

At the gentle age of seven, Tillie was best known for three things: her big, bashful hazel eyes, her giggle that sounded of raindrops and wind chimes, and her enormous heart, which she wore proudly on her sleeve.

One cozy summer afternoon, her family's stable boy caught her picking tulips and daffodils in the garden.

"What are you doing with those?" He asked.

"They're for my mother," Tillie explained. "She told me once that when we're vibrant and bold, we're infectious; we give the gift of vibrance to everyone we touch. She said that it is difficult to be vibrant all the time and that sometimes, we must borrow vibrance from somewhere else until we can restore it again for ourselves. I thought she could use some vibrance right now, so I'm collecting some for her. I won't take many, I promise... just one of each color should do."

Tillie's basket filled quickly with indigo, auburn, magenta, and blonde, and once she felt she had collected enough, she clutched the handle of the basket firmly in her hand and skipped the whole way back home.

Tillie fetched a silver bucket from the bottom shelf in the shed before dashing directly to the pond at the far corner of her family's property. She crouched down to her knees and carefully selected the smoothest stones with the prettiest designs before storing them inside the bucket. The family chef, who had snuck away to enjoy his pipe by the water, spotted Tillie closely inspecting a particularly small stone and he asked, "what are you doing with those?"

"They're for my mother," Tillie replied. "She told me once that it is important to be strong and mighty. She said that strength determines how capable we are, but she said that sometimes, it is not easy to be strong and we may need to borrow strength from somewhere else until we are able to regain it. I figured she could use some strength right now and I thought, 'what in the world is stronger than a stone?' So then, I decided I would collect some stones for her."

Tillie filled the bucket right to the brim and heaved it all the way back home where she stored it under her bed, next to her flowers, until she was ready to present the gifts to her mother.

Tillie rushed over to her closet and pulled out every dress she had grown out of, laying them side by side on the floor. Once she was certain she wasn't missing any, she carefully felt the material of each dress and placed the softest ones aside in a heaping pile. After she was through, she grabbed the pile of dresses in a hug, and was barely able to peer over the protruding fabrics that she held in her arms as she struggled to bring the lot down the stairs.

Tillie found the maid enjoying a merlot by the fireplace in the dining room.

"You told me once that you can sew," Tillie said.

The maid turned to see Tillie peeking over the cloud of clothes clutched snug in her arms. "Do those dresses have holes in them?" The maid guessed.

"No," said Tillie as she allowed the dresses to fall to the ground, making a soft *thump*. "I wish to make them into a blanket for my mother. Every night when she tucks me in, she says that when you are wrapped in warm, you are safe. As she squeezes the blankets around my legs and bundles them snug to my feet, she says she's building me a shield to protect me from any harm. I wish to build her a shield, too, so that no harm can come to her! She'll be protected like she protects me when she wraps me in warm."

Enchanted by Tillie's kindness, the maid obeyed and brought Tillie to her sewing machine where together, they began to build a blanket. Their time together was so delightful that Tillie accidentally stayed up well past her bedtime. The blanket was finished in a day. Tillie was up past her bedtime with the maid, but even after she said her good nights, she didn't feel yet like it was time for her to sleep. Instead, she grabbed a few empty mason jars from the kitchen. She poked tiny holes in the lids, and she used twine and glue to fasten handles to them. Quietly, she crept out the back door and the wet grass tickled her bare feet as she made her way to the large group of trees by the pond. She found a stump suitable as a chair and she sat and waited, hushed and patient, and eventually... the fireflies came out and danced beneath the clouds.

One by one, Tilly caught them and held them delicately in her hands before rehoming them to the jars. Running and twirling to catch the bugs filled Tillie's spirit with glee and eventually, her jingly giggle caught the attention of a neighbor.

"What are you doing out so late?" The neighbor asked.

"I'm catching fireflies for my mother," Tillie said. "She told me once that when we're happy, we produce light, and that light leaves less room for shadows. The terrible things that live in the dark, they hide behind those shadows, you see, so when we produce light, the terrible things must pack up and leave. Mother says that sometimes, we won't be able to produce light and when that happens, it's okay to borrow light from somewhere else until you can make your own again. I'm catching Mother some fireflies because I think she might like to borrow some light right now. I won't be out much longer, I promise! I'll go straight to bed once I've caught enough bugs for my jars."

Tillie caught seven bugs for each jar before slipping the handles over her wrists and marching back home through the grass.

The following morning, Tillie brought her big red wagon up to her bedroom. She placed the jars, the bucket, the basket, and the blanket inside the wagon's cart and grabbed firmly onto the handle. She had to rock the wagon back and forth a few times to gain momentum, as the wagon was very heavy for tiny Tillie, but after a couple of tries, she was able to pull it behind her. She brought the wagon to her mother's bedroom and slipped inside the door. Tillie's mother had been in bed so long that the mattress seemed to have shifted to shape

her form. Her glassy eyes sunk deep into her under-nourished face. She laid nearly motionless, aside from her fragile fingers that trembled from their spot under the covers. Upon Tillie's entrance, the nurse propped some pillows behind her mother's head so that she could see Tillie when she spoke.

Tillie brought the wagon to the foot of the bed and declared, "I brought some gifts for you, mother! They're for you to borrow."

As she placed each gift on the bed to present to her mother, she said, "I brought flowers for vibrance, stones for strength, a blanket to be your shield, and fireflies for light. With all these tools, you shouldn't have to say goodbye anymore." Tillie smiled at her mother as her eyes flooded with hope.

"Oh, sweet girl," her mother whispered. "I've already been borrowing those things from you." Tillie paused for a moment. "I didn't think I had them... I thought I was living in 'sometimes,' and mother, I didn't think you had them either, but... now that I'm here, I feel like I'm borrowing them from you right now."

Tillie jumped onto the bed and snuggled close into the nooks of her mother's warm body.

"Does this mean that you still have to say goodbye?" Tillie worried.

"I'm afraid I will have to soon," Tillie's mother said. "But I will bring your gifts with me, as I suspect I could use extra strength, light, warmth and vibrance as I carry forward through the next door that will open once I close my eyes."

"Can I come with you?" Tillie asked.

"Not for a very long time," her mother spoke. "You have much to do here before you walk through the next door. But whenever you do, I promise you I will keep these gifts safe so I can give them back to you when you arrive. Until then, princess, know that you can always borrow them from me whenever you may need them. I will always be able to let you borrow them, no matter where you are, and no matter where I am too."

Tillie reached for the blanket of dresses she had made for her mother and covered them both with it. She laid her head on her mother's chest and they spoke softly to each other, sharing stories and wonders until they both drifted off to sleep.