on, are you serious? How can Eliza be missing?" Miss Penelope said to Maggie.

"Mum, I don't know, but she's gone."

Corporal Alexander, Mr. Fitzgerald, Miss Penelope, everyone in town, heard about Eliza: Someone stole her, returned her, Mr. Fitzgerald gave her to Maggie, now she is missing from Maggie's room.

Where is Eliza? Poor Maggie; she is so sad. Nobody could find Eliza, even after Corporal Alexander and others searched Maggie's home thoroughly.

What about Narks and his buddies? Did they take Eliza? No, they didn't. They played one prank too many, and one month earlier, Corporal Alexander caught them letting air out of his car tire. To their credit, the boys confessed their wrongdoings. The judge ordered them to volunteer, helping elderly patients at the local hospital, three weekdays for the rest of summer.

Today, Narks and the other boys will tell you they are happy they confessed, because they learned an important lesson: It's a great feeling to give your time and ability to help others. Narks is sure that's why the Bible says it is better to give than to receive. Next semester, the boys plan to volunteer a few days after school. Not only will they stay out of trouble, but they will be doing something they believe will benefit them as much, if not more, than the folks they will help.

So, where is Eliza? Who took her? Why?

For five consecutive days after Eliza disappeared, it seemed everyone in Butterfly Island was looking for her. But nobody came up with clues, suggestions, motives that helped answer the many questions surrounding her disappearance.

The weekly laundry day at Maggie's home came on the seventh day of her disappearance. As Miss Penelope was emptying the laundry bag... voilà, out popped Eliza.

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Eliza, in the laundry. How did she get in the laundry bag? Can you guess? Fredrik-a and her pals know, but Maggie doesn't. Maggie is still trying to understand how Eliza ended up in the laundry bag.

Let's see if we can get some clues from Maggie's room. Honestly, it was always messy. When you entered, you couldn't see the carpet. Really? Clothes, books, papers... sometimes pop cans, yogurt cups, popcorn, covered the floor. If Maggie used something, it would end up on the floor. And when she felt like "cleaning" to impress her Mum, she stashed stuff under her bed. Under there was like a dungeon.

The day Eliza went missing, Marian Maid, house cleaners, came to do a test clean, starting in Maggie's room, which, as usual, was a big mess. They dusted, vacuumed, shampooed the carpet, and in the process scooped up clothes from the floor and under the bed and stuffed them in the laundry bag. After they left, Maggie's room was spotless. Miss Penelope agreed to use Marian Maid's services weekly, on Thursdays.

So, was Eliza under Maggie's bed with other stuff? If she was, how did she get there?

The only clue we get comes from Fredrik-a. She says her plan worked and she is confident Eliza's attitude will change. "One week in a laundry bag with dirty clothes will change anybody," she said with a smile. "Especially," she continued, "because Eliza knows next time, it won't be the laundry bag ... it will be the garbage bag."

"Thank you, Mr. Bob, for climbing back on the shelf after you did the job below." Fredrik-a said to the long green worm doll.

"My pleasure, Miss Fredrik-a; great plan, all of us will benefit."

"For sure, Eliza will fall in line and be "good." Her time under the bed, though brief, wasn't fun, either." Fredrik-a said with a, wink, wink.

Bye, bye.

Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you.
(James 4:10 (NASB))

On 30 April 2010, Michel wrote this story on a flight from Sydney, Australia, to San Francisco. It's based on a request from budding creative writer, 12 year old Esme Hall, to write a story about:

A little rag doll who falls off her shelf and gets lost under her owner's bed. The little rag doll has flame red hair, big grey eyes and a perfect little rosebud mouth (She also has a bit of a temper. But don't tell her I told you that. Her name is Eliza.)