

## Wrapping Up A Little Bit of Trouble

W.M. Akers

My brother, Davis, doesn't know a thing about Christmas. He thinks the whole point of the holiday is having fun and singing songs and getting presents. He's wrong. Christmas is about wrapping paper, and that's all.

It's December 20<sup>th</sup>. The tree is decorated, the lights are lit, and my bedroom closet is full of presents. These aren't gifts for me—I don't really care about gifts for me—but gifts for my family. I got dad a dorky T-shirt with some comic book character on it; I got mom a fancy new cooking knife; and I got my brother some records, because he's a weirdo and he likes old records. And now it's time for my favorite part of the holiday season. It's time to get out the wrapping paper.

I carry two rolls of our nicest paper into my room, balancing them carefully with some Scotch tape, scissors, ribbon and labels. I make sure to point the scissors downward since my hands are a little too full to be carrying so much at the same time. I drop the load onto my bedroom floor, holding my breath for a split second, hoping the scissors don't land on my foot. They don't. Time to get to work.

I don't know if I love wrapping presents because I'm great at it, or if I'm great at wrapping presents because I love it so much. Either way, it's one of the only relaxing things that happen during the crazy holiday season. For 15 or 20 minutes, I am in complete control. Any problem I might have—whether it's a corner that won't line up right, a spot of untidy folding, or a limp ribbon—I can solve easily. All it takes is a little time, a little focus, and an unwillingness to settle for second best.

My brother is different. In wrapping presents, like every other part of life, he's always happy to be second best.

I wrap his presents first, because records present no real challenge. Just a few seconds of work, and they are securely packaged—their wrapping paper exterior far more beautiful than the ugly album covers underneath. I'm just finishing when Davis wanders into my bedroom.

"Hey Gloria," he says.

"You're supposed to knock! It's Christmas. I'm wrapping presents in here!"

"Well you're done wrapping mine, aren't you? I mean, those are obviously records."

"Yes, they're records."

"Don't look so grumpy. If you want to surprise people, you have to wrap a little more creatively. Since you're done wrapping my present, and I'm done wrapping yours, can I come in here and wrap with you?"

"Fine."

Davis returns a few minutes later lugging a guitar case, a shopping bag, bongo drums, and an umbrella.

"What's all that junk for?" I ask.

"I don't use wrapping paper anymore."

"Good. You'd only waste it."

"That's a fact. What did you get Dad?" I show him the dorky T-shirt. "He's gonna *love* that. I got him this old map of the city. They were selling at the flea market. It only cost \$2!"

"An old map? That's a pretty crummy present."

"No, think about it! He's always talking about how the city was different when he was a kid—all the roads that have changed and stuff. Now he can remember!"

"Hmm. That is pretty good. What about Mom?"

"I made her this cutting board out of some driftwood I found. Pretty neat, huh?"

"You washed that, right?"

“Nah—it’s saltwater. It’s clean.”

I shudder and make a mental note to wash the cutting board before Mom tries to use it.

“You should probably sand it down more. She’ll get splinters.”

“Good idea.”

“Who are the bongo drums for? Please don’t give those to Mom. She hates noise.”

“Nah, these are for Dad. Watch.” He stuffs Dad’s map into the bottom of the bongo drums. “Bam! Now it’s wrapped.”

“That doesn’t count as wrapping a present.”

“Don’t think of it as wrapping, then. I hid it. The important thing is he can’t tell what it is by looking at it.” He opens the guitar case and nestles the cutting board inside. “Now this is wrapped, too.”

“So Mom is going to think you got her a guitar?”

“And then she opens it, and it’s this awesome cutting board!”

I can’t help but smile. “What are you doing with the umbrella?”

“Well I couldn’t just get Dad a \$2 map. So mom and I picked out this super nice, gigantic umbrella for him to keep in his car. You know, because he hates getting rained on.”

“Everyone hates getting rained on.”

“I don’t know how to wrap it, though.”

“Just lay it down, roll out some paper, and fold it carefully. I’ll show you.”

“I’m sorry, but that’s just...boring. I’ve got it! He’s going to know it’s an umbrella no matter what, right? So why don’t we have some fun with that?”

“What do you mean?” I’ve barely finished asking the question before the umbrella pops open in my face. “You are not going to wrap the umbrella like that! You’ll use up all the rest of the wrapping paper.”

“So finish what you’ve got to do, and then we’ll do it. Come on, Sis. It’s Christmas. You are allowed to have fun.”

I can’t let him know it, but it does seem funny. So when I finish wrapping the knife and the T-shirt, I hand the wrapping paper over to him.

“Tape the end of the roll down there,” he commands, “and we’ll just pass the roll around the umbrella until it’s all wrapped up.”

“That’s gonna look messy.”

“It’s gonna look hilarious.”

So, I follow his instructions. We use the rest of that roll and part of the other one, not to mention all the scotch tape. None of the corners are tidy. None of the edges line up. It’s the messiest present I’ve ever wrapped. It’s also probably the best.

“It looks like a five-foot-tall diamond,” I say. “Dad’s gonna think we got him a giant diamond! This is perfect.”

“Yeah...only, one thing.”

“What?”

“How are we going to get it through your doorway?”