“Got a light?” she asked whisking out a cigarette. Max handed her his lighter, and when he put it back into his pocket, he felt her hand run across his arm. “What’s your room number, honey, 405?” she whispered coarsely.

He excused himself, saying that he had to deliver a gift; he didn’t notice that the girl was following him with her eyes. He knocked on the door, and a burley man opened it. “Whatcha’ want?” he bellowed impatiently.

Max stood silent for a moment before he explained that he had a gift for the man’s daughter. The woman inside drew away and shoved Brown Eyes into the bedroom so she couldn’t see the soldier. “How’d you know I had a girl, and what do ya’ wanta’ buy her something for anyway?” “It’s Christmas!”

“What’re you after anyway, Bud?” “We only wanted to give her the gift,” Max repeated. “We? Where’s the rest of you, and why are you all wet? Just what did ya’ buy anyway?” Max unwrapped the panda and the man laughed. “A bear! What in hell do we need with a bear?” “Drunk!” With that the man slammed the door abruptly. Max stared at the closed door. Then he turned and started for his room. He felt that someone was behind him, but he didn’t turn to see who it was. When he reached his room, he opened the door, tossed the panda into a corner, and stretched face down across the dirty bed.

The Gift

Betty Hawkins

The restless June breeze blew a tattered newspaper skittishly down the shabby street. It rested a moment before Amanda Johnson’s front step, then as if afraid to tarry, whipped the struggling paper across the alley into a crevice in the wall of Frank’s Meat Market. A nondescript gray pup lying in the shade of the grocery listlessly nudged the newspaper, but the merciless breeze whirled its captive away from the mongrel, past the store, and into the weedy lot beside the railroad tracks.
Amanda stood transfixed in her doorway, unaware of the newspaper's silent struggle past her home. She stood in the doorway and gave herself up to hatred. Fists clenched, body quivering, Amanda hated until her throat ached and her eyelids burned. Still the cutting words of her former employer repeated themselves in her tormented ears.

"Pretty child, isn't she? I mean considering she's a nigger."

How dare she! How dare she! Amanda's inner being screamed. Suddenly weak, she dropped into a worn green armchair near the door, fighting to gain control. She stared at the crisscrossing yellow and white checks in the skirt of her gingham house dress as if searching for some hidden strength in the confusion of colored blocks. Then she drew a long trembling sigh, forcing her tensed muscles to relax. Above all she must be calm. Debby must not see her mother like this. Debby... dear, gay Debby, already so enraptured by Mrs. Rudley's gift—a fragile pink and white doll.

Crooning a tuneless lullaby, Debby cuddled the creamy white doll against her own golden brown cheek. Debby's tight black pigtails bobbed beside the long golden curls of the beautiful doll. Her eyes sparkled. Dimples played across her features as she whispered to her newest "baby," admiring its lovely pink silk dress. She clutched the doll to her, completely enchanted.

Amanda must not spend her bitterness on Debby. The doll was far more beautiful and expensive than she and Bill could afford. Bill... Bill mustn't know about Mrs. Rudley's words. And Debby must keep the doll. Rising resolutely and brushing rebellious tears from her eyes, Amanda walked out to her cramped kitchen to resume the day's work.

§ § § §

Summer spent itself uneventfully. July was hot; August hotter. Bill got a three-dollar raise and caught a six pound bass in Chad's Creek. Debby skinned her knees, bit the boy next door, and celebrated her sixth birthday. In the midst of it all, small triumphs and smaller disasters, Amanda smiled and rejoiced in her loved ones.

But now it was a golden September morning. Chattering about teachers, pencils, spelling, and new books, Debby patiently allowed her mother to button her new red coat. Then convinced, after much explanation by Amanda, that she must leave her cherished gold and pink doll at home, Debby skipped off gaily to begin her first day in school. Watching her beloved daughter hasten to join her friends, Amanda shivered with an inner chill that touched her heart and made her starkly fearful. Amanda suddenly realized that Debby, who had known only love, was going outside her own little world for the first time.
"Oh, God, don’t let them hurt her. Make them kind,” Amanda breathed.

She sank into a scarred kitchen chair, pillowed her head in her arms, and cried until her shoulders heaved. But a woman has not time enough for tears and soon she was at her work again, trying not to think, trying to lose herself in household tasks.

A few hours later while peeling potatoes in the kitchen, Amanda heard the front door open and close. She heard Debby’s light yet slow steps as she mounted the stairs to her own little room.

"Debby, come here and tell mother about school," Amanda called.

There was no answer. Then Amanda heard a violent crash. Dropping her knife, Amanda felt cold in her heart as she ran from the kitchen, up the stairs to Debby’s room. Debby stood in bewildered rebellion, tears coursing down her baby-plump cheeks. Her young body shook with enraged, hurt sobs. At her feet lay the golden haired doll in shattered pieces.

“I’m glad!” Debby screamed. “I hate it!”

Then holding her hysterical child against her, Amanda knelt beside the broken doll and wept, for Debby, for herself, for her people.

§ § § §

Integrity
James Cone

Integrity, a man’s most important characteristic, is to be found in all of the great composers. These men were true to their ideals, and no one, no matter how important, could dissuade them from their ideals. Men like Bach, Haydn, Chopin, Grieg, and Liszt were true to their ideals; they sincerely believed in their work, and none of them ever composed for anyone else’s fame. Although they were peaceful men, respectful of powerful and influential people, these men were never guilty of losing their integrity. Their music is persuasive, expressive of each man’s greatness, and above all, rich in a type of individuality brought about by courage and a desire to please, but never tainted with the stain of falsity.