

Cardboard Dressers

I saw her silhouette from a distance running toward our summer lunch van. As she came nearer, our eyes met. Drops of sweat were running down her beautiful face, and she was breathless. She had a big, green sack swung over her left shoulder. I responded with a hug and she began to share her morning.

“My sister and I had to walk to the laundry place this morning while my brother stayed home to watch my little sister. We had three bags to do. Because we remembered it was Friday, we ran all the way home. We didn’t want to miss choosing our books and lunches, and see, on the way home, I stopped and picked this flower for you, to say thank you for bring out lunches.”

She reached for my hand and in it, she placed a yellow, wild dandelion.

I watched as she carefully chose the books she wanted. The same small hands that picked the beautiful wild flower, now held books, lunches, and the green laundry bag. “Please let me walk home with you,” I offered. She smiled. “You take the lunches and I’ll take the books!” Each of us held in our hands gifts of nourishment, both to the body and to the mind.

The short trip to her apartment door was a pathway of broken bottles and clutter. As I entered the chipped door, dangling on its hinges, I was greeted by squeals of joy as her brother and sisters rushed to receive their gifts. Carefully, they placed the lunches in a row on a small table. As I looked around the room, there were only the table and three chairs, no other furniture. In a corner were

four large cardboard boxes, and on each box in boldly printed letters, was the name of each child in the family.

The three laundry bags had been placed in the center of the room. Two children began going through the laundry, carefully folding the items, and placing them in the cardboard boxes. As I watched, I thought of their mother who, with no dresser drawers for her children's clothes, had brought order out of confusion with the simple cardboard boxes.

As I left, I reached into my pocket and felt the damp petals of the simple, yellow dandelion. I smiled as I thought: "out of the sorrow of poverty comes the joy of hope."

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