

Mother

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He watched through the frosted glass of his living room as the large snowflakes blanketed the ground on the quiet December day. They slowly danced before his window, mocking him, before snuggling next to each other just outside of his house. Just like last year and the year before, the cursed holiday brought forth a fake sense of happiness. The warm glow of his fireplace and the steam rising from his coffee cup was the only visitors he wanted this year.

Jacob took a slow sip from the hot liquid that swirled in his coffee cup. Laughter filled the air, as many of the towns children ran through the pristine hillside kicking up powder. With each step their pace slowed as their winter boots sank deeper and deeper into the holiday cheer. A smile that seemed to radiate straight from his heart started to show on his haggard face. Christmas Eve, I can allow myself a little enjoyment. After all, tomorrow will be the day that children see their family, not today. He thought to himself as he closed his eyes.

Wonderful visions danced behind his eyelids. Visions of children opening presents and getting everything they ever wished for. Parents hugged them close to their bodies in a warm embrace, cherishing the moment. Distant relatives handed obscure presents out in hopes that their many hours of indecisiveness would reap a little happiness in the kiddos. He could picture a holiday feast, filled with laughter as the new puppy that little Johnny got for Christmas begs for scraps in the most adorable fashion.

Jacob opened his eyes and inhaled deeply, letting his lungs expand fully before letting the stagnant air escape. Oh how he longed for a Christmas like that, one where he is loved and happiness is just a box away. He finished his coffee in a large gulp and chunks the cup into the

fireplace. A loud crash rings out as it explodes into many bits of ceramic shards. He can feel his fury building deep inside himself.

No. I hate those kids! Why do they deserve to be happy on Christmas? What did I do different that forced Santa to kick me in the ribs instead of giving me gifts? A resigned sigh escaped. I guess it's because of her. It's because of mother that I hate Christmas. Jacob thinks about his eighth family holiday and how when no one showed up his mother got furious. They avoided her like a plague. He remembered. They knew how she was when she drank and she always drank. Sometimes she would start at three in the morning, not quitting until her limp body was found in a drunken slumber somewhere. When she would wake up, she would simply force the beer back to her lips.

That particular Christmas was when I truly knew something was wrong with her. All the other kids were getting new bicycles and a ton of presents. Their trees shined brightly with every type of glitter and lighting, illuminating the happy expressions on their faces. My mother on the other hand, spent her money making sure she would not run out of alcohol. After all, she had mentioned how badly it sucked for the stores to stay closed until the 26th. Our tree was made of a horrible smelling plastic, and had only a hand- made aluminum star on the top. Underneath was a single present addressed to Jacob, love Mom.

By the time I got to open it, I felt the tears swell up as I seen the two dollar container of army men from the Dollar Saver. I tried to be polite and thank her, but the alcohol knew I was upset. A cigarette still hung from her lips when she spoke. Her anger raised the volume of her voice as she scolded me over and over.

“ANY OTHER KID WOULD BE LUCKY TO HAVE A PRESENT LIKE THAT, BUT YOU ARE A SPOILED LITTLE BRAT! DO YOU HEAR ME JACOB? SPOILED LITTLE BRAT.”

I watched her stumble to the oven, almost knocking over the tree in the process. With her beer still in one hand, she grabs the oven mitt and pulls the undercooked turkey from the oven. Mumbling something under her breath, she walks through the living room and to the doorway. I watch in horror as she opens the front door and chunks the turkey out into the snow.

“SEE WHAT BEING UNGRATEFUL GETS YOU. NOTHING. I HOPE YOU STARVE, WORTHLESS BRAT!”

Tears start free falling from my eyes and guttural sounds escape my throat as I feel the sting of mother’s words. Before I knew what was happening, she snatched me by the shirt and threw me to the sofa. My eyes widened with the physical abuse, not knowing what to say or do I simply stammered.

“I-I-I’M SORRY MOMMA!”

He looked out the window once more, watching the kids throw snowballs back and forth. Some had built little forts, apparently impenetrable to all common variety snow weapons. Jacob couldn’t help but wonder what all he had missed in his youth because of his mother’s disease.

The disappointment was a sort of holiday tradition growing up, though mother’s temper seemed to get worse every year. By the time he was an adult, she was completely out of control. Twelve packs turned to twenty fours and happy hours seemed to be from noon to midnight. Jacob tried to maintain a relationship with her, but only from a distant. Once a year, he would

invite her into his life to celebrate Christmas with him...her only son. He tried so hard to make it work, putting her before his own needs. This worked for a while. She remained civil towards his girlfriend and even managed a smile or two.

Then, on the Christmas of his twenty first year of living hell, mother decided to come down for a long holiday. A celebration of her only son's first year as a married man. Oh how he loved Jenny, so sweet and pretty. A far cry from everything his mother was. He planned on spending the rest of his life with her, eventually growing old and then being buried with matching headstones next to his beloved. To that extent, he also believed that Jenny reciprocated those feelings. But it only took three days with his mother to change her mind.

She had no sooner unpacked her suitcase, when she broke into the case of beer she brought along for the ride. After all, it's Christmas! To her, this fact alone simply meant she could drink as much as she wanted as fast as she wanted and be justified in doing so. Jenny and Jacob were snuggled next to the fireplace, sipping champagne and chuckling among each other, oblivious of what would happen to their first and only holiday together. The large pine tree, glowing as bright as the North Star on a clear summer night, contained colorful presents of every shape and size. Jenny had even bought his mother one of them fancy red hats, you know the ones, and they come with a large bow and an even larger price tag. It was her attempt to get in good with her mother-in-law, hoping for a warm welcome into the family. Everything was so perfect.

After about three hours of indulging, Mother came stumbling into the living room, bumping the mantle and shattering Jenny's favorite vase. I was appalled! Instead of "I'm so sorry" she simply flopped down on the recliner and took another swig of beer.

“That was the ugliest damn thing I ever saw, good riddance if you ask me”

“Mother! That’s not very nice.”

Her blood-shot eyes radiated glossy overtones; Jacob knew he was in for a rough time. Jenny started sobbing uncontrollably at the sight of her vase being turned into a makeshift jig-saw puzzle. Large fat tears streamed down her pretty face, leaving a river of mascara in its wake.

“What are you crying for darling? Are you a big baby? Boo-Hoo, Boo-Hoo, I knew my son would marry someone as weak as he is. Careful honey, I wouldn’t want you to get a splinter cleaning up that mess.”

Jenny simply continued to sob quietly, and started to sweep up her family heirloom. In hopes of saving their first holiday together, not a word was said between the two. Mother continued to push buttons, showing love in the only way she knew how, through humiliation. Between the embarrassing stories of how Jacob wet the bed, to calling Jenny every name in the book, Christmas was ruined. After taking the abuse for quite some time, Jacob’s sweet wife finally put her foot down.

“YOU ARE A MONSTER! HOW CAN YOU BE SO MEAN TO YOUR ONLY SON?”

“A monster? I will show you a monster darling!” she said through slurred English

It was then that mother, walked over to the tree and smashed all of the presents. She took special care to kick through the one addressed to her. After all, who would want a present from a tramp? She reminded Jenny. The next two days were spent watching her get trashed and continue her rampage. By the afternoon of the third day, Jenny had enough. She gave Jacob the choice, either mother leaves or she leaves. How could he through his own mother out, knowing she was

too drunk to drive? What kind of a son would do such a thing? So it went that Jacob went through his very first divorce thanks to family roots.

Things pretty much stayed the same through the years, going through three marriages, two houses, and a dog named fluffy. Jacob had to remind himself that he only had one mother. The years came and went, seeing mother only during the holidays. He tried to be a good son, but he resented her and couldn't take more than a few hours at a time. Then about three years ago, Jacob received a call from mother saying this would be her last Christmas. She claimed to have liver cancer and would be passing soon. Passing soon? Jacob seriously doubted that. She was way to mean to die. Hell, she would probably make the Grim Reaper cry. But Jacob indulged her anyways and flew to her home for a long holiday vacation.

He no sooner arrived, when he was greeted with the wonderful smell of cooked turkey. The entire kitchen seemed to be flowing with pleasant odors. For once, his mother stayed sober long enough to cook a Christmas dinner. Jacob was feeling pretty good about his decision to come out for the weekend. Maybe mother finally got her act together. He thought to himself. Maybe we can have an actual relationship now. After a wonderful meal, he noticed his mother sneaking into the kitchen and downing a beer with only a few breathes between gulps. She was trying so hard to conceal her drinking, trying to make things right. The demons she fought had finally won though, as she finished her twelfth "secret" beer things started to go sour.

She called Jacob every name in the book and told him how bad of a failure he was. He couldn't even get a woman to stay with him. His job sucked, he sucked, his choices sucked, and he was a spoiled brat. That last sentence brought repressed memories to the surface at a most

heinous time. He finally stood up to his mother, telling her what mental scars her years of abuse had caused.

The screaming matches lasted for the entire weekend, neither one surrendering to the other. Stubbornness, I wonder who I got that from? He thought to himself. His mother even went around shattering every picture she had of him, hoping to offend. Jacob just laughed at her, after all, only a drunk would think that destroying her own items would hurt others. Finally, Jacob simply gave up. He calmly packed his bags and threw on his warmest winter coat. With sad eyes he calmly turned to face his mother.

“I’ve had enough mother. I can’t do it anymore. Stay away from me, don’t call me, I hope I never see you again.”

“You will honey. I will show up when you least expect it. I will be there to meet your new wife, to see your new house, even to meet your new boss. I will be there. You can’t get rid of me...I’m your mother.”

Jacob walked through the door and out into the cold December day, never looking over his shoulder as he walked out on her. That was the last time he had seen her. Every Christmas since, he put out his one present and put up his tree, waiting for her to come. This year was no different. He seemed to have gained some sense of self-respect over the last twelve months and expected her to swoop in and take it away. Like a plague, she would be there when he least expected it.

He stood, walking slowly to the fireplace poking the logs with a long metal fire poker. Outside he could still hear the kids laughing. A few times, he even heard a loud splat as a snow ball collided with the side of his house. He wasn’t mad though, how could he be? Kids will be

kids after all. Most of them are just little bundles of happiness and who was he to damper their holiday?

He inhaled deeply and let out a defeated sigh. I don't hate them. He admitted. I envy them. They will have a wonderful holiday, just like every year and grow to be healthy adjusted adults. I on the other hand, will continue to have baggage. Emotional and mental baggage that is far too heavy for me to carry. It will continue to ruin my relationships until I die alone. Thanks mother!

Jacob stares at the Christmas tree that repeatedly blinked a false sense of happiness. Underneath it sat one neatly wrapped present, complete with an adorably over-sized bow. Why do I do this to myself? Why am I waiting for mother to show up and ruin my holiday? Why? Because I am a good son...that's why. He can feel the anger rise inside once more, a feeling that mixes heartburn and teeth chattering.

“Enough! I will open it when I damn well please! Do you hear me mother? When I want to open it I will! I don't need to wait on you.” His voice echoed off of the walls rattled his eardrums. He drops to his knees and as a final act of defiance, he rips open the present. Inside sat a large object with a newspaper wrapped around it. He carefully removes it, hoping to see what it is concealing within its print.

The headline on the newspaper sends him into shivers, catching his attention like a deer in headlights. He unfolds it and holds it closer to his eyes to read. It was dated back three years exactly.

Woman killed in tragic house-fire

Doreen Smith, 62, was killed in a tragic house-fire yesterday at 1642 Lincoln Avenue. Though the cause was Arson, the suspect is unknown. According to those who knew Doreen, She was a recluse and never had company. Her only family is her son, Jacob Smith, who lost contact with her years ago...

His heart skipped a beat as he dropped the paper, spilling his mother's urn. Her ashes soaked deep into the carpet, turning it a murky brown color. In a flash, visions of the past came back to haunt him. Jacob remembered burning his mother with lighter fluid and a match while she lay passed out in a drunken stooper. He trailed the fluid all across the house, hoping to block any escape she may attempt. An accident, yes, it will look like an accident. It all became clear to him now; it came back as it really happened. After the first night of arguing, he killed his mother in her sleep and slipped out in the middle of the night.

He repressed the memory, wrapping all evidence of its existence into a fancy little present to be opened only on Christmas. Jacob smiled as he scooped the remaining ashes back into its fancy home. He wrapped it back up with the news article and placed it back in its box. As he turned to grab the vacuum from the closet it, a thought occurred to him. Mother had won. She will always be there to ruin Christmas.