

THE GOLD LOCKET

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Three dates, a string of hurried cafeteria lunches together, countless rushed snatches of conversation in the halls between classes, and Matt knew that he was in love. That's why he was wandering around downtown for three hours the Saturday before Christmas. He had searched everywhere for the perfect gift, but nothing seemed quite right for Carrie.

He finally sauntered into a jewelry store. After a few awkward minutes of looking, he explained to the saleslady he wanted a really nice present for his girl friend. She told him she thought she had just the right thing and led Matt to a nearby display case. She pulled out a brown velvet box, set it in front of Matt and waited for his reaction.

The moment he opened the box and saw that gold locket Matt knew it was perfect. The gold glistened in the light—just like Carrie's eyes. The quality of the locket was obvious, even without the "24K" tag. The 14K gold chain added a touch of elegance. It was expensive, but Matt had been saving a long time. And he knew Carrie couldn't help but love it. So he paid for it, took it home, and very carefully wrapped it himself. That locket did make the perfect gift. Carrie thought so too. And Matt knew that as long as he lived, he'd never forget the night he gave Carrie that gold locket.

Winter hadn't reached February before something happened to Matt's love. The warmth seemed to fade. Matt knew Carrie sensed it; he could see the questions in her eyes. Breaking up brought the greatest sense of sadness and loss Matt had ever known. A few months later Matt met Rita. She was just the opposite of Carrie. With dark, flashing eyes and a fiery personality. Love struck again. And Matt decided he wanted to show his love for Rita with a special gift.

He haunted the stores, trying to decide what to buy. But he always found himself back in the jewelry store looking at gold lockets. He wracked his brain for other ideas, but no other gift seemed as perfect. He ended up giving Rita a locket. She thought it was beautiful and Matt was pleased with his selection. Matt and Rita broke up a few months later. After Rita, he dated Barb, and after Barb came Sandy and Arlene and then Nicole. There was nothing strange about the fact that Matt went through a string of girl friends. He really cared about each one.

But it did seem strange, even to Matt, that whenever a birthday or some other special occasion called for a special gift, he would return to the familiar jewelry store to buy another gold locket. A couple of times he felt a little guilty not putting any more thought or effort into choosing a gift. But even when he tried, he couldn't think of a nicer present than that locket.

Finally Matt met Carol. Right away there was a different look about him when he was with her; he acted calmer, more sure of himself. He knew no one had ever understood or loved him the way Carol did. All of his previous loves paled in the light of his love for Carol. No one was surprised when Matt asked Carol to marry him.

A few weeks before the wedding, Carol suggested they exchange wedding gifts. Matt thought that was a great idea. He wanted this gift to be just as special as the wedding rings they'd picked out together—and just as symbolic of his love. He tried to think of something else, but he finally settled on that beautiful, gold locket. He went to pick it up at the same jewelry store, and the moment he saw it, he remembered just what a perfect gift it was. Nothing else seemed to express his love quite the way that locket did.

Their wedding was as exciting and as beautiful as Matt and Carol had dreamed. And when the exhausting day of ceremony and festivity came to a close, and the two of them were finally alone, Matt presented his gift to Carol. She told him the locket was beautiful. She also said she loved him and that he'd given her the happiest day and most wonderful gift she'd ever had. But when Carol put on the locket, Matt couldn't help remembering all the other gold lockets he'd given. He wondered if Carol knew. He wished he could have given her something truly unique, for her alone. Always before, that 24k gold locket had seemed such a perfect gift. But now, on the happiest day of his life, that locket didn't seem special or beautiful any more. It didn't even look as gold as Matt had remembered.

"A short parable about sex (for those who can't wait)"