



*A Rare Nativity*

Written by Sam Beeson

Illustrated by Nina & Terral Cochran

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Thinking of disrupting the status quo brought to mind the holidays as a time filled with good cheer and celebration. *A Rare Nativity* definitely had me thinking twice. I passed right over this picturebook sitting on the shelf. It took the bookstore owner to put it in my hands and tell me I needed to read it. I was totally surprised to find this rendition of “The Twelve Days of Christmas.” Told in first person, the narrator sends “gifts” to his “enemy” for each of the 12 days of Christmas. With gifts such as a briar from a tanglewood tree and shards of glass, the reader knows there is no love between the giver and the receiver. Upon reflecting about his actions, however, the narrator tosses and turns with regret instead of sleeping easily. When his doorbell rings in the middle of the night, he finds a package on the doorstep with a tag saying, “Forgive me.” The story grows in a positive way from this point.

It is interesting that readers never find out what caused the friction, but I can’t imagine that there is person alive who doesn’t regret their former actions, actions that may even feel criminal and keep them awake at night. While we all might know this feeling, it is so much harder to confront our missteps and forgive. That the receiver of the gifts asks for forgiveness first gives the reader pause. The text requires deep reflection on the reader’s conflicts and what might be necessary to resolve them. It’s never easy. In this story, the receiver forgives the sender of the gifts, but even then, forgiveness is announced under the cover of darkness--the middle of the night rather than meeting with each other to find common ground and perhaps resolution.

The story is illustrated using photographs. The story begins with photographs in black and white, intentionally shaded to match the mood of the narrator. When the tale becomes restless and the final gift is left, the photographs are in color, lightening the mood. Each image is carefully designed with a minimal number of objects that guide the focus of the reader.

This would be an interesting book to use in discussion with readers of all ages. Not only is there ample opportunity to think about the concept of forgiveness, but also the importance of addressing our slights or bitterness in ways that may lead to resolution rather than further internal struggle. If used as a Christmas story, then a pairing with the classic tale by O. Henry, *The Gift of the Magi*, can provide further insights.

Sam Beeson is a high school English teacher and teaches night classes at Utah Valley University. He gives himself a writing assignment every year. In 2007 he wrote about his wife every day and then gave her the journal for Christmas. He loves reading old family journals. The illustrators, Nina and Terral Cochran, create their art together.

They have fine arts degrees in Photography and Graphic Design. They believe there is always time to rearrange or make something new.

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