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SANTA'S GIFT TO JOEY

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

A small room with bare walls, a rusty metal bed with super-hero sheets, a red Christmas bow hangs on the door knob.

JOEY (5) in super-hero pj's sits on the bed. His hands covers his ears, he rocks back and forth while he hums.

(O.S) From another room, emanates sound of commotion. THUD, BANG, SLAP, a woman's SCREAM.

Joey rocks faster back and forth while he hums louder and louder. His eyes are squeezed shut and his hands press on his ears.

(O.S) A bottle BREAKS and more SCREAMING.

JOEY
(singing)
We wish you a Merry Christmas, we
wish you a Merry Christmas, and a
Happy New Year.

A loud CRASH against his bedroom door startles him.

JOEY (CONT'D)
Please hurry Santa.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Joey is hunched into a ball on the floor, his ears still covered.

JOEY
(singing)
Here comes Santa Claus, here comes
Santa Claus, right down Santa Claus
lane..(tapers off)

He carefully loosens his hands on his head. He opens his eyes, looks around. He gets up and treads over to the bedroom door. He puts his ear against it and listens. Silence.

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

Joey sticks his head out the bedroom door, looks around. A mirror on the wall hangs crooked and there's broken glass on the grimy floor.

He leaves his bedroom and heads over to another bedroom door. He opens it and peeks inside.

INT. WOMAN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

A woman snores as she sleeps on the bed in the dark room.

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

Joey smiles slightly and excitedly tip-toes to the kitchen.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

The kitchen is a mess. Dirty dishes overflow the sink, liquor bottles and trash litter the counter. A roach runs by.

Joey opens a cupboard and takes out a plate and glass. He opens the refrigerator, grabs a jug of milk, and pours some into the glass. The milk drops into the glass in big congealed lumps. He dumps the rancid curdles into the sink.

He looks into the fridge again and finds a carton of chocolate milk, he pours some into the glass.

In a breadbox he finds a no-name brand package of cookies. Only five cookies left, he puts them on the plate.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

The living room is small and depressing. A pathetic Christmas tree with branches weighted down by too much tinsel and flea market ornaments sits in a corner. No presents underneath.

Joey pads across the room to the tree. He kneels in front of it and places the plate and glass on the floor in front of it, a wide eyed expression of anticipation on his face.

He gets up and heads back to his bedroom, he turns around and gazes back at the tree with a smile on his face.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Joey climbs into his bed, a smile on his face as he pulls the sheets up to his chin and closes his eyes.

INT. BEDROOM DAY

The faint light of dawn illuminates the room. Joey wakes up. He eagerly pulls the blanket off and jumps out of bed. Wide eyed and excited he rushes out of the room.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

He hurries across the room to the Christmas tree. Disappointment grows on his face as he nears the tree. He slumps down on his knees next to the plate and glass, the cookies and chocolate milk untouched.

He leans in under the tree, no presents there. Sadness on his face as he looks around the room. With his head hung low and shoulders stooped he slowly leaves the room.

EXT. FRONT YARD - MORNING

The front door to the decrepit house opens up and Joey steps out. He wears a winter jacket over his pajamas and Barney slippers on his feet. He strolls down the uneven wooden porch and into the snowy front yard.

He kicks some snow at a plastic Santa lying smiling in the snow, walks down to the curb, looks left and right then sits down.

WALTER (55) tall and scrawny with long gray greasy hair and Army surplus clothing limps down the street towards Joey.

He takes a swig out of a bottle in a brown paper bag. He hobbles past Joey, stops and turns around, stumbles back, takes another swig.

WALTER

Hey kid, shouldn't you be opening presents or something?

Joey looks down while making patterns in the snow.

WALTER (CONT'D)

You didn't like your presents?

Joey stares at the ground and shrugs.

WALTER (CONT'D)

What did you get?

Joey glances at Walter then back at the ground.

WALTER (CONT'D)
Hey Kid, are you serious?...Santa
didn't bring you anything at all?

Joey shakes his head. Walter ponders this for a moment.

WALTER (CONT'D)
What did you do?...(teasing) Did
you do something naughty?

Joey nods. Walter sits down on the curb next to him, his pant
legs rise up revealing two metal rod prosthetics. Joey
glances at Walter's metal ankles then turns back to stare at
the ground.

WALTER (CONT'D)
What did you do Kid?

JOEY
I called nine one one.

WALTER
You made a prank call?

Joey shakes his head.

JOEY
I wanted the police to come.

Walter looks puzzled.

WALTER
Why?

Joey looks up and their eyes meet.

JOEY
He was hurting my Mommy.

WALTER
Who?

Joey looks down again. Walter turns and peers at the house.

JOEY
Rodger.

WALTER
...That means you were trying to save
your mom...That makes you a hero.

JOEY
She got mad at me...said I was bad.

Walter thinks for a moment then he stick his hand inside his pants and feels around. Joey watches him.

WALTER
Hey Kid, look away, alright.

Joey does. Walter pulls a small pouch out from his pants.

WALTER (CONT'D)
I didn't tell you at first, but my name is Walter. I'm Santa's cousin.

Joey suspiciously eyes him.

WALTER (CONT'D)
Santa told me to come here and give you your present. He couldn't come himself. Some problems with his reindeer. I think Prancer had a bowed tendon, Comet colicked and poor Rudolph choked on an alfalfa cube.

Walter opens up the pouch and takes out a star-shaped medal with a blue ribbon. Joey studies the medal.

WALTER (CONT'D)
This medal, they give you..I mean Santa gives you, when you've displayed personal bravery or self-sacrifice to save someone else. It's called the medal of honor.

Joey stares at the medal in Walter's hand.

WALTER (CONT'D)
Santa only gives out one of these every year. Of all the kids on earth, he told me to give this one to you.

He slowly drops the medal into Joey's hand.

JOEY
To me?

WALTER
Yes, to you.

Walter gets up, Joey does the same.

WALTER (CONT'D)
Next time someone tells you you're bad, you just remember that medal Santa gave you.

Joey looks up at Walter who wipes a tear from his eye.

WALTER (CONT'D)

Don't loose that thing Kid. It's
very special, only the bravest
people can get one.

Walter turns and hobbles down the street. Joey watches him.

Joey gazes up at the last remaining star in the morning sky.
It twinkles brightly once and disappears. He closes his hand
around the star in his hand.

FADE OUT: