

Christian's

Christmas

Conundrum

A Holiday Story by

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Christmas Day

“This angel will not go away in this lifetime,” a girl said.

Christian’s eyes shifted around in his sockets as he dared to remain in an interesting dream that he knew he would lose the memory of when he woke up. White light entered through his eye lids as he fought between remaining asleep and waking up. He started leaning towards the latter since it was the day he had been looking forward to for the past month, ever since his mother teased him with wrapped gifts from family members that she took upon herself to put under the tree.

The tree this year was lit with white lights instead of the colored lights Christian was accustomed to. His mother, Sarah, wanted to do something different this year, something to “mix things up”; those were her words, not his. Christian hated this year’s holiday decorations. He thought they were boring, and there was nothing but a room full of regular lights. Christian’s mentality was that there was enough white light made by the lamps, so why did there need to be more white lights?

He opened his eyes fully and looked above at the imperfections in the ceiling. When he couldn’t sleep, he

would just stare and count the creases. He never settled on a number though; he fell asleep before he could finish. Christian wanted to know but it was never the highest of priorities for him; not like the time he counted how many licks it actually took to get to the center of a Tootsie Pop. If you ask Christian, the number is 6,562.

Yes. He counted one night at his aunt's house as his cousins slept.

The realization that it was finally Christmas day had not sunk in quite yet. The room was silent; so silent that Christian could hear the snowflakes hitting the window, those huge white snowflakes that he had grown attached to since his parents moved to Norton, Ohio five years ago.

Home was a split level house at the abrupt end of a street. At times Christian felt like no one else was around for miles, but that was the furthest thing from the truth. He consistently had to worry about the blonde girl down the street coming over to play. "She's cute, at least for a girl," Christian thought, but was a bit bossy though; a real Bossy-McGee as his dad would put it.

The blonde girl down the street, Christina, thought that Christian liked her because of her pretty blonde hair and because her name was like his. That and because she could boss him around to do things like play dolls or house

when she wanted. Normally Christian wouldn't fathom doing what a girl told him, but there was not many kids in his neighborhood and he needed to keep all the friends he could, especially now.

The heater kicked in and the gust of warmth covered Christian's bed and face, waking him up even more. He hopped out of bed and his feet touched the cold hardwood floor that ran throughout the entire upstairs. Adults would typically insist on their kids at least wearing socks throughout the house when the floor was cold, but not Christian's parents. They knew better than to try convincing him or even to argue because they knew he loved the feel of it on his feet and when his feet got too cold he would put on his socks on in time, but he would be the first to take them off in the winter.

His mother heard his feet hit the floor all the way from the kitchen. She stopped drying dishes and stood over the sink with her hands firmly placed on the counter, holding herself up. She was tired to be sure, but she knew there was something else aiding to her fatigue.

Sarah was pregnant going into her final month. She had been busy this holiday season; taking care of herself and keeping up with Christian. She had pushed herself way more than she needed to, but that couldn't have been

helped; a mother has to do what she can, especially when a father is absent from the household.

It was a hard position to be in at this time of year. It was only in October when Christian's father left home to live in an apartment at his new job in Florida. Sarah didn't want to live in Florida; she wanted to be at home. Home, the place you want to go to at night to sleep, and where all of your family is and on days like today when you get to see them or at the very least take comfort in the knowledge that they are around.

It wasn't just the move that made Christian's parents separate. It was the consistent lack of communication and not being around each other; the not knowing what to talk about, or all the business trips that the father took. They lost the ability to talk to each other and any emotion that was shown was through a series of noises and head shakes, or nods. Sarah knew her son was picking up on the tension and it destroyed her that she couldn't make him understand why daddy wasn't around right now, or even why an oath to God to stay together in sickness and in health was so easy to let fall apart.

"MOM," Christian yelled from the other end of the house as his footsteps got louder and faster as he ran down

the hallway. Sarah turned around, still holding on to the end of the sink to keep herself standing.

She started to think it was due to her heart; it has never been a strong heart. The doctors always told her to take it as easy as possible. The fact that Christian was born and Sarah was unharmed was a miracle in of itself. When the news came that she was going to have another baby was exciting to her; the chance to prove the doctors wrong one more time, but it didn't make the danger lessen any.

Christian ran into the kitchen and slid across the hardwood floors so he can beat his record from a few weeks ago where he almost made it to the sliding glass window that lead to the second floor porch. He had an intense look on his face that Sarah found hilarious; the mean eyes and the tongue sticking out was a priceless moment that she worried she would never get on film or camera in her lifetime.

The floor was slippery from being mopped the night before; nice and clean with no filth in sight, the socks were newer and without the slip resistant foam specs that Christian usually had on per his mother's request, *she worries too much.*

Christian saw his mother in his peripheral vision and in spite of her distain for the games he plays where he

runs the risk of hurting himself; he ran and started to slide across the floor. *This is going to be the furthest I've gone yet, I just know it!* He was determined and sure of himself. His tongue appeared from his mouth as he stuck it out whenever he concentrated on something. The slide was commencing and it was going to be one for the books, well, the book inside Christian's head anyways.

Christian measured and kept track of his progress by the kitchen table and breaks in the wood. He slid easily to the beginning of the table, which was the easy part; the middle of the table is when you know if you will pass it completely. *I did it! Past the middle of the table!*

Indeed he did. Oh the sweet smell of victory that he was feeling. An image popped into his mind as he continued with both feet on the floor, sliding into what he thought would be legend, the image of friends from school and family members applauding his success. There was Colin, his best friend and his cousins from Indiana. Oh the glory he was feeling...until a girl he did not recognize was watching him not applauding. Their eyes met; *those eyes look so familiar*. She started to speak to him and as he slid he watched her mouth the words "watch out".

The cloud of a daydream dissipated quickly and as Christian looked forward the glass door was right in front

of him. No one could prepare him for the thud that would echo through the house or how his face hitting the glass would sting, but he would find out in a second.

Whack!

That was a term that Christian thought grownups made up to describe something hitting another object, but it turned out that it was an actual sound.

Sarah put her hands over her mouth in despair and Christian's face and body slid down the glass like when a cartoon character runs into a wall, or boulder. As he slid down the glass the oil from his face and saliva left its mark on it that Sarah has only just cleaned the day before. Sarah ran, and hobbled, or, "robbed," over to Christian as his body hit the floor. She got on her knees, which she was not to do, and picked Christian up to cradle him.

"Are you okay kiddo?" she asked rocking him.

Christian remained quiet as she held him.

"Christian," she continued, "can you tell me you're okay?" No response. She worried that he may have given himself a concussion. "Christian!"

"Can I have some French Toast?" he replied. She sighed in relief and in anger.

He was fine, just a red mark on the side of his face. She was mad at herself for being too over protective. It was

the same since he was a child; fall off the couch or bed, run into walls, slide down the bannister and fall on his rear...he would just shake it off until he knew someone was watching, and then he would cry to get something he wanted.

“I just made Cream of Wheat with chocolate for you,” Christian’s mother said. She didn’t understand why Christian would not want the chocolate rice cereal that he swarmed to consistently; the sugary, chocolaty goodness that Sarah felt bad for feeding him sometimes.

“I don’t want that,” he insisted, “you always make that, and you haven’t been making it right lately.” Sarah got upset. The kind of upset that makes you tear up and want to yell, but Sarah couldn’t exert her emotions right then. She wanted to tell him to “be quiet!” and “eat what I make you!”, but what he said to her about it being “lately” made her feel guilt about his dad not being around.

“I really think that you sh...”

“I WANT FRENCH TOAST!” Christian yelled.

Sarah looked down at the clean hardwood floor and laid her hands against it and decided to claim defeat. She wanted to call her husband and tell him to come home for the day so Christian would be happy for once.

“Okay,” she claimed. She turned her body and watched the snowflakes flurry to the right. The porch and the back yard was caked in snow perfectly, no footprints, no animal tracks and no sign of the ground. All she wanted to do is go down the hill near the climbing tree with a sled like she used to do, when she was healthy. A bird landed on one of the branches of the tree by the window and the snow fell, snapping Sarah out of her day dream.

“Could you...,” she said while watching Christian leave the kitchen and run downstairs to the Christmas tree.

“Help mommy up please?” she whispered to herself knowing that he was too far away to hear her anyways. She didn’t take it to heart; kids will be kids, especially on Christmas Day.

After a few seconds of scooting herself up the side of the counter, she regained her composure and started walking to the stairs to climb down. As she went down the stairs she heard a noise that was all too familiar. It reminded her of the time she caught Christian tearing the recipes out of her recipe book that her grandmother gave her.

The ripping of paper was more apparent as she descended the second sets of stairs. Wrapping paper flew in the air as she stared to witness her son, the boy who waited

for his parents to sit down to watch him open his gifts, destroy the beautiful paper and wrapping like a feral cat.

“Why did you do that,” Sarah asked her son. She couldn’t look him in the eye, because of the mess he created.

“What,” he replied with an attitude.

“We always watch you open your gifts from Santa”

“You were taking too long,” he replied.

“That’s not an excuse to be rude and inconsiderate,” she said with a heightened tone. He stared at her with hate and so much on his mind. She knew there was going to be a day it all comes out; she just didn’t want it to be today.

“We only do this once a year and we like to watch you open the presents,” she continued more calmly.

“What “we”,” Christian asked, “What other people are here?” He stood up amidst all the holiday wrapping. “Dad’s not here! Who ya talkin’ about?”

Sarah put her hand on her chest as a defense mechanism to keep herself from crying. She wasn’t sure what it was to make her upset, the fact her hormones may be out of whack or the realization that her son was right and she had no idea how to justify it.

“Santa gave me some of these gifts too! Mine! They have my name on them, not yours!”

Sarah, hearing her son for the first time yell at her was making her upset and in the stream of negative words coming her way, she decided to move back upstairs to avoid it all. It was time to acknowledge the fact that her son was mad, confused, sad, and most of all...he had become a brat.

The gift that Christian noticed the most was the recent 'Morphin' Mac' game that released over the holiday called 'Morphin' Mac III: The Mighty'. A videogame was rare for Christian, at least a brand new one. Sarah never liked them much as she figured her son could do more with his spare time, but games helped his reflexes when he was a kid so who was she to complain. Christian was clumsy, well, that is an understatement. Sarah always said Christian could fall down because he stood up the wrong way. As comical as it was to watch, Sarah and her husband agreed that it would be best to try something to help his hand/eye coordination. It worked, but it then turned into an addiction over time, one that led to Christian only playing it on the weekends and until he finished the game on the hardest difficulty level.

Christian tore open the box and placed it in the game console not paying any mind to the other gifts that were strewn across the floor. A familiar jingle come

through the television speakers; the ‘Morphin’ Mac’ theme song was coming on and it gave Christian goose bumps as any epic music could to a fan of the series. The first level started and instead of finding the first magic drink that made his character invincible he heard his mother’s voice off in the distance.

He placed the oversized controller on the floor and quietly walked around the paper so that he wouldn’t make a noise as his resolve to eavesdrop became greater.

“*I don’t know,*” Sarah said in the distance from where Christian was lurking. It was a one sided conversation to be sure and no one has come over to the house that he knew of. *Who is she talking to then?*”

Sarah paced back and forth cradling her stomach. She started to bite her nails during her time on the phone; it was an awkward conversation to be having on this day of all days.

“I...don’t...know. I can’t make that any clearer to you,” she said to the person on the other end of the phone.

“It’s been rough for everyone and I think you should come by today...No, I don’t think it’s simply a phase...Can you...can you please...NO! Let me finish. Can you just be a man and do what’s right? Better yet, can

you play the role of a father who acts like he cares for a day?”

Christian sat on the landing before the second set of stairs listening to his mother talk to his father in a way that he never has before; with hostility. Everything was coming apart around him and he didn't know what to do.

“I am the reason this is happening,” Christian thought, “I can't do anything right and I am mad all of the time. I get so mad, but it's like I am trying to tell them but instead of talking I do things I wouldn't normally do. I know this isn't me. I am another person now and maybe if I go away for a while and come back when things are more normal, that would be best. Just for a while, not long. Maybe dad will come back if I leave. Yeah! I will leave and then he will look for me.”

Sarah had her back to the stairs and hallway that Christian crept down to go to his room where he quietly closed the door.

“Don't give me the flimsy excuse of the snow being too high,” Sarah continued to yell at her husband who was currently staying in a studio apartment located closer to his work, “You own a SUV, you can get here in peace, I believe in you... YES THAT WAS MEANT TO BE SARCASTIC! I am simply asking you just help me mend

our child's heart for a few hours and then you can go back to ignoring me..."

Christian slid down his closed bedroom door as he listened to his mother's side of the argument. As his back felt the wood skimming against him, he looked outside at the snow that was coming down heavily. Something caught his eye. He didn't want to acknowledge what he saw, he just wanted it to be colors blended with the snow on the ground, but he knew better. *Maybe someone dropped something out near the road?*

Christian stood back up and walked over to the window near his bed. His movements were slow, like that girl he saw in a scary movie walking towards a dark room; you know something scary was going to happen but you have to make sure for your own piece of mind. The red and blue stripes were becoming more apparent on the side of the road. Christian saw this kind of sign before, the sign of people leaving, the sign of a piece of your life changing as well as all those involved. It was a realtor sign, indicating that his house was for sale.

*This isn't fair! I didn't do anything do deserve this!
This is her fault!*

"Why?" Sarah asked her husband on the other end of the line. Sarah had moved around so much that the

coiled wire from the phone had wrapped her several times and made it a task just to become unraveled. The stress from talking to her separated husband and the phone cord made her yell for the first time in years.

“Why? He’s your son too!”

Christian didn’t understand what that meant. Did she not want him around? Did dad not want to come? Was only one of them claiming him? These were questions that only the adults knew and because of that, a child could misinterpret what it meant, and Christian did just that.

Bolting out of his room he went to the closet and pulled down his red, heavy coat from the wire hanger and slid it on as he continued to walk down the stairs to put on his black snow boots with superheroes on them.

Sarah saw him bolt down the stairs and proceeded to hang up the phone in anger and frustration. The phone cord was a vice holding her in her own little purgatory. *Why do we even have this phone cord or this cord at all?* After about ten seconds of untangling herself, Sarah decided to simply raise the cord over her head and duck underneath, but her pregnant belly wouldn’t allow it so easily. She was worked up and at a high stress level which is not good for a regular person, much less for a woman

with heart issues and has been told to lay off her feet as much as possible.

“Where are you going?” she yelled down the stairs to Christian as he was finishing up putting on his boots.

“Away from you” Christian snapped. Not truly understanding what she just heard, Sarah had to stop and process the snide remark her little boy just made.

“What did you just say to me?” Sarah yelled getting worked up even more.

“You heard me!”

Sarah threw the extremely long telephone cord to the ground and stomped towards the stairwell, hovering over it, feeling a little dizzy.

“All you ever do is fight with him! Now he is not coming today and now you are selling our home because you can’t figure things out! You are messing up everything and you don’t even care!”

“It’s more complicated than that! You get back here right now! Don’t make me come down there after you!”

Christian opened the front door to the eight inches of snow outside that he would have to trek through and mess up the perfect white blanket that God created for the neighborhood.

“You won’t,” he yelled back before he took a step outside, “that would mean you would have to make an actual effort!”

Sarah couldn’t help her condition and not being able to move around in a way that people are accustomed to. Christian knew this but went and threw it back in her face anyways, but little did she know that the jab was not aimed at her physical condition but more her mental one. Taking the insult at face value, she hobbled down the stairs with no coat or shoes and ran after Christian.

The snow flew up from Christian’s boots as he ran from his mother and the house he called home. He had no idea where he was going to go, but he figured he would just figure it out along the way.

Sarah’s feet hit the soft snow with only her socks on to protect them. She glided her legs in the snow with little effort to pick them up and make progress to get to her son quickly.

“Come back,” she yelled to her son. Her heart was thumping hard, harder than it should be. Christian knew his mother was behind him, trekking through the snow on the ground and the wind stinging her face, but decided to walk towards the realtor sign.

It was hard for Sarah to breathe. It was like inhaling shards of glass to her and trying to catch her son was going to prove impossible. Christian reached the sign and started kicking and beating it.

“Is it not enough that you made Dad leave?” he yelled as he kicked in the sign.

Sarah fell to her knees because her legs could not take it.

“You yell at him and then you want to leave our home like it means nothing!”

Bang. The snow fell in front of the sign onto the ground.

Sarah’s vision was blurry and she felt a pain in her arm. She clutched it with her other arm and watched Christian spout of hateful things at the sign and at her; her son...her only son.

“Oh no,” she muttered before she fell to her side.

Christian, still pounding away his anger and frustration at the inanimate object was going on a rant about something that didn’t really have anything to do with the initial point, stopped when he noticed his mother lying in the snow.

“Mom?”

She didn't move from her spot. Christian started walking towards her in hopes that she would hear him better

“Mom.”

There was no response from her. He noticed that she may be shivering and that was some movement at least, but in spite of his concern he also thought that she may be playing a game with him to help him calm down.

“Mommy?”

It wasn't a game. He knelt down beside her and shook her a bit. He could see the coldness coming out of her nose and mouth; she was still breathing at least. This was it. The moment that his mom and dad told him and taught him about in case this type of emergency even happened, his chance to be a hero, the need to call 9-1-1.

He shuffled through the snow and told his mom to hold on and that he would be back in a flash. He ran and fell up the stairs as he was trying to get to the phone in the kitchen. As he took the phone off the receiver, pressed the numbers that would let him talk to someone on the other end for help. As the line started to ring, he could put the phone all the way to his mouth because the phone cord got tangled up. *Who has a phone cord? Seriously!*

A bored sounding woman on the other end of the line responded.

“9-1-1, what’s your emergency?”

“My mom fell over outside and she isn’t getting up.” The responder’s voice perked up at the sound of a child on the other end.

“What’s your name?”

“Christian”

“Okay Christian, can you give me your address?”

Christian blanked. Of all the times in the world to forget his address, this was the worse one. Christian’s eyes shifted back and forth trying to remember his address.

“Hello,” the dispatcher said in search for a response.

“3266 Red Patch Drive, that’s the address!”

“Can you tell if she is breathing?”

“Yes, she is. I can see her breath outside”

“She is outside?”

“Yeah, she fell in the snow.”

The 9-1-1 responder sighed and said to Christian, “Okay, you have to take every coat and blanket you have and put them on top her to keep her warm. Does she have any medical conditions?”

“Um,” Christian said, “She had heart issues and she is pregnant.” The phone line in both directions was

completely silent and in that time Christian thought, “*She has a heart condition and she’s pregnant. I am a terrible boy. I did this. God help me.*”

The ambulance came and rushed to her aid with a gurney being pushed through the snow that had accumulated over his legs by the time they had arrived. Christian watched as the men tried to position his mother to be able to pick her up onto the gurney, but she yelped every time they touched her. With every faint cry and loud squeal, Christian jumped back a little more. As much as he wanted this to end, it didn’t seem like it was going to.

The paramedics placed her on the gurney after several minutes of fighting her pain and motioned Christian to come with them into the back of the ambulance where he would watch his mommy writhe in pain and all he would do is think to himself how it would be “all his fault”.

The trip to the ambulance was long and surreal. It had never occurred to Christian that his poor decisions would lead to someone getting hurt, even worse...his mom. Christian didn’t cry as his mother stopped writhing in pain. He wasn’t concerned what his dad would say or how he would explain why Sarah was in the cold chasing him in the first place. Christian just didn’t want to be around at all

and just wanted to go to sleep and pretend that this awful Christmas day would just be over.

The ambulance came to a stop and the men pulled her out of the truck slowly and guided her to the emergency. Christian followed them and overheard them talking about putting his mom in some called the I.C.U.

“What is that?” he asked himself, “If everything was okay they would have just put her in a regular room...right?”

Christian didn't bother to ask what it meant. Nobody ever listened to what he thought or paid any attention to his questions; he was just a kid after all and no one takes a kid seriously unless they are crying about something. That was the way Christian saw it anyways; grown-ups are always so concerned with their own problems that they don't see how anyone else feels about things.

They placed Sarah on a bed with tubes going into her throat and arms, machines that beeped a lot and liquids going into her body without her even knowing what is going on and all Christian could do is sit on the uncomfortable couch and watch as the snow fell. The stars were the only thing visible to Christian as they were now on the fourth floor of the hospital. Christian, as much as he

told himself how stupid it was, wished upon a star in hopes that there was some good left in life and that it is not all for nothing. Christian put his knees on the light blue couch cushions and looked up to the stars, particularly the North Star.

“I don’t know if this is going to do any good or not, but if there is something...real...that all these people believe in then I think this is the time I need to see or know something that will help me get through this. I am not going to ask for my mom’s health because that might go against your plans and all, and it may come off selfish and I don’t want that seeing how I have been selfish for a while now. I...*sniff*...I just need to know that it’s not all for nothing and that there is a purpose for this...for things.” Christian prayed.

“I need to believe that there is more than just this and not the sadness I see or feel.”

Christian climbed down off the couch as it pleather made a loud sound. He stopped in his place to see if the sound woke his mom up. It didn’t.

Beep...beep. Christian watched as the green line on the screen bounced every few seconds and what that meant

for her heart. He took off his winter coat and gloves and climbed to the foot of the bed. Christian curled up next to her feet. *She always complained that her feet were always cold no matter how warm it was.* He pulled up the sheet to check her feet. They had the socks she came in with.

This was not good enough.

He sat up and took off his shoes. The dirt and wetness from the bottom of his boots got all over his hands and they slipped from them hitting the linoleum floor that was in need of a good waxing. From his angle, her tummy was taller than her feet. *I bet your going to be a chunky one...at least I hope you will be and hope you will be okay.*

Christian pulled his socks off and proceeded to put them on his mom's feet, but they were so small compared to hers. They went over the top of her feet tightly, but the socks soon started rising up as they were just too small to stay on. Christian watched as his grand gesture to help his mother fell off of her and onto the bed. He stared at his socks and dark spots on them where his heel and toes went and all he could think was, "There is nothing I can do for her."

He collapsed back around her feet and listened as the "beeps" from the monitor grew further and further apart. He fell asleep on his mother's feet with the hopes

that when he woke up everything would be ok. As he drifted to sleep the beeps got even further apart but Christian was too tired to get up and see if everything would be all right. In his mind, he had faith that it would be, but he knew what the beeps meant, and in his heart...didn't think it would be.

Dreaming With an Angel?

Christian woke up outside with his pajamas on. Light snow covered him and melted on his bare skin which gave him the tingling sensation to open his eyes. He sat up and dusted the light snow off of him and watched as his breath hit the cold air, only, he wasn't cold. By all accounts he should be; he should be 'freezing his nose off'; that's what his mother told him when he wanted to go outside.

"You better get your long johns on and hat, I don't want you to freeze that cute little nose off!"

It was so embarrassing, but that was Sarah, a mom who would have done what it took to keep her little guy safe, and knowing this made Christian sad as he didn't do what it took to protect his mother from bad things.

He sat up and watched the snow falling from the sky where the stars were at their brightest and the sky was dark. It was night time and there was nothing but a neighborhood street that led into a cul-de-sac. Christian, confused on why his feet were not icy yet, walked down the street and looked at the homes and decorations.

The first house on the left has colored lights around the gutters and the bushes outside. The candle like lighting decoration that went up both sides of the driveway led

friends and family to a happy home for the holidays. Christian enjoyed the colored lights on houses and trees; it was what his mom also put up. His dad never cared for the colored ones; seemed too immature for the holidays he thought, but in his dad's defense, Christian started to appreciate the white lights on the trees more and more, and when he looked to his right a little ways up the road, he found that he may be actually like white lights instead.

The modern looking home has lights around the windows and the roof of the house. The white lights were in the form of those that looked like icicles. And bushes in front of the yard were encased in lights, but just the regular ones.

Each house he passed seemed to get better and better with their decorations and as the show fell in front of Christian's face, every house he looked in was a family having dinner or opening gifts together.

The first house with the colored lights had a family with their baby that loved to rip apart the wrapping and was not as concerned with the new toy it got. That didn't matter; the mother and father had no problem laughing at their child having fun.

Music started to fill the air. A holiday tune played but Christian didn't know if it was in his head or if

everyone else could hear it as well. It was an instrumental tune that he remembered hearing on a cartoon special that he watched every year. The piano was pleasing to him and set the mood for what was surrounding him.

Every house he looked into as he walked down the street had a family but the child got older each time and as the child grew old so did the parents. Soon Christian realized that the first house was his but just angled different on this street than he was used to. The houses after that changed. Sometimes the house would have the family and child, and then the next would have the mother and child, and then one with the father and child. As Christian was close to end of the street, the mother was the same but a different man was in the picture as she got older.

When Christian reached the end, there were two houses; the left house was old and ugly with a man inside crying to himself with a small silver Christmas tree on an end table, while the other house had the same man but this time there was a lady and two children hanging on him, playing.

Christian felt bad for the man in the left house; no one to be with him on Christmas.

As Christian looked between the two houses, a dark silhouette started to emerge from the shadows. He thought

this dream was going to turn into a nightmare very fast based on how the entity was moving; very staggered.

He thought it was him; another version at least coming towards him. The being had no shoes on, taking its time to get to where Christian was standing. He put his hands forward to help the person but as he lunged forward, his fingers smashed into something that felt like glass. Christian was unable to move past that point as the two houses and the person in-between them would be impossible to get to as an invisible wall was placed between them. Looking around, Christian would have thought the lights would reflect off this barrier, like glass...but it didn't and Christian became even more confused than he was before.

“It’s okay,” the person said, “it’s meant to be there.”

Christian looked back at the person walking towards him, with the same size body and the same shaped face, and the eyes Christian saw every day in the mirror; only this was a girl.

“No matter how times I have felt it, something about snow on my feet makes me all disoriented and stuff,” she exclaimed. Christian watched as she put her hands against the glass.

“It’s for your own good,” she said.

“Why?”

“Something about worlds imploding or something if we happened to touch one another,” she explained. “Or that may have been something I saw in a movie, can’t be sure, a lot of things that blur together from up there and this world.”

Christian scowled at that term, ‘*up there*’. “Are you saying that you’re from Heaven?”

She brushed the snow from her nightgown that she was wearing and from her legs. “Listen chief, I’m not sure what to call it but it’s a pretty cool place. If you call it Heaven here, then He’ll hold true to it there.”

“Where are your wings? What about your halo?” Christian asked.

The girl stood up straight and looked at Christian. It was the first time he saw what she really looked like. It was almost uncanny how their features matched up.

“Why do you look like me?”

“I just have one of those faces,” she replied. She put her hands beneath her chin and said, fluttering her eyes, “Don’t I look like a perfect, pretty angel to you?”

Christian thought she was going to gag in her vanity.

“Oh relax, I was just kidding,” she said.

Christian watched as she paced back and forth. She wasn't completely wrong about herself; she was kind of pretty...*in a little sister or relative kind of way.*

“You still didn't answer the question!”

She turned around and told Christian, “Look chief, I don't have wings or a halo yet because I am not ‘technically’ an angel.” Christian squint his eyes and twisted his mouth in disbelief of anything that was going on. This was by far the strangest dream he had ever had. *I just want to wake up, that's all.*

“Not going to happen at the moment, chief,” she said sneaking up next to him, “at least not right now.” *How did she know what I was thinking?*

“My name is Sol, and I already know who you are, Christian,” she exclaimed.

“Soul?”

“No, Sol, no ‘u’ in the name,” she explained, “It's what my friends call me. Do you like it? I made it up myself.”

Christian sat down in the snow and leaned up against the invisible field, separating them. When he heard her name, Christian began to feel bad.

“Didn't your mom give you a name?”

Sol slid down the barrier on her side and sat next to Christian. “No,” she said softly, “I didn’t really know my mom the way that I would have liked, but I think she would have liked the name.” Christian glanced at her sadness then looked down the street and watched the snow fall onto the footprints he had left.

“My mom named me,” he told Sol.

“You’re lucky,” she replied, “There are a lot of kids out there that don’t know their parents.”

Christian looked around at Sol and she looked back at him and gave a look of concern. *It’s not fair!*

“Doesn’t it make you angry?”

“What?” she asked.

“All this sadness and pain,” Christian exclaimed, “All this loneliness and the questioning of life and thinking that it’s your entire fault, even if it really isn’t! What’s the point?”

Sol glared at Christian whose eyes were glazed over in tears ready to pour out. “That’s the hand that some of us get dealt chief, and only He really has a reason behind it.”

Christian glared back at Sol with eyes that had went from sadness to anger. “That’s the biggest cop out I have ever heard,” he said, “Whenever there is something

someone can't explain they go to the "God only knows" excuse!" Christian stopped to wipe his nose on his sleeve.

"If He is so great then why let bad things happen in the first place, especially those that are not at fault. Maybe I need to find a different God!"

"Don't say that," Sol cried out, "He is a jealous God."

"Jealous? Seems like a petty emotion for a God, don't ya think?"

Sol put her finger to her mouth in deep concentration. After a few seconds and some profound thought, she had found her reply.

"If we were made of in His image, wouldn't it make sense that He would get jealous as well?"

Christian wiped the saline from his eyes and opened his mouth expecting a response to contradict Sol, but it didn't come out. Sol bounced onto her feet and playfully pointed to Christian and paraded around saying, "Someone call the burn ward, because you...just got...aaaahhhh burned!"

Sol wanted to parade around some more but realized that this entire thing was not about her, it was about Christian. She silently sat down beside him again and

told him she was sorry and “I shouldn’t have pranced around like that, it wasn’t very mature of me.”

“It’s okay,” he said, “You’re allowed one.” He then smiled at her and even though he was proven somewhat wrong, it was good to see another individual having fun.

“You worried about your mother?”

“Yeah,” he replied.

In Christian’s mind he should be cold, but he wasn’t. He put his knees towards his chin and hugged them just out of habit. Sol looked around trying to figure out what to say in order to break the awkward silence. It turned out that she didn’t need to.

“Parents are so dumb,” Christian blurted out. Sol stared at him, wanting him to elaborate. Christian wasn’t going to, but some kind of force inside or him, maybe outside, told him to continue. “This whole thing wouldn’t have happened if my dumb dad would have just stayed at home instead of leaving.”

“Where did he go?”

“Somewhere outside the city,” he replied, “Some ‘hole-in-the-wall’, that’s what my mom says anyways. It’s just some small apartment.”

“Why did he go?”

“I’m not sure. I think it all came down to him working too much and mom needed help raising me and my sister. Then again, she is such a chore anyways. Dad probably just got tired of her dumb stuff.”

Sol grimaced and looked leered at Christian. “You mean your unborn sister?”

Christian cut his eyes at her and asked, “How did you know that?”

The area grew dark. The snow stopped and the lights in the houses grew dimmer. Sol’s eyes grew big and white, like the snow that surrounded them.

“We did our homework on you Christian!” She rose to her feet and placed her hands against the invisible barrier. As his side of the barrier grew dark, Sol’s side started to change.

The two houses started to merge together into one and the yard grew in length. Christian watched as the scenery behind Sol started to take the shape of his house and lawn.

“Watch...watch what you were too selfish to see!” Sol yelled.

The house started to break apart. A crack started at the bottom and then worked its way up the side, across the roof and back down again. The split level home broke in

half and the side nearest Christian started to open up, like a doll house. Christian watched as the previous day events were acted out by...him and his mother, Sarah. It was like someone took a gigantic lens on a camera and captured every piece of footage in one long take.

He saw everything in every perspective; when he went downstairs and tore through the presents and the reaction his mom had, the breakfast debacle and how his mother was in pain even though she tried to hide it from him, and the conviction fit he had storming out of the house and his mother wobbling down the stairs to catch him which led to her going to the hospital. He knew that he was being a little horror, but he still felt that he was right to be mad at his parents for splitting up. Then it happened again, the whole day replayed in front of him again.

Christian tried to turn his head but some force was keeping it glaring at the house with versions of him and his mother performing the same song and dance that was his horrendous Christmas Day. Sol threw attention to Christian when she realized how uncomfortable he was from not being unable to move.

“Please stop this,” Christian pleaded, “I’ll do better!”

Sol replied, "I'm not doing this chief, I am just the guide."

She looked behind Christian and noticed the street was falling into the Earth. Concrete was crumbling and the houses down the streets were breaking apart. The families in the houses saw nothing of what was coming and continued their routine that Christian saw earlier; like they were on a continuous loop.

"You better make a decision," Sol yelled. Right then, Christian's house broke apart and morphed back into two separate houses with one man hugging his family that could be seen from outside and the other with the old lonely man eating a TV dinner, alone.

"What decision?"

"You have to choose a house."

"Why?"

The ground started to give out right behind them while lamp posts and mailboxes tipped over.

"What kind of life do you want? Do you want a happy life or a lonely one where you have no family?" Sol was calm while Christian started to float off the ground.

"What kind of question is that?"

"So you want a good life?"

"Of course!" he yelled.

Crumble-crumble

Sol watched as he floated upward.

“You have to stop being this way; you have to let things go where they will...you can’t stop what is meant to be!” Sol yelled upwards.

“It’s not my fault they are unhappy! Why should I have to live with their mistakes?”

“Because that’s what life is...living with your mistakes...to learn from them and from others. You can have a great life with a great family of your own and your mother will be around! It doesn’t have to be bad! Stop making it that way!”

Crumble-crumble

The two houses tore apart with both versions of Christian’s future falling in with it. The snow stopped and the only piece of concrete left was the piece Sol was standing on.

“It’s not fair! It won’t be the same!”

“Make your choice! Make the right one! Have the mother I never knew!” Sol shouted.

Christian looked down and realized his mistake through whatever Sol’s life was or could have been; he felt sorry for her.

“Help us,” Sol cried, “PLEASE!”

The ground under her gave way and she started to fall into the abyss, the blackness that will engulf both of them.

“I WANT A LIFE OF MY OWN THAT I CAN BE PROUD OF!”

2

“Is that it,” Christian asked.

He and Sol were both kneeling in front of one another. There was nothing but clouds around them; pink, purple, and orange. It swayed around them in a circle, like cotton candy.

“Yeah,” she said, looking at Christian, the boy who looked like her in way with the same kind of eyes.

“What now?”

“I’m not sure,” she retorted, “I guess you will have to see.”

“What if nothing changes? What if my mom dies?”

“Then that’s the way it will have to be.”

“It will be different and lonely,” Christian said in sadness.

Solstice put her hand on his shoulder and Christian jumped in fear of something bad may happen. Sol chuckled and consoling said, "It's okay, there are no rules here."

Sol put her arms back in her lap. Christian wiped away his tears and looked away embarrassed.

"Just because it may be different, doesn't mean it will be bad; it just means that's its different. That's all."

Christian nodded. He knew that she was right but was having a hard time believing it at that moment in time.

"You will never be alone, and even if you think you are, just look in the mirror and look into our eyes," she insisted.

Sol stood up and Christian followed her lead. Sol put her hands on his.

"They're almost the same size!" he thought.

Christian let go of Sol's hands and looked at her with a harsh demeanor that Sol hadn't seen yet. He twisted his mouth and asked, "Are you really a kid or do you just look like that because I can relate to you better?"

Sol smiled and was proud of his insightfulness.

"It is whatever you want to believe...and just please make sure you believe in something in life, and I hope you are happy with whatever it is you decide."

A white light started to surround the both of them. Sol's image started to dissipate and Christian tried to grab on to her. He was scared for what was going to happen next.

Christmas Day, Again

"Sometimes the angels we need are the ones that are right in front of us the whole time," Sol's voice said. This time the whisper was very distinctive and for once Christian understood what it meant. Patches of light came through in the darkness and the still sound of winter air; there was something about the air inside a home during the air. When it's quiet, it was like you could hear the nothingness.

Christian's eyes opened suddenly. He didn't move his eyes. He just laid in his bed a stared at the ceiling, wondering how he got home, but more than that, he just enjoyed the silence. He could hear the snowflakes hitting his window. *Did my dad bring me home?* Confused and scared to find out what had happened to his mother, Christian refused to move.

Thunk-thunk

The heater kicked on, startling Christian enough for him to shift in his bed. He sat up and looked around his room noticing that everything was still where it was when he woke up yesterday.

“Christian!” a woman yelled from down the hall. This voice was all too familiar to him. He swung his legs over the bed onto the cold floor and before he got too excited, he thought it may have been his grandmother; her and his mom sound a lot alike. He slipped on his socks and ran down the hallway. When he came to the kitchen, he saw a figure that he could not mistake, never, not in his life. He knew her face so well that he could draw it without having to look at her. It was his mother, and she didn’t look sick anymore.

Instead of running and gliding on the kitchen floor, the game he usually played with himself, he just walked over to his mother and hugged her gently so he wouldn’t hurt her.

“Are you okay,” he asked her. Concerned, Sarah looked down at him and ran her fingers through his hair and said, “I’m okay, why wouldn’t I be?”

Christian refrained from responding because something felt off. This whole scene seemed all too

familiar to Christian, like it happened before, a weird sense of Deja-vu.

“You slept in big boy,” she continued, “usually you are up and wanting to open the presents.”

Presents?

“I opened the present’s yesterday mom, don’t you remember?” he asked.

Sarah’s eyes were big and were full of anger. “You better not have gotten into those presents mister!”

Sarah slowly walked down the stairs and Christian followed, curious to know what was going on. As they both descended the staircase, the Christmas tree with the white lights on it was a vision. Christian found a new respect for white lights as if something changed in him.

“Whew! That is a relief,” Sarah exclaimed, “You must have had a dream about opening presents.”

Christian stared at the tree and the presents that were neatly organized underneath; something he didn’t realize before. His mother went out of her way to make it look special, like in a catalogue. She didn’t have to. She could have easily just thrown them under the tree, but she thought it mattered.

“Come on,” she insisted as she hobbled back up the stairs, “We’ll open them after we eat of Cream of Wheat.”

Christian rolled his eyes at the thought of eating it. *She hasn't been making it right for a while now.* He wasn't going to say it though, even though something sounded better. Sometimes we have to do things we don't like so we don't hurt a person's feelings. To Christian's surprise, the breakfast was actually very good. For the first time in a long time, he was happy to eat this for breakfast.

While he ate, he thought about how this was all possible. How could he start Christmas Day over again? However, it was done...it was a miracle to be sure.

Then another thought occurred to him, "*Those are probably all the same presents I already opened before.*" This was going to hard; acting surprised when he already knew what he was getting and before he knew it he was done with his breakfast and soon it would be show time.

The walk back downstairs was long. Christian had to mentally prepare himself for the performance of the year presented by him. He sat down and chose a present as his mother sat on the couch with her camera, waiting to point and click, the flash going off and it would blind him for a moment and it happened. It happened several times.

The wrapping paper flew and the smiles were had, but not because he was acting like he never knew what was coming, but rather because his mother was having a ball

watching him. His performance in that last hour could have gotten him some sort of award. Christian felt bad because he was sort of lying in a way, but he also thought it would be worse if he just shouted out what was in the packages and gotten his mother frightened or upset. It was for the best.

Christian started to play his videogame so his mother could rest. Sarah slowly made her way up the stairs and smiled the whole time, masking the pain she was feeling.

Sarah made her way to the living room upstairs and sat on the couch. She put her hands in front of her face and started to cry. She wanted nothing more than for her husband to come home today; if not for her, then for Christian at the very least. As much as she attempted to muffle the noise, Christian was listening to her from downstairs; noises carried throughout the house well, especially there was hardly anyone in it.

Christian 'paused' his game and walked over to the phone. He debated with himself on whether or not to do it; to call his father. He wasn't pleased with his father at this point in time, but he probably wouldn't be regardless for a while. The fact of the matter was that it wasn't about Christian, it was about his mother and what was right.

Christian picked up the receiver and dialed the long distance number to reach his dad on his company cell phone.

The phone rang on the other end as Christian looked outside at the snow.

“Hello?”

“Hey dad, it’s me.”

“What’d up bud? I was just getting ready to call you. Did you like the gifts you got?”

“Yeah, they were fine. Listen. You need to come home.”

“What...why? I don’t think I will be able to...”

“You need to come home. Don’t come up with excuses and come home.”

“I know you want to see me, but...”

“This isn’t about me. It’s not about you either. Mom is in bad shape and you need to come home.”

(Silence)

“Dad?”

“Ok. I’ll try to get out today.”

“Bye dad.”

Click.

That was it. That is all he had to do.

Christian wasn't sure what getting his dad back home was going to achieve in the long run, but at the very least it gave them an opportunity to maybe deal with the issues instead of just ignoring it. He sat back down in front of the television and stared at the screen. The crying noises stopped and Christian got an idea.

He popped up and reached into the cabinet for a board game that was doing nothing but collect dust. This game was Christian's and his mother's favorite to play together. He brought it up the stairs and found his mother on the couch, watching the snow fall outside. He put the game down in front of her and then looked out the window and saw the snow had covered everything. He looked at the houses around and saw people celebrating in their own ways. Smoke coming from the chimneys, kids trying out their new sleds, snowball fights occurring; and as much as Christian wanted to go outside, there was something else that was more important right then.

"You can go outside if you want," Sarah told her son.

Christian thought about it for a moment like any child would, but he wasn't the same kid he was yesterday...or today...or today being yesterday...oh you get it.

“No,” he replied, “I think I will just hang out with you today.”

Sarah smiled and sort of laughed. “I’m not going anywhere soon,” she said, “Go be with kids your own age.” She was probably right, she wasn’t going anywhere, but she could and Christian knew that now.

“It’s okay,” he said firmly, “I want to play this instead.”

He opened up the box and set up the pieces and the cards, fished for the dice and they played for hours and while they played they talked about things. Family, movies, and deep thoughts about life that only they understood; it was that special bond between a mother and her son that no one talks about that much, but they know deep down.

From outside, a young girl watched Christian from outside as if she could see through walls. The other kids didn’t acknowledge her, like she was invisible to everyone; everyone except Christian who looked outside the window for a brief moment and saw her gaze. He slightly waved his hand at her and she smiled and waved back.

At that point, Christian’s dad pulled up to the driveway in a rented car he got from the airport and Sol watched him go inside and how Christian and Sarah ran down to see him.

A voice started to speak to Sol.

“Do you think that everything will be okay?”

Sol didn't look up or around, she just simply answered, “I don't know. Not everything will be perfect, but it's up to him to figure out how to work around the bad things that can happen. It's not all about how you take it, it's about how you deal with it and move on. There will always be hard parts to deal with but there are the good parts to embrace and make the most you can of it.”

Sol sighed and turned around to walk away. As she disappeared into the snow she continued, “But that's life though...isn't it?”

The End

