the GIVER: *Chapter 5 (continued...see previous)*

Titus 3:4-8a 'But when God, our kind and loving Savior God, stepped in, He saved us. It was all His doing; we had nothing to do with it. He gave us a good bath, and we came out of it new people, washed inside and out by the Holy Spirit. Our Savior Jesus poured out new life so generously. God's gift has restored our relationship with Him and given us back our lives. And there's more life to come—an eternity of life! You can count on this.' (MSG)

They slid into the parking lot which was lit up like a Christmas tree by all the yard lights. Metal bars reached eerie fingers toward the sky like guards with guns drawn, a stark reminder where they'd arrived. Frank's young passenger hadn't a clue yet, however, with his eyes squeezed tightly closed and a merry grin pasted on his cute little urchin face. "Are we there yet, Mr. Frank?" he asked for the umpteenth time. "Can I open my eyes yet?"

"Teddy, I'm going to count to ten, and when I get to ten, you can open your eyes! One!" Frank exclaimed. He was caught up in the dramatic event that was about to take place; his emotions like a ball being volleyed back and forth over an invisible net. What if they refused to see or greet one another? What if this imbibed more pain, heartache, fear, false hope, in this dad, or worse yet, in this precious little boy? What if this idea had been a mistake?! "Two...three...four." Frank pulled into his normal spot where he parked when he came to work each weekday. "Five...six...seven." He popped the gear into park, his eyes misting over and a lump in his throat. "Don't open your eyes yet, young man!" Frank warned. "Eight...nine."
"Can I open 'em now, Mr. Frank?" just a hint of a whine lacing his name.

"Merry Christmas, Teddy! Ten! You can now open your eyes!" Frank cried .

The boy bolted upright, his chocolate eyes swimming like fondue. He shook his massive head of black ringlets like he couldn't believe what he saw. Some people paid thousands for what he had on his head naturally. "Wow!" fell out of his mouth like a secret. Frank watched him gulp. "Is my daddy in there, behind them bars?" he asked in awe and wonder.

"Yes, he is, Teddy. Would you like to go visit him?" A single tear, the size of a snowflake lit on the end of one long eyelash before making a trek across his cheek. Teddy nodded vigorously. "Please! May I?"

Frank had forgotten about all the little details. He'd gotten permission, obtained the proper documentation, filled out appropriate paperwork. But he had forgotten about things like how the sound of metal gates closing assuredly behind a new visitor was startling; how even the limited pat-down of a little boy would seem significant in his mind; how the long walk from the main entrance to the building where the visitor center was housed could feel like hiking the Damascus Road. Frank watched Teddy take in every element, glancing behind him every so often as they neared the metal door to where his dad hopefully awaited. Frank hadn't told Sammy either. He arranged the visit and had the staff promise they'd do whatever it took to get the man off his bunk and out of his cell and to the visiting room on time. This had been a total exercise in faith, Frank smiled to himself, as he mouthed another silent prayer. Deep down, he knew it would work out just fine. His God was bigger than the paperwork and the red flags, the impossibilities and the doubts. He was always working all things out, this God of the details. Like He sent His only Son to be the spotless, unblemished lamb to be the atonement for mankind's waywardness. So that someday everyone would have an opportunity to become children of God and spend eternity with Him, no more separation. Just like God the Father and His Son, this father and his son needed a chance to be together, no longer separated by the brokenness in life. This God of the detail would make sure it all came out just right.

Teddy's eyes swum like mud puddles as Frank tugged on the metal door. The hefty gate slid open and Teddy fell into the room like a gift. One thing Frank knew just like he knew his own name—it didn't matter that father and son hadn't seen each other since the boy was an infant. Frank knew, their hearts would know one another anywhere. And so it was. Teddy crossed that sterile room in mere seconds and he leapt into the arms of a waiting dad who he'd only heard stories about. That didn't stop Sammy either. One word was on his lips, and that was 'Jesus!' as his arms wrapped tightly around his child as if he would never again let go.

Frank might never come back from this one, he thought to himself, as his car floated over the icy roads after dropping Teddy off. He would carry the memories of today in his soul for the rest of his life. He had worried it might be traumatic for Teddy to have to say good-bye to his dad, but in the end, he and Sammy made wonderful plans about their next visits and what the future might hold. Frank knew today had just been the beginning. Sammy was up for parole in the coming year, and while some might shrug and say, 'Who knows?' Frank would grin and say, 'God knows.' And He always did! Know best. He is the Giver of all good gifts.

James 1:17, 'Every gift God freely gives us is good and perfect, streaming down from the Father of lights, who shines from the heavens with no hidden shadow or darkness and is never subject to change.' (TPT)

THE END