

Chapter 1: Christmas 1998

A young man with a big goofy smile, and a small cup of coffee reaches down and gently shakes a sleeping woman, “good morning sweetie, are you excited?!” She stretches her arms up and her legs out, her arms touch the top of the headboard while her feet still don’t reach the bottom of her king sized mattress. While she does, a smile grows on her face. He bends down and kisses it, “your smile is so cute”. She opens her bright green eyes, full of love, “I love you baby”. She stands up out of bed, already dressed in her Christmas pajamas that just so happen to match his. He hands her a warm cup of coffee and with her other hand she grabs his, he tightens his grip of her hand, leading her down the steps.

Describing their bedroom as tidy would be an outright lie. This is not due to the room being messy or dirty, it is due to the simple fact that the room is cleaner than tidy can convey. The walls practically sparkle, the carpet is more fluffy than the sheep it was sheered from, and the one window that is cleaned daily always is mistaken to be open. One would normally assume that Jess would be the sole reason for this immaculate setting, but in this case they work equally together to make this a reality. Pete’s orderly nature is enough to make one wonder if he has gone mad, but in reality this is the only thing keeping him from it.

They enter the living room, full of rainbow colored lights, to the point of blinding. They hang from the ceiling, wrap around the banister, and of course cover the tree, which is too big and the top two feet bend against the ceiling. She looks around in pure, childlike amazement. “I need the coffee because I was up late, want to know why?” he asks jokingly. “Why?” she asks with a smile. “You’d think this would take an hour or two, god it must have taken five. I’d plug in the light to the wall, and nothing would happen. I’d change out each light bulb and when I finally gave up it randomly turned on when I bumped into it!” He explains while giggling. “Next time you should start by bumping it” she jokes back. He smiles at her, and leads her to the Christmas tree. “You know what was even worse? When it was all said and done, I took a step back and realized the tree was a couple inches too far to the left...” She giggles, “please tell me you left it”. “You know what I had to do!” He laughs. “It’s perfect baby” she assures. “Now it is” he says with pride and a hint of relief.

Under the tree are two piles of presents. One pile is fairly large, of eight or nine presents wrapped neatly and nicely, while the other is absolutely massive, consisting of some twenty five to thirty perfectly wrapped presents. “Come on Pete, you told me we weren’t gonna spend that much this year” she says almost disappointed in him for breaking their promise. “Sorry Jess, I broke the promise, you’re worth every bit of overtime to afford it” Pete says with no remorse. Jess smiles ear to ear, and Pete pulls her in tight for a hug, “I love you, now come on and open your first gift!” Jess gently picks up the first present and unwraps it by peeling off each piece of tape holding it together. The second she removes the wrapping paper, Pete grabs it and puts it in a garbage bag. It unfolds to reveal a Kent State hoodie, “we just graduated, you won’t let me forget will you?” Jess says with a little sass. “Nope, open the small one down there, it’s a Kent State bumper sticker” Pete jokes back. “It better not be! I love the hoodie, but I’m glad we graduated” Jess attempts to hide her anger. Pete laughs and Jess joins in with a chuckle. She reaches for her next gift, a medium sized nearly perfect cube. As she opens it she gasps and looks up to Pete, who returns a slightly confused face. She quickly rips it apart to reveal a box of daily devotionals. “Thank you so much! I love it so much!” Jess explodes with joy. Pete tilts his head, “your welcome. I saw you point them out the one day. You should open this one next” Pete hands her the next present. “One second baby” Jess’ focus is completely on opening the devotionals and reading