

Smoke Break

Written by
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EXT. SHOPPING CENTER - NIGHT

The air is thick with the mingled scents of cheap perfume and a lingering pine needle aroma from the picked-over Christmas trees.

Christmas music playing over the speakers, echoing from store to store and trees glowing with Christmas flickering lights.

Everyone has a smile on their face, some even share laughter...except for a girl in her early 20s, is sitting alone at a nearby bench with her head lowered.

She scrolls endlessly through images of herself and her family. All smiling and full of cheer.

Her tearful eyes gaze at the smoke ascending from the embers at the tip of the cigarette. Silently, in her thoughts.

Mandy glares up at the passing shoppers across the street, ignoring the Christmas music as she smokes her cigarette.

MANDY

What a fucking joke...

MALE VOICE (O.S.)

Pardon me?

Mandy turned her head to the voice, greeted by an ELDERLY MALE with a gray beard and wearing a long black coat; holding out a few crumpled bills in his hand.

ELDERLY MALE

May I please...what the hell do they say now...? *Bum* a cigarette out of you?

Mandy examines him, eyes up and down. Hesitantly, she takes the bills from his fingers and hands him a cigarette.

ELDERLY MALE (cont'd)

Appreciate it!

He takes a seat on the bench and lights the cigarette with a zippo lighter.

ELDERLY MALE (cont'd)

I started to lose hope I was ever gonna get a smoke break...I think I can survive the rest of my shift.

Mandy motions her eyes over to the elderly male, noticing the red suit peaking through the black coat.

MANDY
Santa Claus huh?

ELDERLY MALE
How...do you know that?

MANDY
I can see the red suit.

"SANTA"
Oh...well...you caught me...I didn't
want the kids to see me like this.

Mandy stays silent as she continues to scroll through
pictures...her hand shaking as she holds the phone.

MANDY
It's unfair...

Mandy gaze out at the people walking on the sidewalk.

MANDY (cont'd)
These people have no idea how lucky
they are...

EXT. SHOPPING CENTER

People pass by with smiles and are filled with joy.

MANDY (O.S.)
Why can't I go shopping with my
family?

A group of teenagers having a snowball fight in a nearby
park.

MANDY (O.S.) (cont'd)
Why can't I spend time in the snow
with my friends?

EXT. BENCH

Mandy's warm tears fall onto her hands.

MANDY
(weeping)
Why can't I be home...? Why do I have
to make someone else's holiday special
in exchange for mine to be ruined?

Santa motions his eyes to her.

MANDY (cont'd)

Why me...?

Mandy holds her hands against her face and sobs.

"SANTA"

It's not you...it's not any of us,
really, for that matter...it's just
Christmas...if it was up to me...I
would've quit my job ages ago...but
that dream is a pipe one, at best.

MANDY

There's plenty of people who can play
Santa Claus.

Santa chuckles.

"SANTA"

I don't think anyone could do my job.

MANDY

Don't fool yourself with that
thought.

Mandy looks down at the burning embers at the tip of her
cigarette.

MANDY (cont'd)

We're human...no matter how many
times I bust my ass, I'm just a
normal person doing the best I can...
but no one sees a retail worker that
way. Especially on Christmas...

Mandy brushes her tears.

MANDY (cont'd)

I apologize for my negative
attitude...I'm just tired...

Santa looks down at the remainder of his cigarette as he
thinks to himself.

"SANTA"

No, you're right...my wife has said
the same thing too...

Santa exhales as he smokes the cigarette.

"SANTA" (cont'd)

I am tired too...I'm tired of this job and the holiday that comes with it...if there's anything I could ask for Christmas...it would be not to work...for one year...

MANDY

Just one?

"SANTA"

I...guess there's some nostalgia with this Holiday for me, despite work. Me and my wife used to walk in the snow and drink hot cocoa together every year...what I would give...just for one day...of that...it would be enough for me...

Mandy looks over at Santa Claus with glossed eyes.

MANDY

That sounds so peaceful.

"SANTA"

What about you? If you could be home. What would you do?

Mandy brings her head up to the Christmas tree across the street. Staring intensely upon the lights.

Mandy hangs her head down as she takes steady breaths.

MANDY

...I would be home...I would be helping my mom decorate the tree...me and my sister would be getting cookies & cocoa ready for Santa.

"SANTA"

Ho-Ho-Ho, you guys don't do the old fashioned milk and cookies?

MANDY

(chuckling)

No...she would say..."Santa is always working in the cold, wouldn't coco be better to keep him warm?"

"SANTA"

That's really considerate of her.

Mandy stares down at a picture of her sister on the phone...

MANDY

In her own way...I think she gets it.

-- Beep. Beep. --

Santa taps a button on the side of his watch.

"SANTA"

Back to it, I guess.

MANDY

I suppose I should return too.

Santa and Mandy stand from the bench. Both flicking their cigarette buds into the snow.

Mandy and Santa start walking down the sidewalk together.

EXT. OUTSIDE OF THE STORE

Mandy and Santa stop in front of the store. Santa looks over at Mandy, standing there in silence.

MANDY

I really don't want to go back in there and deal with that bullshit.

Santa places his hand on her shoulder.

"SANTA"

Customers are human too, as much as I hate to admit it...even our best is not always enough for them but that's fine, neither you or I are miracle workers and we cannot make everyone happy...If some can't understand how it feels to be in my boots...I am grateful there's people like you, who does.

Mandy looks at him with a loss of words.

MANDY

(smiling)

You're a strange one, Santa.

"SANTA"

Ho-Ho-Ho! I'll take that as a compliment....Can I ask you one more thing?

MANDY

Sure, what's up?

"SANTA"

What do you want for Christmas?

Mandy bursts into laughter.

MANDY

(during the laughter)

Oh my God, of course you would asked that.

"SANTA"

Come on, entertain me!

Mandy digs into her coat pocket and pulls out a crumpled cigarette carton.

MANDY

(sarcastic)

A new pack of smokes would be perfect. I'm sure as hell gonna need them to survive today and tomorrow.

"SANTA"

Ho-Ho-Ho! I'll see what I can do about that.

Santa starts walking away, waving to Mandy.

"SANTA" (cont'd)

(while walking away)

Merry Christmas!

MANDY

You too!

(under her breath;
chuckling)

Old Lunatic.

Mandy throws her carton into the trash.

INT. BACK ROOM

Mandy entered the combination to her locker. As she opened the door. she notices a small gift placed inside of the locker, wrapped neatly in glittering red wrap.

She takes it out of the locker...looking around the backroom. Wondering how it even got there.

MANDY
(reading the note)
*"Thank you for tonight, Amanda. Have
a Merry Christmas...and happy
holidays. Also, thanks for the
smoke."*

Amanda raises a brow at the last line.

MANDY (cont'd)
"Smoke?"

Amanda removes the wrapping paper...and she's stunned.

Underneath the crimson color wrapping paper, revealed a pack
of unopened cigarettes.

MANDY (cont'd)
Merry Christmas to you too, Santa.