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Corey Pennington

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Christmas Eve Service

by Corey Pennington

"What time is the service, Mom?" I asked as I walked into the kitchen.

"It's at seven thirty, but if we want to get a seat, we'll have to leave here by six thirty. The roads are really bad," she said as she mixed up her special pizza sauce.

"They are?" I asked.

"Take a look," she offered.

I ran to the window in the living room. On tiptoes, I peered over the window sill. I watched the swirling white sky and white roads. I ran to the kitchen and looked at my mom with my mouth drooped.

"Aw, I don't want to go early," I whined.

Just then my brother Brian came in. "What? We have to go early? To what?"

"To church," I moaned.

"Aw, Mom, it's not fair!" cried Brian. "I don't wanna go!"

"You don't have a choice, and that's final! Another word and you'll have to wait till tomorrow morning to open your presents!"

"But, Mom, we've always opened our presents on Christmas Eve!" Brian yelled.

"If you'd like to keep it that way, I suggest that you don't say another word!"

"But--" I stammered, then we both ran to our rooms before she

said anything.

I played with some toys for a while. Then Mom yelled, "Boys, hurry and get dressed! Be sure to take a shower!"

"Shoot," I moaned, "I hate showers."

When I finished my shower I put on the Superman robe that I got for Christmas last year. I went to my room. Mom had laid out a white shirt, a blue clip-on tie, a blue sweater, and a matching blue pair of pants. I put them on and played a little longer before combing my hair.

Dad slowly pulled out of the driveway, and headed down the street. You couldn't see fifteen feet ahead of you, the snow was blowing so hard. The ice on the road didn't reflect the headlights of our little Chevette, because it was covered by a few inches of snow.

"What did you get me for Christmas?" I whispered to Brian.

"Corey, that's a surprise!" exclaimed Mom. "Brian, don't you dare tell him!"

"I wouldn't have told him anyhow," sneered Brian.

I looked out the window and daydreamed for a while. Then I asked Brian, "Don't you hate going to Christmas Eve Service? They tell the same story every year. We know it by heart already."

"I know. We should just skip the service and open presents early instead. Then we could have more time to play with our new toys."

We lived in St. Joseph, Iowa, and there were many corn fields surrounding the town we lived in. We travelled down the long, slippery road. When we approached the school that my brother and I attended, I saw a large shadow below a street light. As we got closer, I saw that it was a dog. It began to walk across the street.

"Look!" I shouted.

Dad was startled and jerked the steering wheel slightly. The car swerved across the icy street. Mom instinctively screamed.

Dad quickly turned the wheel and we crashed into a ditch. I felt myself being thrown forward by the impact, even though my seat belt held me firmly.

I looked out my window and only saw a foggy mist. I wiped it away and saw the white sides of the ditch we were in. Our Chevette was in the ditch at a steep angle facing downward.

My brother started to cry. I hit him in the arm, and yelled, "Baby!"

He stopped crying and hit me in the arm. I started to cry, and he said, "Wimp!"

"Baby!" I cried back, covering my face beneath my coat.

"Wimp!"

"Baby!"

"Wimp!"

"Shut up, Brian!"

"Make me!"

"No, really! Look at Mom and Dad."

We both peered around the space between the two bucket seats.

"They aren't moving!" exclaimed Brian.

"They aren't telling us to stop arguing, either," I pointed out.

"Hey, yeah. You're right."

"Let's try to wake 'em up," I suggested.

I tapped on Mom's shoulder and Brian on Dad's. Then we shook them, but they still wouldn't wake up. We got scared and panicked. First my brother, then I began to shake them violently.

"Wake up!" I yelled at my unconscious mother.

"Wake up!" Brian yelled.

"Stop!" I said. "They aren't waking up."

I maneuvered myself so that I could look at my mom. She had a cut above her left eye. Blood trickled down and dripped onto her cheek. I turned and saw my father had an abrasion against his forehead where he had hit the steering wheel. As I looked at him, he twitched his hand slightly. My eyes grew wide. Then my mother moaned softly. My mouth drooped and I plopped into my seat. I looked at Brian who had tears in his eyes.

"I'm scared," he whispered.

"Let's give them our coats, they need to be warm," I said.

There are some blankets in the back, too."

We both took off our small coats and draped them over Mom and Dad. I grabbed the blankets and we covered them as best we could.

"We have to find help," I said

"How?" asked Brian.

"Let's try to flag down a car."

As we prepared to get out of the car and find help, I realized I couldn't open my door because the snow was piled so high.

"Now what, Corey?" asked Brian.

"Roll down your window and climb out."

We rolled them down as far as possible, and climbed out. The chill of the cold wind was incredible. I climbed up the steep ditch. I shivered as I waited for Brian to meet me beside the road. We couldn't see if anything was coming, because the snow was blowing so badly. The wind blew through our sweaters. We were shaking violently.

"I'm freezing!" cried Brian.

"Me too!" I looked down the road. "I don't think any cars are coming. Maybe we need another plan."

"I think so, Corey."

"I crossed my arms rigidly and looked around. My eyes fell upon the school. I had an idea.

"Let's find a phone across the street!" I exclaimed.

"O.K." said Brian, "but who'll we call?"

"911."

The swirling winds howled in our ears as we peered across the icy street. As I took a step onto the street, I slipped on the ice, and fell on my back.

"Ow!"

"Are you O.K.?"

I wiped away a couple of tears and sniffed, "Sure."

I looked at my old shoes that I'd been wearing to church for months, and realized that I didn't have any traction on my soles. I

didn't know how soon a car would come by, so I had to get across quickly. I took a step back and braced myself. Then, I slid across the ice. I tumbled into a snow bank on the other side. I got up and brushed the cold snow off my thin pants and sweater.

Brian slid across. Then we looked for a phone. As we walked slowly around the building, I saw a phone beside a door. The phone had snow on the receiver. I brushed it off and picked it up. I remembered the quarter in my pocket that Dad had given me to put in the offering. I popped it in and dialed.

"Isn't that a free call?" asked Brian.

"I don't know. It's not a big deal."

I explained to a man on the other end what happened, and he said, "We'll be over as soon as possible."

"How soon will that be?"

"On these roads, at least a half-hour."

"Thank you," I moaned.

I hung up, frowning. "We have to wait a half-hour."

We walked to the road and skidded across in the swirling winds again. I tumbled down the ditch and landed beside the Chevette. Brian landed beside me. We got up and brushed ourselves off before climbing through the window.

"Brrrr!" I said, rolling up my window.

"Well, we have a half an hour to wait..." I moaned.

"I'm scared," Brian moaned after a long silence, then he began to cry. He shivered uncontrollably.

I tried to figure out a way to help him stop crying.

"What did you get Mom and Dad for Christmas?" I asked.

"I got Mom another mug, and Dad some of that aftershave Mom said he likes. What'd you give them?"

"I got Mom a mug, and Dad a pair of socks."

We sat again in silence, but soon Brian began to whimper and shake.

"We could have a service in the car," I suggested.

"I thought you said you didn't want a service, it's the same ol'

story every year," he sniffed, wiping a tear away.

"Yeah, but it's not like we're gonna preach or anything."

I pulled out my Bible as Brian leaned forward and turned on the lights. "Where should you start reading?" asked Brian.

"Somewhere at the beginning of Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John."

I opened up to Luke and searched through the bold print until I saw *The Birth of Jesus* printed above a paragraph.

"In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree..." I read four paragraphs, then Brian read four more.

"...The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told."

"That's still a nice story, I guess. Even if you do hear it every year," I said.

"Yeah. Hey, let's sing some carols, Corey!"

"O.K. How 'bout 'Joy to the World,' 'Away in a Manger,' and 'Silent Night'?"

"Sure!"

We sang for a while, but soon we finished.

"Now what? More carols?" I asked.

"No."

"What if we pray for Mom and Dad?" I asked.

"Good idea."

We bowed our heads and turned off the light. "God, please let Mom and Dad be alright. Don't let anything bad happen to them, please," prayed Brian.

"God, help Mom and Dad. They're hurt real bad. I'd give up all my presents for them to be O.K., Amen." I looked up at Brian. "You know, until now, it really hasn't seemed like Christmas, ya know?"

"Yeah."

Just then, flashing red and blue lights illuminated the interior of the car. We opened the windows and climbed out. "Here!" we

screamed to them. A police car was with an ambulance.

A big, burly policeman pulled us up from the ditch.

"You must be freezing!" he said, staring at us. "Hurry, get in the car. We'll take care of your parents."

We got in the police car, but instead of being excited about being in a real live police car, we just peered out the window as they got Mom and Dad out. They were there a while, because of the snow that jammed Mom and Dad's doors shut.

Soon, the ambulance drove away, and a little while later, the police car we were in followed it. I leaned my forehead against the window and watched the white scenery slowly float by. When we got back into town, I saw many lights of different colors and I could even peer into the white haze and make out the silhouette of a Christmas tree in someone's window. It was brightly lit with colorful lights. I imagined there was a family inside sharing memories and opening their gifts.