

One Word

By: Viola McCarthy

It was the first day of school in New York City. Lucia was thrilled, but yet so scared. She had never been to a public school. “*What if* I do badly?”, she thought, “*What if* the other kids don’t like me?” Lucia couldn’t stop the *what ifs*. As her mom walked in the room, Lucia was filled with panic. “Lucia, it’s time to go to the subway,” her mother said.

Lucia slowly stumbled out of the room feeling like her legs were made out of rubber. She finally got to the subway station. Her heart was beating so fast that it felt like she might have a heart attack. She found her seat on the subway. As she sat down, the train thumped and bumped. Finally, she made it to school.

As she got to class, her teacher welcomed Lucia and showed her to her seat. A few hours later her teacher, Mrs. Michel, announced that they were going to do a writing project. Lucia was thrilled! She loved to write. Mrs. Michel explained that the class would be making cards for strangers with a word of encouragement. After they made the cards they would hand them out in the hope that it would brighten their day. Lucia couldn’t wait!

She and her classmates started making their cards. After school, Lucia raced home to make even more cards! Lucia worked all night from the moment she got home. The next morning as she walked to the subway stop she proudly carried the 35 cards she had made.

As Lucia walked onto the subway, she could feel the bubbles fizz up in her stomach. She didn’t know it was possible to feel so nervous and so excited at the same time. Lucia scanned the subway looking for someone who looked like they were having a bad day or upset. She saw an older man with white, crusty, curly hair. The man looked sad. As she slowly walked toward him she paused. She thought, “*What if* he doesn’t like it?” Lucia decided to push through the wall of fear inside her. She slowly shuffled nervously towards the man and said, “H-h-hi.”

The man turned towards her and smiled kindly, “Oh hello, dear. I’m Hank.”

“I’m Lucia,” she said nervously.

“What a pretty name”, he said.

“I-I thought you looked like you were having a rough day, so I wanted to give you this.” As Hank read the note, his face lit up like the Christmas tree at Rockefeller Center at Christmas time. Hank started to cry happy tears.

“Oh, my dear, this is the sweetest thing I’ve ever read. It really was just what I needed.” For the rest of the ride they talked and laughed like they had known each other for years. After seeing Hank’s reaction, Lucia was less and less nervous with each card she passed out. The rest of the week Lucia handed out more and more notes and spread joy everywhere she went. With each card she passed out she noticed the bubbles fizzing up in her stomach that had been full of anxiety were replaced with happiness.

After all the cards had been passed out, Lucia thought about the 35 strangers she had met over the last week. She smiled when she thought about Hank’s reaction and how she had been so nervous at first. As she walked home from the subway station, she thought of some of the other people she had met and how much it meant to them to receive an encouraging card from a stranger. Lucia noticed that the strangers weren’t the only ones who had changed because of the cards she handed out. Even though it was scary at first, it ended up being something that brought her joy and built her confidence. From then on, she looked forward to going to school and finding ways to encourage her classmates. She also discovered that she enjoyed making the cards so much that she continued to do it even after the assignment was over. Each time she handed out a card, it always amazed her that one word could make such a big difference to someone.