



BY AMANDA GRIEME aka DEAR PRUDENCE
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A young man whisked through a bookstore looking for last-minute items to surprise his family. He collected his purchases, and rushed home, only to find that his wife and youngest child were still out shopping. Wrapped in the giddiness of Christmas eve, and but touched by melancholy, he sat to wrap gifts. Time passed...packages were glowing beneath the warm lights of the tree, and he was still alone. He tried to reach his wife in vain, as she, too, was out amidst the bustle of the 24th, unaware of the ringing phone in her purse.

The man cracked a crisp ale, took a swig and watched the heavy afternoon sky change from watery winter sunlight to impending snow. He drifted into daydreams of Christmas past, cradled by Tchaikovsky tinkling from the stereo.

As he was about to fall to slumber, his eyes popped open with a realization; he had forgotten something. Although it was nothing imperative, it 'twas Christmas eve and stores would close at sunset. Despite his disdain at the thought of entering the retail world again, he climbed into his hat, lit a smoke, and made his way.

His feverish journey took him to Kmart... a blue light standard; easy in... easy out. No strings attached. And as is generally the case, he was accosted by the bright lights, Dean Martin poured from the loud speakers, and the 50% off blue light Christmas Eve specials seduced him. His essential item was fulfilled, then smothered by countless surprises for his nephews and little girl. The cart slowly piled-up; it felt good!

As he rounded each aisle, he couldn't help but feel as if he was being watched... not a (maybe they think I am a shoplifter) paranoia per se, but just a looming feeling of eyes studying his choices. And on several occasions, he crossed paths with a lovely woman dressed in black, who in hindsight he thinks perhaps glanced in his direction to share a smile. The man walked nonchalantly into the check out line, only to find the woman-in-black behind him. He noticed she was only holding a small item.

"Please... go ahead of me!" He pointed to his cart. "I will take a while."

She smiled at him. "No... no... I have plenty of time. You go right ahead."

He watched the bags fill up, and the store clerk totaled his purchase.

"\$158.16, please."

As the man reached into his pocket for his wallet, the woman-in-black reached across the counter and handed the cashier a crisp \$100 bill.

"I'd like to contribute, please."

The man, shocked... muttered something out of embarrassment, and the cashier blushed.

"Please... let me do this for you." The woman-in-black smiled. "You remind me so much of my son. Merry Christmas!"

And with that, the man said a simple "Thank You," and hugged the woman-in-black, feeling her

contentment. No questions were asked... no other words were exchanged. The woman-in-black disappeared into the parking lot, and the man was forever-changed by the true Spirit of Christmas.

Behind ghosts of smoke, the twilight winter sky slowly released the first flakes of snow. Frank quietly made his way home to me and his youngest daughter, wiping away tears of gratitude.

A Peaceful 2013 to ALL

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