

The Best Day
By Dorothy Rice
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It is the day after Christmas. I sleep the dreamless sleep of reprieve. At wakening, memories come.

I am in that tiny house, subzero. The windows so cold my fingers stick. 1956, 5am, up to madness. Four brothers and sisters descend on cheap wrappings, throwing, tearing. My mother has slept two hours since somehow she has only finished wrapping.

Then begins the most frightening day of the year. with Jack Daniels and Franny Farmer as the honored guests. Baby Jesus has long since fled.

It is the sheer tedium of the eroding terror in me that I remember, watching hour after hour to see that no one harms themselves or another. The noise is ever present. No music ever. Just squabbling and sarcasm, as the ever-present Specter of Death sits quietly next to the "real tree" that will stay up until my mother's birthday in February. This is the land of addiction. My breakfast is ribbon candy and chocolate.

I seek sanctuary from this nowhere place. I live under the back of the tree and imagine wonderful fairy stories about the ornaments. The only family warmth is from the TV.

My father drives drunk over sheer ice to get Grandma. I am the only one who sits with her. She is almost mute, like my father. They say the same thing rarely- "I'm no good." I tell them they are.

Grandma goes home after a binge cooked poorly. To this day, I resist holiday cooking. I recall seven faces all posed to devour. A feeding frenzy ensues, where even Santa would go back up the chimney, leaving no presents.

My holiday stories were about past suicides. Many children get beaten on Christmas. I would have welcomed the attention. Instead, the day drones on like a poorly oiled fan in a southern prison. And yet, God is the comforter of this darkest night.

At the sink in the dusty little corridor- excuse for a kitchen. I find my voice. In acapella comes the bird of freedom from my soul, "Oh Holy Night." It is a tradition I have forced upon them all as we wash the dinner dishes in Dreft laundry soap. (My mother's peculiarity). The audience is stunned into silence. This is the one area where I have triumph. I am the only one in the family who goes to church and they are suddenly afraid of me.

The power of God is in that place, as my mournful strains are accompanied only by the everywhere howl of outside wind.

And yet, is this a sad tale? I think not. For in the lifting worship and determination of that young girl's adoration of Christ Jesus, He is born anew. In forgiveness of these sick and suffering souls of darkness, Jesus comes. Bringing hope and strength and peace to the little girl "who loves Jesus."

The best day is the day after Christmas.

"May my Savior (who saved my all-thoughtful heart all those days) be glorified in this. I write to praise Him."

- Dorothy Rice