

STORY  
WALKER  
365

7 to 10  
YEARS

BUILDING BEAUTIFUL INSIDE

# THE GIFT THAT WASN'T

A Story by Arkedelic



*Parents' Guide*

# STENZONCO

## THE GIFT THAT WASN'T

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## THE GIFT THAT WASN'T

The clubhouse was twinkling. Literally.

Every inch of the community room had fairy lights, red bows, glittery pinecones, and one enormous paper tree. Sam squinted at it. “Bit much, don’t you think?”

“It’s a kids’ Christmas party,” Sid said, adjusting his elf hat. “The point is too much.”

“Whatever,” Sam mumbled.

They were all here — Jane, Mario, Sid, Nik, and Sam — attending the Sunshine Park Secret Santa evening. Twenty kids from four neighbouring blocks. Names were drawn from a hat, and everyone had a week to prepare their gift.

Mario had gone full overboard with handmade bath salts and a snowman mug. Jane had crafted a book-themed bracelet. Even Nik, who barely wrapped birthday presents, had sketched a superhero poster.

Sam? She had a bar of chocolate and a gift tag that said “Happy something.”



“Do you even know who your gift is for?” Jane asked.

“Yeah,” Sam replied, pulling the paper from her hoodie pocket. “Tanya J. Whoever that is.”

Jane blinked. “Wait, you mean Tanya from Block D? The one with the mismatched socks and weird cartoons?”

Sam rolled her eyes. “Yup. The one who talks to her water bottle.”

Jane chuckled, “And also the one who beat your score in grammar class”

Sam waved off saying, “Oh that was just a one-time lucky strike”

Jane winked saying, “Going green eh Sam? I can smell envy” and walked away smiling.



Three days earlier, Sam had pulled Tanya’s name and groaned. “Ugh, why me?” she’d muttered. “Why not someone cool?”

She didn’t know anything about Tanya except that she always sat alone on the benches, doodled strange monsters, and barely spoke above a whisper.

“Just give her chocolate and be done,” Nik had said.

So that’s what Sam planned to do.

Until Thursday.

That afternoon, she had wandered over to the clubhouse to pick up her sketchbook and accidentally overheard Tanya humming in the corner, surrounded by markers and tiny cut-out shapes.

She was working on her own Secret Santa gift — painting a set of small wooden blocks. Each one had a cartoon version of the Squad — Nik as a flying squirrel, Jane as a reading dragon, Mario as a dancing donut.

And Sam?

She was a ninja cat with a Christmas crown.

“She knows us?” Sam whispered, stunned.

Tanya turned, startled. Her cheeks went pink. “Oh. Um. I just like observing people. I hope that’s not... weird.”

Sam shook her head. “It’s kind of amazing.”

Back to the present. The gift exchange was about to begin. A pile of presents — neat, messy, crinkled, ribboned — sat under the giant paper tree. One by one, kids stepped up to collect their mystery packages.

Sam held her chocolate bar.

Tanya’s turn came. She walked up shyly and opened a blue package that had glitter leaking from the corners. Inside was a keychain that said “Best Listener Ever.” Her face lit up.

Mario turned to Sam. “That’s your chocolate, right?”

Sam didn’t answer.

Her hand was in her pocket.

Clutching a folded paper.

“Next, Sam!” someone called.

She stepped forward, but instead of placing the chocolate on the table, she pulled out the small folded card and held it out to Tanya.

“I didn’t know what to give you. I didn’t even know you. But now I do. This is just a card. No big gift. But it’s for you.”





Tanya opened it.

Inside was a little doodle — a cartoon version of her. This time, not alone on a bench, but sitting beside a group of kids, drawing happily.

And below it, in Sam's slanted handwriting:  
"Thanks for seeing us. We see you too."

Later that night, after the cocoa and carols and cookie decorating, Tanya came over.

"I didn't get a big gift," she said. "But that card felt... real."

"It was," Sam said. "The gift wasn't the card. It was getting to know you."

Tanya smiled. "Same."

And under the still-blinking lights of the too-much clubhouse, a new friendship began — one that didn't need wrapping paper, ribbons, or perfect tags.

Just a bit of noticing.

And the courage to give differently.

**THE END**

# VALUES FROM THE STORY



### 1. How can I help my child appreciate and celebrate others without envy?

**Context in the story:** At first, Sam is dismissive and even slightly annoyed about being assigned Tanya, a quiet, “uncool” classmate, as her Secret Santa recipient. She plans to give a thoughtless gift and move on. But after witnessing Tanya’s thoughtful and creative preparations, Sam slowly moves from envy and indifference to admiration and warmth. She rewrites her gesture, turning it into something far more genuine and meaningful.

**Real-world connection:** Children are often caught in situations where they size others up based on popularity or appearance. It's easy to overlook or dismiss quieter peers or feel threatened by their talents. This story opens the door for children to see others differently and celebrate them without comparing or competing.

**How parents can use the story:** This story gives parents a gentle, seasonal way to address the habit of only valuing certain kinds of people or gifts. Use it to spark conversations about times your child may have looked down on or dismissed someone without knowing their full story. Explore the idea of how giving can feel better when it’s thoughtful, not just transactional. Let your child know that real admiration doesn’t come with envy, it comes with seeing others deeply and being big enough to celebrate them.



## 2. How can I help my child show loyalty, care, and stand by loved ones?

**Context in the story:** Sam's transformation isn't just about Tanya it's also about stepping up for what she believes in. Once she sees Tanya's kindness and talent, she feels compelled to honour that truth. She gives up the safe, lazy gift and offers something more personal — a gesture that acknowledges Tanya and shows care, even if they weren't close to begin with.

**Real-world connection:** Standing by someone doesn't always mean defending a best friend — sometimes it means choosing to do right by someone overlooked. Acts of loyalty begin in moments like these: when we recognise goodness and quietly respond with respect, kindness, and action.

**How parents can use the story:** Use Sam's journey to help your child think about what it really means to stand by someone. It doesn't always take grand declarations — sometimes, a note, a moment of empathy, or a small change of heart is enough. Ask your child if there's someone in their school or neighbourhood they've misunderstood or ignored. Encourage them to take one quiet step toward connection. That's how loyalty grows — not through big promises, but small choices made with heart.





### 3. How can I help my child when they're kind but always get taken for granted?

**Context in the story:** Tanya is a kind and observant child who quietly pours her thought and creativity into her gift. But no one really notices her — not at first. She's the kind of kid who's easy to overlook, and there's an unspoken suggestion that she might be used to giving more than she gets. When Sam finally acknowledges her effort and responds sincerely, Tanya's kindness is seen, valued, and returned — maybe for the first time.

**Real-world connection:** Many kind children go unnoticed in social circles. Their quiet gestures taken for granted or dismissed as “nothing special.” Over time, this can lead to low self-worth or reluctance to keep giving. Recognising and celebrating such children is essential to help them feel seen and appreciated.

**How parents can use the story:** This story is a powerful way to remind your child that kindness matters, and so does recognising it in others. Talk to your child about who the “Tanyas” are in their life — kids who are kind, generous, or quietly thoughtful. Encourage your child to be someone who notices, who acknowledges effort, and who gives back in small ways. This builds not only empathy, but an inner radar for emotional fairness — one of the deepest relational skills a child can grow. You can also talk to you child about who the ‘Sams’ are in their life.

## Assessment Questions for “The Gift That Wasn’t”



**Q1.** What made Sam change her mind about what to give Tanya?

**Purpose:** To help children realise that sometimes the kindest gift is simply paying attention to someone who feels unseen.

**Follow-up:** When was the last time you noticed something special about someone others often overlook?

**Q2.** Why did Sam groan when she first picked Tanya’s name for Secret Santa?

**Purpose:** To teach children that assumptions can stop them from discovering someone’s real story.

**Follow-up:** Have you ever misjudged someone at first and then found out they were very different?

**Q3.** What made Sam's small card mean more to Tanya than the fancy presents?

**Purpose:** To show that thoughtfulness matters more than the size or style of a gift.

**Follow-up:** What kind of gift would make you feel truly seen or understood?

**Q4.** How did Sam show courage at the gift exchange?

**Purpose:** To encourage children to step past discomfort and reach out kindly, even when it feels awkward or unfamiliar.

**Follow-up:** When have you done something kind that felt scary or out of your comfort zone?

**Q5.** What did Sam and Tanya both learn about each other by the end of the story?

**Purpose:** To remind children that real friendships begin when we stop comparing and start understanding.

**Follow-up:** How can you help someone feel included, even if they seem different from your usual friends?

# See you next Monday with another interesting story!

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