



Gideon's Gift

#1 NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR

KAREN
KINGSBURY

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A *N* O V E L

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New York · Nashville

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PROLOGUE



The gift that changed them all had led to this: a Christmas wedding.

Nothing could have been more appropriate. Gideon was an angel, after all. Not the haloed, holy kind. But the type that once in a while—when the chance presented itself—made you stare a little harder at her upper back. In case she was sprouting wings.

From his seat in the back of the church, Earl Badgett's tired old eyes grew moist. A Christmas wedding was the only kind for Gideon. Because if ever angels shone it was in December. This was the season when Gideon's gift had mattered most.

Gideon's gift.

A million memories called to him. Had it been thirteen years? Earl stared at the vision she made,

KAREN KINGSBURY

surrounded by white satin and lace. The greatest miracle was that Gideon had survived.

He brushed the back of his hand over his damp cheeks. *She actually survived.*

But that wasn't the only miracle.

Earl watched Gideon smile at her father—the glowing, unforgettable smile of a young woman on the brink of becoming. The two of them linked arms and began a graceful walk down the aisle. It was a simple wedding, really. A church full of family and friends, there to witness a most tender moment for a girl who deserved it more than any other. A girl whose love, whose very presence, lit the room and caused people to feel grateful for one reason alone: They had been given the privilege of knowing Gideon Mercer. God had lent her a little while longer to the mere mortals who made up her world. And in that they were all blessed.

Gideon and her father were halfway down the aisle when it happened. Gideon hesitated, glanced over her shoulder, and found Earl. Her eyes had that haunting look that spoke straight to his soul, the same as they always had. They shared the briefest smile, a smile that told him he wasn't the only one. She, too, was remembering the miracle of that Christmas.

GIDEON'S GIFT

The corners of Earl's mouth worked their way up his worn face. *You did it, angel. You got your dream.* His heart danced with joy. It was all he could do to stay seated, when everything in him wanted to stand and cheer.

Go get 'em, Gideon!

As they rarely did anymore, the memories came like long lost friends. Filling Earl's mind, flooding his senses, linking hands with his heart and leading him back. Back thirteen years to that wondrous time when heaven orchestrated an event no less miraculous than Christmas itself. An event that changed both their lives.

An event that saved them.

Time flew . . . back to the winter when Earl first met Gideon Mercer.

CHAPTER ONE



The red gloves were all that mattered. If living on the streets of Portland was a prison, the red gloves were the key. The key that—for a few brief hours—set him free from the lingering stench and hopeless isolation, free from the relentless rain and the tarp-covered shanty.

The key that freed him to relive the life he'd once had. A life he could never have again.

Something about the red gloves took him back and made it all real—their voices, their touch, their warmth as they sat with him around the dinner table each night. Their love. It was as though he'd never lost a bit of it.

As long as he wore the gloves.

Otherwise, the prison would have been unbearable. Because the truth was Earl had lost everything. His life,

KAREN KINGSBURY

his hope, his will to live. But when he slipped on the gloves . . . Ah, when he felt the finely knit wool surround his fingers, Earl still had the one thing that mattered. He still had a family. If only for a few dark hours.

It was the first of November, and the gloves were put away, hidden in the lining of his damp parka. Earl never wore them until after dinner, when he was tucked beneath his plastic roof, anxious to rid himself of another day. He would've loved to wear them all the time, but he didn't dare. They were nice gloves. Hand-made. The kind most street people would snatch from a corpse.

Dead or alive, Earl had no intention of losing them.

He shuffled along Martin Luther King Boulevard, staring at the faces that sped past him. He was invisible to them. Completely invisible. He'd figured that much out his first year on the streets. Oh, once in a while they'd toss him a quarter or shout at him: "Get a job, old man!" or "Go back to California!"

But mostly they just ignored him.

The people who passed him were still in the race, still making decisions and meeting deadlines, still believing it could never happen to them. They carried themselves with a sense of self-reliance—a certainty that

GIDEON'S GIFT

they were somehow better than him. For most of them, Earl was little more than a nuisance. An unsightly blemish on the streets of their nice city.

Rain began to fall. Small, icy droplets found their way through his hooded parka and danced across his balding head. He didn't mind. He was used to the rain; it fit his mood. The longer he was on the street the more true that became.

He moved along.

“Big Earl!”

The slurred words carried over the traffic. Earl looked up. A black man was weaving along the opposite sidewalk, shouting and waving a bottle of Crown Royal. He was headed for the same place as Earl: the mission.

Rain or shine, there were meals at the mission. All the street people knew it. Earl had seen the black man there a hundred times before, but he couldn't remember his name. Couldn't remember most of their names. They didn't matter to him. Nothing did. Nothing except the red gloves.

The black man waved the bottle again and shot him a toothless grin. “God loves ya, Big Earl!”

Earl looked away. “Leave me alone,” he muttered, and pulled his parka tighter around his neck and face.

AUTHOR'S NOTE



Dear Reader,

Many of you know me as a bestselling fiction author. Others think of me as the writer who brings you collections of true miracle stories. *Gideon's Gift* is a combination of both these passions. Whereas other miracle stories I write about are rooted in truth, this one grew from the soil of my heart.

I hope you enjoyed traveling the pages of *Gideon's Gift*, walking the streets of Portland with Earl, and standing by as a very special little girl longed for a miracle. Perhaps you've read a chapter a night for each of the twelve days of Christmas. Or maybe you found time to curl up in a chair and read Gideon's story in one sitting. Either way, my prayer for you is this: that like Gideon you would believe in miracles this Christmas season.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

Maybe for you that means trusting God in a dark time. Or maybe it means making a phone call and mending ties between you and someone you love. Maybe it's a new doll for your daughter or a fire truck for your son. Whatever your situation, please, look for God's presence this holiday season.

Because, like Gideon said, Christmas miracles do happen to those who believe. On the following pages I've included a list of Red Gloves Projects for you and your friends or family, or maybe your office or church group. One year our children took on a Red Gloves Project—by raising money to feed fifteen homeless people on Christmas Day. My challenge to you is to take on a Red Gloves Project of your own. So that the type of miracle love spread by little Gideon might be spread in our own towns and communities as well.

As always, I would love to hear from you. Please contact me at my website, www.karenkingsbury.com.

May God grant you and yours the wonder and beauty of a miraculous and memorable Christmas.

Karen Kingsbury

AUTHOR'S NOTE

RED GLOVES PROJECTS

A Red Gloves Project is a way of giving something back during the Christmas season. Each project idea involves red gloves. I invite you and your family to take part in one of them—or to create one of your own.

Remember, Christmas miracles happen to those who believe.

✿ Start saving your pennies. The week before Christmas, purchase a pair of red gloves, wrap them, and stick a card or drawing inside. Then deliver it to the first needy person you see—whether he or she is standing at the end of a freeway ramp or eating dinner at your local homeless shelter. Do this with a group of people and impact an entire group of street people.

✿ Use your extra money to buy food for street people. As you distribute meals, include pairs of red gloves. Again, if you're bagging the food, you can put the gloves inside where they can find them.

✿ Sing Christmas carols at a local homeless shelter or retirement center. Wear red gloves during the performance. When the singing is over, you and

AUTHOR'S NOTE

your group can walk around and give away your red gloves to those in attendance.

- ✿ Organize your church, school, or office, to have a Red Gloves Drive. Collect toys and food for needy families in your area. When you deliver the gifts, have everyone in the group wear a pair of red gloves. Then leave the gloves with the people who need them more.