

“The Gift” by Cecelia Ahern
2009, HarperCollins, 302 pages

On a frosty December morning, Lou Suffern buys a cup of coffee for the homeless man huddled on the ground outside the entrance to his office building. A brief conversation with Gabriel leaves Lou so impressed that he secures a job for the young man in his company’s mail room. It’s an act of uncharacteristic generosity with unexpected repercussions.

Gabe settles into his new job easily. He is a quick, dedicated employee with an uncanny ability to be two places at the same time. He also has a penchant for meddling in Lou’s life, and seems to know far more about Lou than he should.

Lou Suffern appears to be a successful man. He is a powerful executive with a good chance at that next big promotion. He’s got a lovely wife, two beautiful children and a gorgeous home. But a scratch to the surface reveals a man so involved with his career that he has no time for his family.

Lou routinely skips family gatherings, including his daughter’s Christmas play. His infant son doesn’t even know him, and cries when Lou comes near. He justifies his chronic absences by congratulating himself on being such a great provider.

When his sister asks him to help plan their father’s 70th birthday party, he designates the task to his assistant, cutting his sister out of the process so that he won’t have to waste time answering her questions. He breaks promises to his family so often that his siblings no longer expect anything from him.

He spends his life rushing to the next appointment while simultaneously fielding phone calls and answering emails on his blackberry. He is constantly overbooked, leaving each meeting a few minutes early to arrive a few minutes late for the next one. It’s a breakneck pace, but he can’t imagine living any other way.

Gabe’s presence begins to unnerve Lou. He senses judgment in Gabe’s gentle blue eyes, finds himself questioning his motives and regretting his decisions. Unaccustomed to feeling guilty about anything, Lou eyes Gabe with suspicion, convincing himself that Gabe is an enemy. As a result, Lou very nearly misses the opportunity of his lifetime.

The Gift is a perfect holiday read. Lou, pushing determinedly towards ever greater success, is completely oblivious to the wonders of each ordinary day. He is blissfully unaware of the precious time slipping between his fingers. To Lou, time is something to be managed and made the most of. It is up to Gabe to teach him to slow down and enjoy each precious moment as it comes. Lou must learn that unlike money, time cannot be earned and is most valuable when it is shared.

Cecelia Ahern (*There’s No Place Like Here; Thanks for the Memories*) has crafted another moving, gripping tale grounded in reality and sprinkled with touch of the fantastic. *The Gift* is a quick read that packs a powerful punch, urging readers to check their priorities while there is still time.

