

Christmas Wish

by Brit

Long day, huh? It always seems like the day before Christmas is a zoo around here. Everyone plunging into the *euphoric sentimentalism* of the season by ramming into the car that beat them out of a good parking spot or decking the halls of the little old lady who got the last sale item they were reaching for.

Bah-humbug, *me*? C'mon! I love a little *holiday combat* as much as the next guy, really.

Grouchy? Oh, come on, O'Brien, I've been very good this year—no coal in my stocking. And since when have you been assigned *Comfort and Joy* duty?

What do I want for Christmas? Cute. No way, *Santa* O'Brien. I'm not falling into *that* trap. No matter how good you are, you never get what you wish for.

Get your mind out of the gutter. You're nuts, you know that? Just send me a fruitcake or something, because I won't be around anyway—I volunteered for duty Christmas day.

Yeah, really—I *volunteered*. Holidays are for families who know how to celebrate them. This single guy will be making himself useful. Besides, it'll be one of the last times I hit the streets here before my transfer over to Bay City. It looks like they've already got me assigned to somebody over there.

Yeah, the divorce papers were served yesterday. I know it'll be hard transferring academics in the middle of the term, but I really think it'll make life a whole lot easier if Vanessa and I aren't running into each other every time you turn around.

Nah, thanks for the invite, though. After my shift I've got a date with a porterhouse and a new book. You enjoy your time with your family.

Of course, I like Christmas! Always have. It's just my family that...well, it's a little hard to explain, Bob. I guess it's just that...*never mind*. It's a long story.

No, I never got what I asked for as a kid and yes, it's had a deep psychological scarring on my psyche. There, *Santa Freud*, you've diagnosed my deep, dark psychosis.

You're not going to leave this alone, are you? I'm telling you, you're going to think I'm nuts.

Yeah, more so than normal. Gee, thanks, Bob. Fine. You asked for it.

Well, I guess growing up I felt different from all the other kids. Sounds weird, huh? I don't know, I can't explain it. I can't even give you a reason for it. I just knew somehow that I never quite fit in. Maybe it was my parents' money or the social position they *loved* to throw around. Maybe not; maybe it

was just *me*. But even in a crowd of people I still felt *detached* from everyone there. Every holiday I wished for two things, one really—a combination of the two. When Christmas rolled around, I'd be prepared for the liturgical question from my folks as to what present would make me happy. For as long as I can remember, every year I would always ask for the same thing and every year I would be disappointed.

Good guess, Bob—but, no, not a puppy. I wanted a little brother. A brother or a best friend. Either or. I wasn't too particular.

Yeah, really. Well, of course, I never got him. Wasn't in their "reproductive plans." Oh, my folks were generous. They had the resources. But still, their mountain of gifts weren't what I wanted. What I thought I needed. Crazy, huh? As I got older I learned to think of something else to ask for, maybe something trendy or all the rage with the other kids—a certain bike, toys or games, then later music and clothes. But these were *things* that I never really wanted, never really needed. They just filled the void—for a little while anyway.

See, I told you I don't really know how to explain it. I seemingly had everything I could possibly need—affluent parents, an accredited semi-private school, opportunities that were enviable. *But still...* still somewhere deep inside was a part of me that remained...I don't know... *lonely*...in a way that I couldn't identify. Even as an adult I've tried to fill that hole: college, women, my job.

No, not even my wife. Or rather, my soon to be ex-wife. Even now, nothing seems to fill it. Don't get me wrong, I love what I'm doing. This is what I was meant to be. I've never been happier, actually. *It's just...* I don't know if I can explain it.

In high school I was pushed into all sorts of competitions, had to be the best. I was a Hutchinson, after all. High school track star, debate team captain, honor roll. It made my parents happy. Made them proud. And for a while those things made me...well, not happy, but maybe satisfied. No one realized how empty I really felt. You see, instead of winning the 30-yard dash, I would've given anything for someone to run along side me, not just try to *outrun* me. Rather than unbeatable debates by a sharp intellect, I wanted someone to argue with me because they wanted what was best for me, not just to *best* me. Instead of gaining friends who were only of honor roll caliber, I wanted someone who I would consider it an *honor* to be their friend. I wanted a friend that would stick closer than a brother. Someone who would accept me for who I was, not *what* I was. A friend that would choose me because I was *worth choosing*, not because of what I was worth. I wanted...oh, man. Bob, I can't believe I...I can't believe you asked me a simple question and I go off on a tangent. I'm sorry...

Well, thanks. I appreciate your understanding. Look, get out of here. You've got a big day tomorrow with Bonnie and the kids and all. I'll see you day after next. And, Bob, thanks for listening. You've...you've been a great teacher and a good friend, *for a sergeant anyway*. I...well, I'm going to miss you.

Yeah, the captain finally got the paperwork squared away so I'm in first of the year, right after the holidays. I'm not sure who my road instructor will be, but it looks like they've already got another rookie in mind for me to room with. Starkly or Starksy or something. Anyway, have a good night.

Yeah, Merry Christmas to you, too.

~ Brit
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