the GIVER: *Chapter 2 (continued...see last week)*

Psalm 126:5 'Those who sow in tears reap in joy.'

Frank stamped his heels together, hard, hoping the clots of snow would fall from his boots before entering the school library. He already could feel the blessed heat from inside wafting near the metal door, like it were beckoning him in to get warm. Lights shone on the snow from the large windows, casting a myriad of reflections on the ground. Shadows played hide-n-seek like ornery children and Christmas was a noisy silence in the air. Carols sang through playground speakers and Christmas lights danced from neighboring doorways; all of it gave itself away. It was no longer a secret Christmas was mere days away.

Frank closed the metal door behind him with a bang, his glasses immediately fog-washed and ethereal. He caught the eye of the lady librarian and she pointed toward a cubicle occupied by the cutest kid Frank thought he'd ever seen. His dark chocolate eyes swam like puddles of hot cocoa and whipped topping in a little urchin face that was being swallowed by a massive amount of black ringlets. The only problem? Those lips had likely seen very few smiles. "Teddy?" Frank asked tentatively, thrusting his hand out toward the little guy. In seconds, Teddy jumped to his feet, returning the firm handshake. "Yessir. That's me. Teddy," he whispered.

Teddy was a quiet kid, unsure of himself, very exposed and beaten by life already in his first ten years. Frank could see immediately Teddy's biggest dilemma was his lack of confidence in himself. He was smart, book and street, articulate, kind, pleasant. He just had no belief in himself or had no reason to count on anyone else. He was a product of the foster system, Frank learned quickly, and already this precious boy had given up on anything hopeful. Hope was just another four-letter word to him that dared fall out of his mouth like a secret. So when Frank instructed Teddy to write a letter to Santa as his final assignment for their time together today, he wasn't surprised that Teddy hadn't a clue what that meant and why. Frank gently explained that in addition to seeing firsthand what Teddy's abilities were, like penmanship and spelling and grammar, it was also a fun exercise for boys and girls to communicate with Santa about hopes and dreams and gift ideas. Teddy shrugged small thin shoulders and nodded, but Frank already knew this kid had likely never even opened a gift, let alone requested one! It wasn't til much later that evening, after Frank had inched home on snow-covered blackened ice and shoveled his own driveway, built a fire in his fireplace and warmed his own dinner in the microwave, that he finally had a moment to peruse the little boy's letter to Santa.

'Dear Santa,' it read. 'Hi. My name is Teddy. It's nice to meet you, sir. My new teacher Mr. Frank tells me I should write you a letter to tell you about my hopes and dreams. Santa, I don't know you, and I doubt you know me, but I'm certain there isn't any way you would give me the gift I want most in life or that you would make a dream or a hope of mine come true. Things just don't work like that. At least, not in my world. But if you could, here is what I would ask for. My dad is in prison. I haven't seen him in a very long time. I just want to see my dad and be with my dad. Now if you can do that, then you truly are a miracle worker! PS his name is Sammy. PPS thank you. Just in case.'

Tears threatened Frank's vision. He'd better get busy! He had work to do.

To be continued....