

Priceless

By Nisha Coleman

Simon loved money. He loved making money and saving money and counting money. Every night before bed he would count the savings in his piggybank.

**Twenty dollars of birthday money from his mom +
five dollars for shovelling his neighbour Mrs. Garcia's walkway last winter = 25 dollars.
Twenty-five dollars +
two dollars from the tooth fairy = 27 dollars.**

After his mom kissed him goodnight, instead of counting sheep Simon would count all the things he could buy with his money.

**One train set ...
Two and a half chocolate cakes ...
Twenty-six lollipops ...**

But for a while now, every night when he counted his money, it was the same amount. He needed more money.

When he saw Mrs. Garcia sitting out on her porch the next day, Simon asked, "Do you have any chores for me?"

"I could use some help weeding my flower garden," she said. "At my age it's getting hard to bend down."

Simon got right to work. After an hour he had filled one whole basket with weeds. Mrs. Garcia gave him **a glass of lemonade and five dollars.**

That night he went to bed early so he could count his money:

20 + 5 + 2 + 5 = 32 dollars!

He went to sleep happy, dreaming of the Lego he could buy. But when he woke up in the morning, there was a hole where the happiness had been. He needed more money.

That afternoon, he returned to Mrs. Garcia's and filled **two baskets of weeds.** She gave him **three cookies, two glasses of lemonade, and ten dollars.**

Ten dollars! He was so excited that he counted his money as soon as he got home.

20 + 5 + 2 + 5 + 10 = 42! Wow!

He was happy again. That night he dreamt of all the art supplies he could buy. Finger paints and coloured pencils and markers. But in the morning when he woke up, there was an even bigger hole where his happiness had been. He needed more money.

He returned to Mrs. Garcia's that afternoon. But he had finished weeding the flower garden. There were no leaves to rake and no snow to shovel.

"You could weed my vegetable garden in the back," said Mrs. Garcia.

Simon got to work right away. He couldn't wait to count all his money when he got home. He had half-filled a basket with weeds when he heard someone say, "Hi."

He looked around, but there was only a rabbit sitting at the edge of the garden watching him.

"Hi?" Simon said.

"What are you doing?" asked the rabbit.

"I'm weeding," Simon replied.

"Why?"

"For money," Simon said.

"What is money?" asked the rabbit.

Simon paused. How could he explain what money was? Especially to a rabbit.

"It's something we use to buy things that we need. Like food and toys."

The rabbit wrinkled her nose in confusion.

"Everything has a price," Simon explained. **"A train set costs 25 dollars. A chocolate cake costs ten dollars. And a lollypop costs one dollar."**

"I see," said the rabbit. "How much does it cost for a sunny day?"

Simon laughed, but the rabbit was serious so he said, "You can't buy sunny days!"

“What about a refreshing rainfall?”

“No, you can’t buy those either!”

“OK, what about a friend? Or a story? Or love?”

“No!” Simon exclaimed. “None of those are things you can buy!”

“Aren’t those things we need?” asked the rabbit. “Aren’t they valuable?”

Simon didn’t know what to say. Maybe not all valuable things had a price.

“How much for one of those carrots?” asked the rabbit.

“Do you have any money?” Simon asked.

The rabbit shook her head. Simon pulled out one the carrots and gave it to the rabbit.

“You can have it for free,” he said, hoping Mrs. Garcia wouldn’t mind.

“Thank you!” the rabbit cried in glee. “My favourite!”

Simon continued weeding and thinking. When Mrs. Garcia came outside with his payment, he had an idea.

“Would it be alright if instead of money, I brought some garden vegetables and flowers home for my mom?”

Mrs. Garcia smiled. “That’s a wonderful idea!”

Simon and Mrs. Garcia picked **two zucchinis, three carrots, 20 beans and one bouquet of purple and yellow flowers.**

“What beautiful flowers!” his mother beamed when he returned home. “And these vegetables will be perfect for a stew.”

Together they washed the vegetables and his mom began to cook. Before long the house smelled sublime.

“Can I invite Mrs. Garcia over for dinner?” asked Simon.

“That’s a wonderful idea!” said his mom.

After he invited Mrs. Garcia for dinner, Simon stopped at the bakery. He used the money he'd earned from weeding the day before to buy a chocolate cake for dessert.

Later that evening, Simon, his mom and Mrs. Garcia gathered to eat. The flowers looked so fancy in the middle of the table. Simon took a bite of the stew. It was positively scrumptious.

"These vegetables are way better than the ones from the store," he said.

"That's because they were grown and prepared with love," Mrs. Garcia winked.

As they ate, Mrs. Garcia told them stories of her garden back home when she was a little girl, a place far away where it never snowed so everything grew and grew. Parrots would hang out in her backyard, and sometimes scorpions would hide in her shoes! She told them about the special fruits that grew there. One looked like a dragon. Another looked like a star.

"And you would love guanabanas, Simon," Mrs. Garcia said. "They're as sweet as this chocolate cake!"

When it came time to leave, Mrs. Garcia took Simon's hand.

"Thank you for inviting me tonight, Simon."

"Thank you for your stories, Mrs. Garcia."

That night, Simon didn't count his money. After his mom kissed him goodnight, instead of thinking about all the things he could buy, he thought about all the things that money couldn't possibly buy.

A friend + a story + love = priceless.