

GIFTED

A short play
By Dean Lundquist

“Everyone is gifted - but some people never open their package”
- Anonymous

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CHARACTERS

MRS SYLVIA LIM

Late 20s. Bobby's neurotic mother.

DR CHERYL LEE PhD

Early 30s. The school psychologist at the Wallingford Academy for Gifted Youngsters. She has a walking stick.

SETTING

Dr. Lee's office at the Wallingford Academy for Gifted Youngsters.

TIME

Late one Friday afternoon in December. The last day before the holiday break.

DR. LEE: is alone in her office. On her desk is one manila folder with Wallingford Academy for Gifted Youngsters written on its front. Also on her desk are a number of small Christmas packages. She is looking in the folder, checks her watch, and then puts down the folder and goes about wrapping a small empty box. MRS. LIM is DR. LEE's last appointment before the holiday break. MRS. LIM enters with a large bag full of bulky Christmas presents and a large glass jar of coins. She struggles to balance it all. In her struggle, she spills the coins all over the floor.

MRS. LIM: Oh my God! I'm sorry. I'm so sorry.

DR. LEE: It's okay. I'll help you.

MRS. LIM: I'm so embarrassed.

DR. LEE: I was beginning to think you weren't going to make it.

MRS. LIM: Mad rush at Toys R' Us. Bobby wants this new super monster truck. All the parents were scrambling for them. I'll have to get to the other store across town after our meeting. And the tuition is due today.

DR. LEE: Tuition?

MRS. LIM: At Weston. The day-care centre?

DR. LEE: I see.

MRS. LIM: I meant to take these to the bank and change them for notes, but—Oh, I see you're getting ready for Christmas too.

DR. LEE: Yes, kind of.

MRS. LEE So...?

DR. LEE: So?

MRS. LIM: So...don't keep me in suspense!

DR. LEE: Well, I'm sorry for calling you in so close to the holidays Mrs. Lim, but I know you want what's best for your son.

MRS. LIM: Yes.

DR. LEE: As any parent would.

MRS. LIM: Perhaps more so.

DR. LEE: And why is that?

MRS. LIM: Well, Dr. Lee, my husband, you see, he's an only child.

DR. LEE: Uh-huh.

MRS. LIM: And there are no other men in his family.

DR. LEE: I see.

MRS. LIM: Except Bobby.

DR. LEE: (*heavy*) Yes, well the reason I asked you to come today is—

MRS. LIM: Oh dear!

DR. LEE: What?

MRS. LIM: I think I know what you're going to say. But I've read that these tests are sometimes wrong. That according to Renzulli, a true barometer exists in behaviour, task completion and creativity. That the Stanford-Binet's flaw is that it is mostly language-based and not a true measure of a child's—

DR. LEE: Yes, that is true of some tests and in some cases but—

MRS. LIM: My sister's eldest, Evelyn, she's gifted. She's in a special program.

DR. LEE: Yes—

MRS. LIM: It's just not fair. I mean her husband has three brothers and they all have sons. Oh! Did you know that Bobby was a water baby?

DR. LEE: Yes, it's in the file.

MRS. LIM: I used to play Mozart to my belly when he was still in the womb. He could read by the age of two. We give him essence of chicken and ginkgo biloba for his memory. And my husband and I both took second jobs when he got into Weston.

DR. LEE: Weston?

MRS. LIM: The day care centre—remember?

DR. LEE: Sorry?

MRS. LIM: You haven't heard of it? I'm surprised. The brochures spoke so highly of it. It's quite exclusive. Bobby goes there and takes speech and drama class with all the ex-pat children. I suppose it's not as prestigious as Thornelibank, but it's still—

DR. LEE: I'm sure.

MRS. LIM: His sister, Lucy, she goes there too. It was just easier, after we sold the car. The bus stops very near there, on my way to work. Do you think they should go somewhere else?

DR. LEE: I don't know. Do they enjoy it?

MRS. LIM: Yes, she does. They feed them there: three meals a day. She doesn't like the food. But Bobby never complains. Lucy says she likes—or rather liked—Rosalind's better.

DR. LEE: Rosalind?

MRS. LIM: She was our Filipino maid. We had to send her back when they started day care. We just couldn't afford her. They both balled their eyes out when she left.

DR. LEE: I see. How much time do you spend with her?

MRS. LIM: Rosalind?

DR. LEE: No, Lucy.

MRS. LIM: Pardon?

DR. LEE: With Lucy. How much time do you spend together?

MRS. LIM: Oh...I spend just as much time with her as I do with Bobby.

DR. LEE: And how much time do you spend with Bobby?

MRS. LIM: As much as I can. We ride the bus together, I take them to piano lessons and Science Adventurers—that's new—and Gymboree. I tuck them in at night...So was he at least close?

DR. LEE: Close?

MRS. LIM: To getting in, I mean. Because if it's an issue of money—

DR. LEE: No, it's not that—

MRS. LIM: I can find a way. We...we could get a loan or something—or a second mortgage. We could get him a private tutor to help him keep up. So was he close?

DR. LEE: Do you know what it means, Mrs. Lim?

MRS. LIM: What?

DR. LEE: To be gifted.

MRS. LIM: Gifted? Of course. As I told you before, my sister's eldest, Evelyn, my niece, she's gifted. She has special classes. My sister also gives her essence of chicken every day. She swears by it. And the ginkgo biloba too. My neighbour says she got this six-part CD ROM encyclopaedia thing. Do you think I should get Bobby one of those for Christmas too?

DR. LEE: No. (*sighs*) You see, some schools provide special classes for the gifted in an integrated educational curriculum where they can socialize with their peers—

MRS. LIM: Yes, but—

DR. LEE: They are intended to nurture the child—to promote a rich learning environment for the child to grow. You see, these children make up a select two percentile of the general population worldwide. But strangely, in our city we have a statistical anomaly.

MRS. LIM: A statistical what?

DR. LEE: An anomaly... 4.8 percent.

MRS. LIM: 4.8 percent? I don't understand.

DR. LEE: One of the bench marks of gifted children is their intelligence quotient scores. While it isn't the only factor, most countries identify children with an IQ of 130 or in other words one of the last 2 standard deviations from the norm on a standard bell curve—

MRS. LIM: Uh-huh.

DR. LEE: In other words, about 1 in every 50 children is gifted. But in our city, about 4.8 percent or forty-eight out of one thousand are. Either our community breeds children with a higher intelligence from the rest of the world, or our standards of measuring the child are skewed. So we must ensure that the parents are not—

MRS. LIM: So are you saying that some of the gifted children aren't really gifted after all?

DR. LEE: Well, some are borderline yes, but—

MRS. LIM: I knew it! I thought Evelyn wasn't that bright—especially after she got her hand stuck in the toilet. And the time she shoved peanut butter up her nose—

DR. LEE: No, Mrs. Lim. That's not what I'm talking about. We have to be sure that the children here at Wallingford are not only gifted but that their parents...

(MRS. LIM looks puzzled, lost in thought, she returns to picking up the coins. DR. LEE stops her.)

DR. LEE (cont'd) If you don't mind my asking, what's Bobby's favourite colour?

MRS. LIM: Excuse me?

DR. LEE: Colour. Bobby's favourite colour.

MRS. LIM: Oh, uh. Blue! No green...Green! No Blue. Definitely blue...I think. Am I right?

DR. LEE: If I may be so bold, Mrs. Lim. Your son is six.

MRS. LIM: Last week.

DR. LEE: Yes, and what he doesn't need are more piano lessons, speech and drama classes, other enrichment programs or a private tutor. Or for you to scrimp and save your pocket change so that he can go to an expensive, elite day care.

MRS. LIM: You know these are actually Bobby's coins?

DR. LEE: They are?

MRS. LIM: We were sitting by the fountain, you know the big one in front of the mall, it was hot—they wanted ice cream, but I told them, "Mummy doesn't have enough for ice cream". So Bobby says, I know where to get some money. He takes off his socks and shoes, finds a paper cup, jumps in the fountain, and picks up all the coins! I bought them both an ice cream and he told me to keep the rest. So clever...

DR. LEE: (*shaking her head*) What they really need is to spend more time with you and your husband.

MRS. LIM: Judging from your packages, you must have children.

DR. LEE: One, but—

MRS. LIM: Then you can understand what this means to us. To his father. He *must* be gifted, you see? I've read the books. He exhibits all the signs. He has an advanced vocabulary. He likes socializing with older children. Being gifted means he will be a success! His father was the first in his family to go to university, you see. You can't crush our dreams like this. You can't say that Bobby isn't gifted...

DR. LEE: I just want you to understand what being gifted truly means. What it doesn't mean is that he will be a success in life or that he will make a lot of money and be able to care for you and your husband in your old age.

MRS. LIM: What are you really saying?

DR. LEE: It doesn't mean that he will always make the wisest decisions. Our children's gifts manifest themselves in different ways, Mrs. Lim. Some are artistic, exceptionally creative or natural learners. Some may have a propensity for mathematics while others have advanced language skills. Identifying them raises a plethora of difficulties.

MRS. LIM: Like what? What could a gifted child be troubled with?

DR. LEE: They may be singled out as different from their peers and hide their gifts in favour of being accepted—especially when they have siblings—

MRS. LIM: Like Lucy? I hadn't thought of that.

DR. LEE: And while some may lead you to believe that elite schools, essence of chicken, music lessons and private tutors are the key, the most important gift you can give your child is your time and attention. To let them, both of your children, know that you love them no matter what. You can't make them gifted. Either they are or they aren't. Do you understand? Mrs. Lim? *(MRS. LIM: continues picks up the last of the coins and then suddenly stops)* Mrs. Lim? *(an awkward pause)*

MRS. LIM: We want the best for him.—for both of them, of course. How can I spend more time with them? Are you telling me that picking up these coins is useless?

DR. LEE: It shouldn't be this difficult for you and your husband.

MRS. LIM: But all the classes? The money? My husband didn't want us to have a maid. He was afraid they'd end up thinking of her as their mother. He wanted me to stay home.

DR. LEE: Maybe he was right. Handled improperly, a gifted child might just as well be disabled.

MRS. LIM: Disabled?

DR. LEE: They aren't that different. They both have special needs.

MRS. LIM: Special needs? Hmm...I think I understand.

DR. LEE: Good. Here, I want you to have these—for Bobby and Lucy.

(she gives her two of the small wrapped boxes.)

MRS. LIM: Oh, thank you. They are so light. What's in them?

DR. LEE: Dreams, Mrs. Lim. My little George's dreams. The dream's he never got to fulfil.

MRS. LIM: (*puzzled*) Oh, I couldn't take them, please you keep them.

DR. LEE: I need to give them away. George was around you're Bobby's age. It was Christmas time. I was rushing round town...shopping, violin lessons. I was trying to hurry—we were always running late—and I thought I could make it... It had only just turned red. The truck... On George's side... He was in a child seat, of course—but... He wasn't gifted—not like your boy. George was just a normal, healthy boy who liked elephants and playing in the bath. He had too many things to do and not enough time to enjoy being a child. He may not have been 'gifted' but he was my gift.

MRS. LIM: I'm very sorry.

(She goes to embrace Dr. Lee. As she does, she realizes that DR. LEE: has said that Bobby is gifted and a coin drops. Then another and another spilling out of the jar slowly as if water drops.)

DR. LEE: Mrs. Lim, your coins.

MRS. LIM: Dr. Lee, did you say what I just thought you—

DR. LEE: Yes. Welcome to Wallingford. (*they embrace again*)

MRS. LIM: Oh thank you! Thank you! Erm...can you help me pick these up?

DR. LEE: Yes, of course.

MRS. LIM (*looks at her watch*) Oh! Toys R Us! I have to get to Weston before it closes. Sorry I have to rush off.

DR. LEE: Merry Christmas!

(MRS. LIM rushes off. She has forgotten the little packages that DR. LEE gave her. DR. LEE picks them up, holds one in each hand and shakes her head as lights fade.)

[END]