

## TEDDY'S STORY

I know of a schoolteacher named Miss Thompson. Every year, when she met her new students, she would say, "Boys and girls, I love you all the same. I have no favorites." Of course, she wasn't being completely truthful. Teachers do have favorites and, what is worse, most teachers have students they just don't like.

Teddy Stallard was a boy that Miss Thompson just didn't like, and for good reason. He just didn't seem interested in school. There was a dead-pan, blank expression on his face, and his eyes had a glassy, unfocused appearance. When she spoke to Teddy, he always answered in monosyllables. His clothes were musty and his hair was unkempt. He wasn't an attractive boy and he certainly wasn't likeable.

When she marked Teddy's papers, she got a certain perverse pleasure out of putting *X*'s next to the wrong answers and when she put the *F*'s at the top of the papers, she always did it with a flair. She should have known better; she had Teddy's records and she knew more about him than she wanted to admit. The record read:

1st Grade: Teddy shows promise with his work and attitude, but poor home situation.  
2nd Grade: Teddy could do better. Mother is seriously ill. He receives little help at home.  
3rd Grade: Teddy is a good boy but too serious. He is a slow learner. His mother died this year.  
4th Grade: Teddy is very slow, but well-behaved. His father show no interest.

Christmas came, and the boys and girls in Miss Thompson's class brought her Christmas presents. They piled their presents on her desk and crowded around to watch her open them.

Among the presents, there was one from Teddy Stallard. She was surprised that he had brought her a gift, but he had. Teddy's gift was wrapped in brown paper and was held together with scotch tape. On the paper were written the simple words, "For Miss Thompson from Teddy." When she opened Teddy's present, out fell a gaudy rhinestone bracelet with half the stones missing, and a bottle of cheap perfume.

The other boys and girls began to giggle and smirk over Teddy's gifts, but Miss Thompson at least had enough sense to silence them by immediately putting of the bracelet and putting some of the perfume on her wrist. Holding her wrist up for the other children to smell, she said, "Doesn't it smell lovely?" And the children, taking their cue from the teacher, readily agreed with "*Ooos*" and "*Ahhs*."

At the end of the day, when school was over and the other children had left, Teddy lingered behind. He came slowly over to her desk and said softly, "Miss Thompson...Miss Thompson, you smell just like my mother...and her bracelet looks real pretty on you."

When Teddy left, Miss Thompson got down on her knees and asked God to forgive her.

The next day, when the children came to school, they were welcomed by a new teacher. Miss Thompson was a different person. She was no longer just a teacher: she had become an agent of

God. She was now a person committed to loving her children and doing things for them that would live on after her. She helped all her children, but especially the slow ones, and especially Teddy Stallard.

By the end of that year, Teddy showed dramatic improvement. He had caught up with most of the students and was even ahead of some.

Miss Thompson didn't hear from Teddy for a long time. Then one day, she received a note that read:

*Dear Miss Thompson,*

*I wanted you to be the first to know—I will be graduating second in my class.*

*Love,*

*Teddy Stallard*

Four years later, another note came:

*Dear Miss Thompson,*

*They just told me I will be graduating first in my class. I wanted you to be the first to know. The university has not been easy, but I liked it.*

*Love,*

*Teddy Stallard*

And, four years later:

*Dear Miss Thompson:*

*As of today, I am Theodore Stallard, M.D. How about that! I wanted you to be the first to know.*

*I am getting married next month, the 27<sup>th</sup>, to be exact. I want you to come and sit where my mother would sit if she were alive. You are the only family I have now—Dad died last year.*

*Love,*

*Teddy Stallard*

Miss Thompson went to that wedding and sat where Teddy's mother would have sat.

She deserved to sit there; she had done something for Teddy that he could never forget.