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I am 12 years old

Our Lady of Peace Catholic School

7th Grade



From the Gates Behind Which I Stand

From the gates behind which I stand, I will tell you my story.

My story; one I recommend you don't read at night or around

Christmas time I'm afraid...

I'm not going to beat around the bush, this story is without modification. Sugar-coating is not my thing. I am just warning you.

This all started when I was a young, curious child of twelve years-old, full of imagination, and animated in every way. For me, my imagination flares up especially during Christmas time. I guess that's how I ended up here, behind these gates, but I'll never know.

Nevertheless, there I was, one Christmas evening, baking cookies for Santa and doing all the other preparations. Since I was six, I had snuck

out of my room at night to see if I caught Santa Claus. If only I'd fallen asleep too soon to do so.

I snuck out of my bedroom and tiptoed to the living room. We lived in a one-story house, so I couldn't scurry up and down the stairs like children did in all those Christmas songs. I knew every word of them, too. I looked around... no Santa. Hrmm, I wish I'd have gone to my room to cry, but no, I stood there as my eyes teared up. I thought I'd never find him. What was the sense in it? I'd been looking since I was -

Then I opened my eyes, God I wish I hadn't, and blinked a couple times. Through my teary blinks, I saw a round figure. Was it a person?! No, more like a silhouette... I suppose. The tears ceased.

"H-hello?" I asked tentatively. I felt ashamed to sound so freaked out, because I was always tough and cocky. But I didn't let one little mistake get to me as I crossed my arms over my chest.

All I heard was a loud, deep rumble. It didn't turn around, though. I didn't know what it was, who it might be, or what it was here for, but I did know it hadn't been there a minute or two ago.

"Who are you!?" I asked. The thing still didn't turn around. I should have turned around myself and left it, but of course I did the exact opposite and thought about it. Then it hit me. Or, so I *thought*.

"Hey - are you... are you Santa Claus?!"

Then, it turned around and looked me dead in the eye. All I saw was a still silhouette, sharp red eyes staring back at me. Then, it started to form into more of a human-looking thing. His already red suit had splotches of a darker shade of red all over it, including his hat. His cheeks were a little... *too* rosy. When he smiled at me, it looked like he was missing at least a dozen teeth. His boots had maroon-colored sticky stuff on them. I looked back up into his eyes and his pupils were still red, the color around them empty, reflecting me and the look in my own eyes - stunned.

Now, I expected him to say something like, “Yes, child,” or “Guess what your Christmas present is!”, but it went something like this:

“You think I’m *Santa Claus*, do you?!” This rolled into a series of laughter, grunting, and something that sounded like choking. Huh.

“Uh, yeah,” I said, my cocky attitude that had always gotten me in trouble shining through, “Well, at least I *did*. Never would’ve thought you looked *this bad*. I mean, I knew you were old and all, but-”

I was interrupted by more laughter and wondered what the heck my parents were doing that they weren’t waking up and helping me out here. Wait, maybe this was them just playing a prank on me. No, they were probably sound asleep. My dad had some serious martial arts skills, supposedly.

“EXCUSE ME!” I yelled, and the thing stopped laughing immediately, giving me this “What the...?” look.

“Oh,” It said, “You’re one of those, eh? Well, here’s your Christmas present.”

It handed me a box with wrapping paper on it. I don't know what the heck he was thinking, or what I was even thinking for that matter; the wrapping paper was covered in bloody dolls and pig faces. I mean, ew! Did he really think I was going to -

But I did.

I took it, and I don't know why, but I did. I untied the bow that looked like it was rags stitched together and covered in red paint. The paint was still wet, the parts that had dried brown. I unwrapped the box that was under the paper. Then, finally, I opened the top to look at what lay inside. It was...

Empty.

Wait... what?!

I looked up to where he was before, but he had vanished. I wanted to ask him what this was and why the heck he gave me an empty box, but I just sighed and began walking back to my room. I started up the stairs and -

WAIT! I live in a one-story house - I don't have stairs!

I whirled around, but all I saw was empty darkness. As my eyes got better adjusted to the eerie dark, I saw a door and only a door. Nothing else. Ookay. Spooky, huh? I opened it up. Probably just another one of "Santa's" stupid jokes. I felt for a light switch and found one. When I flicked it on, though, the room was lit with a dim yellow light, and I saw a desk with paper and one of those literal quell pens to my right. Cool!

Then, to my left, I saw a mirror with a couple cracks in it. I walked over to it and saw my reflection. Only... I looked... *older*. My hair now was short and curly. In my reflection, it was still curly, but long. I had been wearing pink pajamas with red hearts on them, but in the mirror, I was in a blue oversized t-shirt and black leggings. I looked to be wearing white Converse, but I don't wear anything on my feet to bed. Hm. That was odd. Then I looked at my feet and saw... white Converse. Then I tugged on the oversized blue t-shirt that was overlapping my black leggings and felt my curly hair spill around my shoulders. Then I looked up to see an... elf.

“Oh, don’t you just *hate* it when *lit-tle chil-dren* grow up, and stop *lo-ving* you?” It asked me. So apparently this one’s quirk was that he had to speak in syllables. Weirdo.

“I’m not *try-ing* to be *dis-re-spect-ful* or *an-y-thing*,” he continued, “but you *ol-der* kids are so dumb. You don’t *e-ven be-lieve* in *San-ta Claus an-y-more*.”

“What are you even *talking* about?!” I asked. “I’m twelve!”

“No, you *poor old thing*,” it said, “You’re *sev-en-teen*.”

Oh. So the mirror changed me. Ummm...?

“You *see*,” the elf began, “My name is Jack. I like to joke with *lit-tle* kids. But, you, dear? I am not *jo-king*. I am *ser-i-ous*. You have to be *sev-en-teen* to be put *be-hind* The Gates. So there-fore, I must make you *sev-en-teen*, be-cause I *can-not stand wait-ing an-y lon-ger* for you. You will have to be *bran-ded* as *our’s* and *en-dure* much pain.”

“Why *me*, though?” I asked him. Ask now, panic later.

“I was just get-ting to that, dear. Now, we have cho-sen you be-cause your mo-ther and fa-ther have nev-er be-lieved in Christ-mas e-nough to be fooled. Nie-ther have a-ny of your an-ces-tors. But you do. Or did, how-ev-er. Most like-ly, you nev-er will ag-ain. So now I must take you.”

“Try me,” I said, getting angry now.

“I don’t really have to.”

Next thing I knew, my hands and feet were bound and I couldn’t move. A sickeningly sweet smell filled my nostrils and my head until I passed out. And that’s all I remember until about seventeen months after that.

I woke up to see that stupid Santa’s face again and felt a sharp pain on the left side of my stomach. He was smiling. Still. Then I looked to where it hurt and I had something like “THE GATES” branded into my stomach. It hurts terribly. And next thing I knew, I was asleep again until about a week ago.

So now I am trapped behind these gates, and I will never be free. I thought I've felt miserable before, but I have never felt such true misery. I am thirty-two now, with a gray hoodie and sweatpants on, and when I'm forty-six I'll get another branding. It's... like a routine, if you will - whenever they feel like branding me, I guess. I have two now.

I've been through a lot. I hate Christmas with a passion. And I have told you this story from the gates behind which I stand.