

Amanda R. "The necklace."

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The Necklace

I'm not a morning person. I don't acknowledge any sort of life before noon. That being said, you can imagine my frustration when I accepted a new hosting job at the Olive Garden, and they phoned to demand I be there at 9 a.m. I dreaded the day from the very start.

Though upset, I jumped out of bed, threw my hair into a simple tie and slapped on some strawberry-flavored lip balm. I then hopped into my new (at the time) 1998 Cavalier and raced down the highway, even though I knew rush hour was over.

"Hello, dear!" my co-worker, Maria, announced as I dragged my body through the freshly sanitized doors, surrounded by "blah-white" stucco walls. "How's my sweet child?"

Maria was the one person I worked with that could put a smile on my face, no matter how grim the situation seemed. A pudgy little lady, she stood nearly a foot shorter than me and had the most adorable and playful smile. But perhaps Maria's sweetest quality, aside from her endearing words, was how she spoke them out of a tiny mouth with a large Bolivian accent. Although I still wasn't thrilled at the idea of being there at such an hour, I gave her a warm expression and began my very unexciting day of friendly, fake 'Hellos' and replacing misplaced menus.

The drab day pressed on and I grew even more tired than when I had first begun. Tired of happy people on their lunch hour, tired of the smell of hot alfredo sauce, even tired of the pepperoncini decorations that covered the iron vines...just tired.

Then, just as the hour hand struck noon, I found something that quickly caught my attention and intrigued me in a peculiar way. There, lying on the ruddy tiled floor, was a simple gold necklace with a few charms strung along its chain. I found myself wondering, whom did it belong to? Where did it come from? And most importantly, would someone notice they'd lost it and come back to claim it? Though it didn't look terribly valuable, I guessed that someone would come searching for it. It was pretty, and I was sure it would be missed. I placed it in the podium I was stationed at where I sat and continued to greet arriving customers, waiting for someone to retrieve it.

The hours rolled on by, as did my memory of the necklace. That is, until a woman with a freckled, golden-brown face and round midsection frantically barged through the restaurant's double-doored entrance.

"Oh my dear, please tell me you have it!" she pleaded in an accent unfamiliar to me. Her voice quivered and her hands shook as she held and squeezed mine in her own. I didn't even need to ask.

"Yes!" I shouted. I had never said the word with such enthusiasm.

Without a moments thought, I reached for the necklace in the podium drawer where I had placed it for safekeeping. Nothing. Where I searched for a necklace laced in gold, I merely found fluorescent markers and mismatched appetizer and drink menus. My facial expression changed drastically, and it was no

secret that I was unable to find what I had been wildly searching for. Her happy expression also turned to worry.

"Please wait here," I begged.

I nervously raced around the restaurant in search of the woman's misplaced jewelry. I approached my manager, gravely trying to imagine the possibility that he had found and moved it to an even safer place. I received no sort of relief.

After searching for what seemed to be the most agonizing twenty minutes of my life, I sheepishly approached the distressed woman.

"I'm sorry," I said, as I felt my eyes well up with tears, "I don't have it." As I heard the words come out of my mouth, I so wished I could take them back, even if it were the unfortunate truth.

She looked at me with her face full of pain and disappointment, and began to cry. Through her dripping mascara and muffled sobs, unfolded the touching tale of the necklace that had been in her family for nearly five generations. Six charms threaded along it, one for each of her six children she had to leave behind in Bulgaria. She had come to America to make more money for her starving family and hoped to return, with a better life for them. Her children were the only things that kept her working sun up to sundown seven days a week, and the necklace was her reminder of them. Though it had little monetary value, it was the hope that kept her going....her hope to see her children's smiling faces someday soon.

I told her how horribly sorry I was, and vowed to call her when and if it showed up, but unfortunately, there was no phone where she could be reached. She understood that I sympathized with her and had done all I could, but she was still heart-broken. She nodded regretfully, and left the building.

Still knowing that I had no luck earlier, I went seeking my fellow host once again. "Maria! Tell me you've seen the necklace that poor woman left here." She looked at me in search of an answer to a foreign question. I told of what happened, and now, how awful I felt.

"Well, wait one minute, honey. I did clean some garbage out of there about an hour ago," she said as she looked towards the mahogany podium. I knew right where to look.

I hurried to the restrooms and dumped the three-foot gray bin to the floor. There, amongst damp paper towels and snot-soaked tissues, lay the necklace, coiled under an infant's soiled diaper. It looked as though it was laughing at me. I quickly ran it through some soapy lukewarm water and raced to the exit.

I ran outside. Left. Right. She was gone. I felt defeated as I made my way back inside, until something caught my eye. Something I'd never thought I'd be so overjoyed to see. Sitting on a wooden bench leading up the cobbled pavement, sat the woman in tears.

We ran to each other, she was like a mother separated from her daughter at birth in a movie. I held the necklace in the air, knowing I was holding something of true value.

Before she even reached for what she was once so desperate to find, she embraced me tightly. It was a sort of hug I didn't recognize well. It was one of gratitude and thankfulness; one that symbolized an act of kindness from one human being to another.

"My dear, you are the kindest lady in all of America. I will never forget you and what you have given back to me."

I smiled as she walked away.

Up until that day, I don't think I ever really stopped the fast-paced life I lived, just to see a simple pleasure, like making someone so happy, by really, not doing anything at all. I still think of that day when I remind myself to slow down and look around. There are amazing things going on that we sometimes don't even see.

It doesn't have to take a child being born to witness a miracle. It doesn't have to take a death in the family to witness a great loss. Sometimes the most common miracles go unnoticed. Getting the job of your dreams, or the spouse you always dreamed of can be "life changing." Nevertheless, not all life-changing things are celebrated with an elaborate party. Every now and then, just a simple act of kindness is able to humble us, and make us grateful for the humility of humanity that surrounds us.