

# **The Alchemist Review**

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## The Snow-Covered Teapot

*Ellen Beyers*

I was ten years old and in desperate need of a Christmas present for my mom. Every year my siblings and I bought presents for each other as well as for Mom and Dad. Since we did not receive weekly or monthly allowances, we didn't have much money to spend on each person. What money we had came from walking beans in the summers and doing other odd jobs around the farm for my parents. With five siblings and two parents, my money supply was quickly depleted.

This year I couldn't think of anything to get Mom. I had finished shopping for my siblings and Dad early and had tucked away their presents in my bedroom closet. They were easy to buy for; there were so many different things we wanted and had to wait until Christmas to get. But Mom seemed to have everything.

A couple of days before Christmas, we had just finished supper when Dad asked, "Does anyone need to go to town and finish their Christmas shopping?"

"I do," I responded, along with a few others. I was thankful for the chance to look for my last present yet deeply worried because I had no idea what I was going to get.

We bundled up and drove to town with Dad. He parked on Locust Street, the main street where most of the shops were located. After deciding when to meet back at the station wagon, we went our separate ways. We always kept our presents a secret from everyone else. We loved surprising each other on Christmas morning.

Not really knowing what I was looking for, I walked down to Metzger's Drug Store. Their shiny glass and chrome cases were filled with colorful bottles of perfume. I tried a few samples and considered a bottle of Gloria Vanderbilt for a moment, but I knew Mom wasn't really a perfume-wearer. She was more practical than that.

I escaped the heady odor I had created and headed back down the street. I stopped in front of Jamie's Jewelry Store. The reflection of the Christmas lights from the street created a dazzling display of sparkling bracelets and earrings in their front window. I was tempted to enter, but again, Mom wasn't much for frills. Besides, I knew the really nice jewelry and figurines would be too expensive for my small budget.

As I turned back to the street, the window display for Wayne's Office Supply caught my eye. I could see that some unusual item was mounted on a bed of snow, but I couldn't tell what it was. I crossed the street to get a closer look. As I drew nearer, I realized it was a round ceramic teapot. It was designed to resemble a snow-covered cottage with Christmas decorations on it. I fell in love with it immediately. That heavy feeling I had been carrying around was suddenly gone. I had found my present for Mom.

I entered the store and found a sales lady. "How much is that teapot in the window?"

"Let me check," she replied. "I have another one right here. It certainly is something, isn't it?"

"Yes," I agreed. "I have been looking all over for a present for my mother, and I think this would be perfect."

"Here it is. It's \$12.95."

My heart sank. I only had \$10 left to spend on Mom.

"Are you sure?" I inquired.

"Yes, \$12.95 plus tax, so let's see, that would be ...."

"That's all right, I don't have enough money anyway," I headed for the door, eager to hide my tears of frustration.

"Ellen, wait," a voice called from the rear of the store. I recognized it as my dad's.

I brushed my tears away and turned around. "Yes?"

"How much money do you have?"

"Ten dollars," I replied. Suddenly I was no longer able to hold back the gush of tears. "I have been looking and looking for a present for Mom and haven't been able to find anything...and then I found this teapot. I think she would love it, but it's too much money." I hung my head.

Dad bent down and lifted my face. "What if I loaned you a few dollars, say \$5, so you could buy that teapot? You could pay me back when you're able."

"Really? You could do that?"

He nodded his head.

"Oh, that would be great! Thank you."

I was never so happy on the way home. I had a truly unique present for my mother. No one had ever given her anything quite like it before.

It was almost unbearable, waiting those last few days before

Christmas Day finally arrived. I wanted to show Mom her teapot so badly, but somehow I managed to keep it a surprise.

She ended up loving it. After opening it and exclaiming how wonderful it was, she placed it on the mantle. It stayed there long after the Christmas decorations were put away.

I'm not sure when Mom received her next teapot, but it soon became a tradition in our family to buy Mom a teapot on special occasions. Over the years her collection has expanded to 27 teapots, thus outgrowing the antique curio cabinet where they are displayed.

Even so, the snow-covered Christmas cottage remains in its place of honor, on the top row in the center, and Mom's hand never strays from reaching for it first as she starts her "teapot collection speech" to the inquisitive visitor with, "Now this was the very first teapot I ever received."

## Sestina

Corrine Frisch

In my memory it stands atop the hill  
like a castle. In fact the little house  
looms large still, the place where, my courage gained,  
I grew up brave enough to face a loss  
or two. And it was there I learned the rose  
hides the thorn, as sometimes tears of laughter

mask the real. I hear familiar laughter  
rise like mist over the crest of the hill.  
I remember how each morning you rose  
to brew dark black tea. The back of the house,  
nearest the barn, never suffered the loss  
of heat, but the parlor windows leaked, gained

light but lost their warmth to wind. Loss and gain.  
I grew tall but I was thin as laughter  
in church. Sundays you saw as waste, a loss  
of good man hours. You could be up the hill  
tending your beans till the eyes of the house  
winked on. Our preacher said even the rose

garden was sinful on the Lord's day. Rose  
colored glasses weren't in vogue, hadn't gained  
favor with folks who idled in God's house  
on the Sabbath. But Saturday's laughter  
rings long after you're gone. You sang Joe Hill  
with the best of them. Drank to sudden loss,

one of your beloved gone. Love and loss,  
one bitter, one sweet, the thorn and the rose  
cleave still. You hid your tears behind the hill;  
you cried \_ what profit a man who gain  
the world \_ but loses his best friend's laughter?  
You stumbled back, lay a fire in the house

to stave off cold. Outside that night the house  
looked postcard quaint. Only you knew the loss,  
the missing face at table, the laughter  
raspy from whiskey and thick smoke that rose  
in rainless clouds to fill the room. I gained  
more than I knew in the house on the hill.

In the dim photograph of hill and house  
I cannot perceive the gain or the loss,  
but the roses are blooming with laughter.