The Last Gift

One last gift hunched under the tree, leaning on the tree stand, draped with tinsel. It had my name on it, but for some reason, I was reluctant to open it. I imagined it was giving off bad vibes. And it said it was from Santa, and I hadn’t believed in Santa for years. Actually, it didn’t say Santa, it said “with love from Sandy Claws.” That meant it was from my mother, because my father would never write something like that. I pictured Sandy Claws as a cat scratching in a litter box, and that wasn’t an image I wanted to associate with Christmas.

Everyone was looking at me. I didn’t move.

"Honey," my Mom said, "it’s for you." I still didn’t move.

She reached under the tree and lifted the package. When she handed it to me, it felt like a book. Mom always tries to get me to read high literature, and if that doesn’t work, to read ... anything. Well, almost anything. She wasn’t hugely in favor of my reading Lady Chatterley’s Lover, for example, but I did anyway. It was kind of a dumb book, but don’t tell my friends I said that.

"Open it," Sarah said. She’s my little sister. Sighing hugely, I tore open the paper. I was surprised. I though it was some retarded
I love doing art. And I love writing stories. And secretly, I write poems. I don't tell my friends, because they think kids who write poems are weird. So it's Christmas night. Everyone's gone to bed. I'm under the covers with a flashlight. Mom usually comes and takes the flashlight away, but tonight, she peeks in and smiles. "Nice tent you have here," she says, and suddenly I remember that I actually love my Mom and she's not the creep I sometimes think she is. I don't have school for ten more days, and I'm going to write lots of stories and paint pictures. (Also go skiing and sledding and ice skating, maybe play hockey. Uncle George is going to take us snowmobiling in the North Country over New Year's.) (Mom says snowmobiles are bad for the environment, but she's still going to let us go.)

One of the cool things about my new leather-bound journal is that it has four removable signatures, like individual blank magazines. In the first one, I am writing these words; my journal. In the second one, I'm writing stories. I'm going to write something way better than Lady Chatterley's Lover (ugh.) In the third one, I'm writing poems (shhh, don't tell.) The last one is for drawings and paintings. I've already made a sketch of Sarah, who's not good at sitting still. And I drew the Christmas tree. And I drew Roxy, our new puppy, one of Sarah's presents. Roxy never sits still, so I had to draw her sleeping. Sarah gloats that her present is better than mine, but she's wrong. She can't keep Roxy to
herself, so Roxy’s my present too, in a way, but Sarah doesn’t get to write or draw or paint in my new Journal. It’s funny that the gift I was most afraid of turned out to be my best gift. I wouldn’t tell my friends this, but I like it even better than my new hockey skates. Which I love.

The journal has my initials on the front. Mom gave me a box, later, that had extra signatures in it, and I can store the signatures that I fill up in there and replace them with some of the new ones. Someday, I am going to be a famous writer and illustrator, and someone will read these words, these very words I am writing tonight, and say, “Wow, already a good writer, and only a kid. Hah!” (I hope they can read my handwriting. Mom says I should try to write neat enough to be able to read what I write myself, at least. She says my writing is too small, but I can read it fine.)

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I’ve been keeping a journal since I was a child, and I have hundreds of them now, full of true stories from my life, and made up stories, poems, sketches, drawing, paintings, and so on. Some of that work has been published.

My journals are extremely important to me. They hold the story of my life and loves.