

## **Be careful what you wish for**

**Emma Cole**

I will always remember that diamond, the day I found it, and how it changed my life. At first, I wasn't completely sure what it was. I had thought it might be trash; glinting in the spring green grass, covered in dew as if an angel had dropped it over our farm. It was a little smaller than my fist, pointed on one end, and flattened on the other. Afraid (afraid of what, I'm still not sure), I snatched it off the cow pasture and put it into my pocket. It seemed to fit perfectly. I often thought later what might have happened if one of the farm cows had gulped it up with a jaw-full of grass. But what if the cow had wished for something? Or, maybe the cow couldn't think one bit, and nothing would have happened? We'd be better off. But you wouldn't know about that yet. But that's the first thing I can tell you, is that I wish that diamond had been trash. A Coke can, stomped into the dirt. Boy, do I wish that's all it had been: garbage.

After I'd picked up the diamond, I ran into the house; my house, just on the edge of our farm, right by the road. Small and white with green trim and shutters, shaped like a barn. I planned on my mom selling the diamond, we'd be rich. But that was the first problem. I walked through the door and saw momma there, standing by the old stove, in a flower-print dress and old gray apron. She still had on her fancy shoes from her work at the diner in town. Her brown hair was the same color as mine, only streaked with a little gray, but I'd never thought of her as old. The stove was sizzling from whatever she was cooking for supper. I had to get around the old wooden table covered in a green table cloth to get to the other side of the kitchen.

"Look momma, look what I found!" The diamond sparkled clearly, almost like water.

But momma couldn't see it. When showed her the sparkling diamond, I held it up real high in my hand, right close to her face. She looked at me like I was really crazy, feeling my forehead and all that.

"All I see is an empty hand Loretta. It's empty. Why don't you go on to bed until supper?" she said softly. So I stomped up stairs, the diamond still in my hand. I placed it on my dresser and stared at it all afternoon. It sparkled in the sunlight coming through my window. I was tempted to hold it again, but I thought *Leave it Loretta, just let it be.*

It was near six o'clock when my mom called. "Ettie! Time for supper or it's going to the pigs!" she yelled. I absentmindedly picked up the diamond on my way out. I wish I'd left it there. Boy, I should have left it there. I'm still not sure it's not my fault, what happened next.

"Mr. Tucker wants Irene back. I just been out with her, don't want to give her away, you hear!" My dad said bitterly. I stopped dead in my tracks at the top of the stairs. If I came into the kitchen, dad would stop talking and I'd never hear about this again. Irene was a fine, fat pig we planned on getting first place with in the county fair. We'd bought her from Mr. Tucker up the road. Now that Mr. Tucker had seen how big Irene was getting, he wanted her back. "Insufficient payment," he'd called it.

"Insufficient payment, my ass! He just doesn't want Irene to win. I could fix this place right up with that first-place money!" my dad continued. My dad was a tough farmer who'd gotten the farm from his father and his father before that. He was smart and didn't like other farmers cheating him, so when Mr. Tucker called asking for Irene back, it rubbed dad the wrong way. And dad *could* fix up this place, the barn, and the whole farm with that money.

“Where is that girl? Loretta!” My mom called, interrupting my dad. I walked slowly down the stairs, thinking over and over *I wish we didn't have to give Irene away to that stupid Mr. Tucker!* And of course I'd forgotten about the diamond. I couldn't even feel it. I might have been holding it so tight for so long it just felt natural. When I got to the bottom of the stairs I saw mom laying out bacon and burgers, and dad sitting at the table with a cup of coffee and tired look on his face. Mom was just sitting down to see me coming.

“Finally!” she said. No sooner had I sat down at the table did my brother come bursting through the door.

Startled, my mom stood up from the table. “Robert! You're not supposed to be home until-”

“Mom, dad did you hear! Everyone's talking about it in town! Old Mr. Tucker's dead!” Robert just stood there in the door way, his words echoing in everyone's head. My parents' eyes got wide and their jaws open. But a horrible feeling settled into my stomach, and my head slowly turned to the diamond in my hand. Its sparkle seemed less happy, and more sharp and painful to look at. It looked jagged and less smooth. I got the most terrible feeling that I had killed Mr. Tucker.

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“Stop it, just stop it!” I yelled, throwing the diamond across my room. It hit my wall hard, right beside my window. It fell into the floor unharmed and rolled over to my feet. Quickly, I snatched it up off the carpet and stuffed it into an empty drawer. I slammed the drawer closed, and the sound echoed off the walls for what seemed like ten minutes. My breathing slowed down. I crawled over to my bed and lay there. No one would know what I'd done. Was it even

me that had done it? By wishing we didn't have to give Irene back, had I wished Mr. Tucker dead? Maybe it wasn't me. But I wasn't eager to try it again to find out. I could hear my brother still talking to my parents downstairs. No doubt beers had been passed around all ready, the burgers left on the plates as my parents and my brother discussed what had happened.

“Just dead, found in his office by Mrs. Winters-you know, that old school teacher in town? In shock, she is. Doctor Brown says Tucker died of a heart attack. Perfectly healthy man dropped dead; whole town is a-buzz about it,” I heard Robert continue.

“You better get back to work. And don't you go talking about this anymore around your sister. Remember how Ettie got when that old horse died?” My dad said firmly.

“Mr. Tucker isn't a horse,” Robert grumbled. But a few seconds later the door slammed and I knew he had left. I buried my head in my pillow, crying softly. Now I really wished a cow had swallowed that diamond.

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“Loretta! Go get the eggs from the chickens! And hurry!” My mother's voice woke me with a start.

“Ah!” I almost rolled off my bed, grabbing for the sheets. Once I had steadied myself, I saw outside my window, that the sun was just rising. I'd fallen asleep in my clothes after supper last night. Moaning, I hauled on a pair of clean jeans and a t-shirt. I stomped down the stairs. My mother was washing dishes before she went into work. She wore a red dress and black apron and fancy black boots with high heels and black-tinted tights. A tiny moon was stitched onto the pocket of her dress. Mom worked at the Moon Café and Diner three days a week.

“You better get going,” Momma said, pointing a fork towards the door. I jogged out the door, around to the back of the house, and opened the small gate that led onto the rest of the farm. The chicken coop is on the other end of the cow pasture, just big enough for one person and all the chickens. It’s tiny, made out of brown-red metal, with a roof that makes every rain drop sound humongous when it rains.

“Morning, Miss Loretta,” Walter smiled meanly at me from inside the coop. Walter; the dirty, mean, weird-looking farm hand was all that my parents could afford for help for the last two years. ‘Lord knows what he’s been feeding those chickens,’ or ‘He hasn’t been into that barn for weeks, don’t know what we keep him around for,’ were words often spoke bitterly by my mother after Walter had left for the day.

“I’m just about finished up with the chickens. You can milk the cows,” Walter told me. The chickens looked dirty and un-fed, so who knows what he had been doing in there.

“Don’t tell me what to do,” I snapped at him, but I went off to the barn anyways. The barn is a stereotypical big red barn, with white roofing and a rooster weather vane on top. I led a cow in from out back and set it up, dragging the low stool over to where I’d put the cow. Five minutes later, I was carrying one pail of milk from the first cow to the table at the other end of the barn, where five more empty pails sat. Out the window above the table, I could see Walter outside the chicken coop, just finished a cigarette, tossing it onto the ground. He stomped back into the chicken coop, grumbling and spitting. *Boy oh boy, I wish we could get a better farm hand than that no-good Walter.* But then I looked down into my hand.

“No...NO!” I shouted. I hadn’t even felt it in my hand until a moment ago. I dropped the diamond into the hay. No, I’d left it in the drawer, I was sure. The diamond looked even sharper

and less smooth than before. Rough, sharp light glanced off its surface. I kicked hay over it till I couldn't see it anymore. I ran to the chicken coop. I left the diamond there, but I had the strangest feeling it would follow me. There, in the chicken coop, Walter lay face down, the chickens all squawking, like they were yelling for help. My mother came running out from the house.

“Loretta! I heard you yell; what's going-oh!” My mother put a hand over her mouth and I began to cry. I'd done this. It was my fault. I ran across the pasture and ploughed through the fence, and towards the house. I ran inside and up into my room, my mother frantically reaching for the phone to call the police downstairs.

“Yes hello? It's Mrs. Jenkins, -from the farm, the farm hand -Walter, he's just dead -the chicken coop -oh, god! I just- I don't know what happened -just come, it's at 55 Easter Road...” My mom kept cutting herself off and talking really fast. I realized I was sitting on my floor. I reached into my pocket. And the diamond was there. I gave it a good hard hit off the ground. My hand stung, and with the other hand, I reached under my bed and grabbed my money chest out. I tossed it upside down, and every bill and coin spilled out onto the carpet. Rage building up inside of me, I felt the urge to scream. I shoved the diamond inside and locked the chest, shoving it under my bed I swore to myself then and there it would never see the light of day. Now I was certain we'd have all been better off if the diamond had just been garbage. I was sure of it now; whatever I wished for, someone linked to that wish died. I hated that diamond. It was cursed. *It's good that diamond is locked up, because I'd be wishing.....*and as if the heavens opened up, I thought the most brilliant idea I've ever had in my life. But not now; if my parents saw me, I'd be in trouble. And it would be dangerous. So I waited.

When finally the day was over, the policemen had come and carried old Walter off and I'd been talked to by three different policemen. One of them, an older woman, told me not to cry. I hadn't even been crying at the time. But after they had left, after supper, the whole house became silent. The moon shone brightly along with billions of other stars across the dark blue sky. I crept out of bed, tossing on my bathrobe and taking my flashlight in one hand, and the locked chest in the other. I walked softly across the hall, set the chest down quietly and put the back end of the flashlight in between my teeth so I could see. I pulled the string on the ceiling and the collapsible wooden ladder fell to the floor. The loud noise made me wince, but no one came running out into the hall. I grabbed the chest, with the flashlight still between my teeth, and began to climb the ladder. Slowly, I was able to see into the dusty old attic. I had to crouch down, and I made my way across the attic to the ladder under the trap door that led to the roof. The chest felt heavier as I dragged it (and myself) out onto the roof. I tossed my flashlight aside, because the moon lit up the whole farm. I opened the chest. Peeking inside, my heart pounded. There it was; the cursed diamond, glinting in the moonlight. Slowly, I picked it up, and tried not to wish for anything or even think very much.

"I am not afraid of you. You have hurt too many people. I wish you wouldn't come back." I said calmly I rose up onto my tip-toes. I pulled my hand back behind my head and extended my arm. The diamond grew heavier and heavier. I took all my anger, all my hate for that diamond, and I threw it into the pasture. I watched it sail through the air. Silently, its silhouette crossed the moon. I saw it land on the other side of the barn; nothing. What had I expected? Then an ear-splitting sound, like a thousand mirrors and windows breaking at once, sounded loud and clear. I covered my ears. Later I found out that it was heard all around town and that it woke up every screaming baby and barking dog and hissing cat within a hundred

miles. Almost rolling on the roof in pain from the noise, I slipped. Falling, wind whistled through my ears. *So this is what happens. I destroyed the diamond, and this time, I'm the one that's killed because of my wish.* The world turned black, but not before incredible pain shot through my body, and I screamed.

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“Do you think she’s alright?” A worried voice croaked close to my face. I couldn’t move. I didn’t want to. I laid there, my eyes closed and my breath short and quick. *At least I’m alive. Alive is good. But what happened?* I thought. I clenched my right hand into a fist, relieved to not find the diamond there. I closed my left hand; no diamond. I tried to make a sound, but my voice wasn’t working right. My back ached so much I felt as if I would never move again.

“Look! She’s okay!” That voice was my mother for sure. I mustered up the strength to open my eyes. Four faces crowded around me, and I could see the red, white and blue light flashing behind them, and the sound of paramedics talking. My mother, brother, father, and Doctor Brown all looked very worried as they stood above me. Later, they told me I had fallen off the roof while ‘sleep walking’. I’d fallen onto a thin pile of hay, so that was better. Not good, but better. I hadn’t broken any bones. Doctor Brown called it a miracle. I couldn’t move my back for a few days, but after that I’d be alright. I often thought of looking for the diamond, or what might be left of it. Finally, curiosity won over and I went out behind the barn. I looked in the tall grass behind the barn, out into the cow pasture, on the roof of the barn, right up along the red walls of the barn, and all the way out to the tree line, in case it had gone farther than I’d thought. But I could never find anything. Maybe a cow ate it after all.