



Santa's Ramp



Merry Christmas 2012




Chapter 1

Amy sat and stared out the window to a cold grey morning. Dawn was beginning to break and was reluctantly shedding light on a dark world. She shook her head a little as looking out the windows only reminded her that they needed a good cleaning. Her hands folded around a hot cup of coffee and they soaked up what little warmth it provided. She already had her small thread bare coat wrapped around her to stave off the morning chill and she shivered inside its bulk. Her eyes drew back into the kitchen.



It was a modern kitchen forty years ago. A white double sink stained from too many efforts to clean one last pot stood guard before the window. The table was a relic with chrome legs and a linoleum top. The chairs looked 50's kitsch and the vinyl bore too many cracks and tears. The floor was cheap white tile at one time, but grey, leaning to black, was its current color. The walls bore an uncanny resemblance to lime green. Still for a rental unit the single bedroom house wasn't that bad. It was clean and the landlord made sure everything worked.

Amy took another sip of the coffee and watched the clock on the wall move towards the anointed hour. She was a bit hungry, but would have to wait to get to work before she could eat. Free breakfast was one of the perks of working at the diner. Amy took another look at her attire, standard white on pink waitress uniform with sturdy canvas shoes, name tag just above the fake pocket on the left. The uniform was worn and had been altered



by at least four people before her. At least she was able to keep it reasonably clean. Most of the stains had come out in the wash.

Her thoughts turned to her job. So far the Christmas season had proved to be a bit more generous this year for tips. She hoped it would continue today. She would like to take the car instead of public transportation to see Tom. The trip by bus was almost an hour and she always had to leave early to catch the last one home.

Amy set the now empty cup in the sink and moved to the front door. Once outside she stood on the concrete landing just for a moment to observe the street. A thin blanket of snow lay quietly on the grass and trees as dawn began to break. The trees limbs arched into the chilled air for want of their warm blanket of leaves. She saw the Santa's, sleighs, and all of the Christmas decorations dotting the street. For all of her homes nuances, the neighborhood was a quiet tree lined street with sidewalks and a generous portion of small kids. She liked where she lived. She would like one of the better houses, but this was all she and Tom could afford. She would particularly like to have some Christmas lights of her own. Amy always liked the Christmas lights.

“Wouldn’t mind a few kids as well. At least two. Or maybe even three.” Amy thought as a grin crossed her lips.

But the Christmas lights always got to her. It was the one thing she never had and they looked so cheery in the dark of the night. Amy never remembered having her own lights. She never remembered her first home, her first Christmas, or her mom or





dad. She was an orphan early on and spent most of her time in the system or in orphanages. That was probably why she got so close to Tom. He was alone also.

“Well, that and his wonderful smile.” Amy reminded herself.


Amy thoughts turned to that summer’s day only a few short years ago. She was resplendent in a sun dress bought second hand. It was a rare day off and she had moved to the park to soak in the rays of the summer sun. He was bent under the hood of a car that had succumbed to the heat. His expletive as an errant tool banged his knuckles drew her attention. He had stood up dressed in a tight grimy t-shirt and a pair of cut-off jeans. His wince turned to that great smile as he saw her standing before him. She had smiled back.



A brisk breeze brought her back to her current reality. She saw her car setting just at the curb right in front of her house. Across the street, directly in her line of sight, a man emerged from a modest two story with a driveway. She had seen him a couple of times and waved. He smiled and waved back as he began work to free the frost from the windshield. The lack of Christmas lights at his house was a comfort to Amy. That meant hers wasn’t the only house on the block with no lights and she didn’t feel she stood out as much. Amy hated drawing attention to her or Tom.

She moved to the car and pulled open its door. The door creaked in defiance but relented. Amy sat down gingerly as the back of her legs hit the chilled vinyl seat. A shiver ran through





her body. Try as she might she just couldn't keep the skirt pulled down enough to protect her legs from this invading cold. She fumbled a bit as she placed the key in the ignition. The old beater roared to life on the first turn. She smiled quietly at the triumph.

"If nothing else, Tommy knows how to keep a car running." She thought as the heat began to build.

It took a few minutes for the care to warm up. Amy made use of the time by clearing off the snow from all the windows and then diving back into the beast. She placed the car in gear and headed the few miles to the diner.



Chapter 2

Joe had the grill running. The place was warm and smelled of a thousand fast food meals. Amy knew that in a few short hours the town around her would be bustling with business men and women headed to some fantastic job and the stillness would be shattered. But for now this was the only oasis of light and heat in the deserted city. Joe's proximity to downtown assured enough patrons geared for a fast meal and even hotter cup of coffee. With a tired smile Amy waved hello to Joe. He returned the smile and then lent his attention to a stubborn piece of food lodged on the griddle.

Amy hit the time clock, wrapped on the cloth apron, grabbed her order book and headed to the coffee urn. With a few well practiced moves she soon had both pots brewing and a couple of pieces of toast in toaster. The bell above the door chimed as a customer walked in. Amy moved to get a cup and saucer.




"The 47% finally hard at work." A man chuckled as he sat down.

"Election's over Roger. Give it a rest." Amy smiled as she placed a hot cup of coffee before one of her regulars.

"Never told me who you backed." Roger smiled.

"Never will. It is my vote, not yours." Amy retorted with a smile.

"Darn right, girl." Another voice said as it sat down.



Amy reached for a second cup and saucer. She poured another cup as the man sat at the counter in front of her. Roger and Adam were regulars and solid friends. They stood on the opposite side of politics, but never let politics spoil their friendship, unlike a few of the others in the diner.

Roger offered a coffee cup salute to Adam as he took a sip of his coffee. Adam returned the courtesy and both smiled warmly.

“Neighbors still fighting?” Adam asked.

Amy nodded. She even shivered at the thought. The election had become so violent on her street that the neighbors on either side had actually come to blows on her yard. Amy had been home when it happened and she had to call the police. Ambulances came and took both combatants away. She didn’t know if they would ever speak again. The whole incident scared her. The anger was so physical.



“People can get too invested.” Adam spoke.

“Think Christmas will help?” Roger asked.

“I hope so. It is such a nice street. Good people. I just don’t know what to say when I see them.” Amy replied.

“It’ll sort itself out. You just be safe.” Adam said.

“Going to see Tom?” Roger asked. He started in on the eggs and toast Amy was placing before him.



“Yes.” Amy replied. Her eyes sparkled with the excitement that replaced the worry.

Roger and Adam smiled. They knew about Amy’s devotion to Tommy. Amy turned around to fetch Adam’s breakfast. She placed it on the counter before him along with the check and then took off to get a cup of coffee and order from another of her regulars.

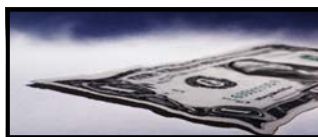
Roger and Adam waved as they left the diner on their way to work. Amy was busy as usual but took a moment to send them a smile and wave. She returned to clear their dishes and collect the money for the check. She stopped a moment and a small tear slipped down her cheek along with a tender smile. A five dollar tip was placed under each coffer cup, enough money to allow her to take the car to see Tom.

Tips had been good in addition to Roger and Adam and Amy threw off the apron as she checked out. Joe gave her a wave and grinned as she made for the door.

“Tell Tom, I said hi.” Joe said.

“Sure will.” Amy replied and fairly skipped out the door.

Amy hopped in the car and made her way over to the discount gas station. Carefully she measured in four gallons of gas, no more. It was enough to get to the VA and back home. She still would have enough tip money to put in the savings jar and get some dinner. Small wonders, but all she needed. She was going to be with her Tom today.



Chapter 3

Amy hopped in the car and began the drive to the VA. Her mind wandered back to their short life together. That chance meeting by the car, led to a burger and fries. He took her to a matinee and got her a coke and popcorn. She swam in his smiles and attentions. But she did notice he didn't get a coke for himself. He hung by her place of work as she got off and they would head to the park if it was nice and walk the mall if it was raining. Summer turned to fall and fall to winter. Still Tom met her at work and was in her life on her days off. Their love grew strong and Amy couldn't think of being with anyone else. She had never been so happy.



It was at Christmas that they almost lost each other the first time. Amy was so excited about seeing the lights and enjoyed sitting next to Tom in the car as they trolled the streets looking for the next big display. At first Tom enjoyed the time but then he started to become distant and

irritable. Then one day he just didn't show up after she got off of work. Amy was in a panic. She didn't know if he was hurt or sick. She walked to his place of work, scared of what she would find out. Afraid he was injured, or worse, no longer wanted her. He wasn't there and she broke down and cried. His boss took pity on her and drove her back to her apartment.



She climbed the stairwell to her rooms and sobbed on every step. She didn't know what was wrong or what she had done. She just wanted her Tom back. The room was cold and lonely. She had heated up some mac and cheese and sat in front of her small television. Some old black and white movie was on when a



knock came to the door. She raced to the door and looked out her peephole. There stood a man in a Santa Clause suit. Next to him, held by the scruff of the neck, was her Tom. She burst open the door.

Tom and Santa walked in. Tom's head hung in shame. Santa stood in the doorway barring any easy exit.

"Tell her." Santa said in a tender and certain voice.

Tom looked to Santa and then to Amy took a deep breath and told her so completely that he loved her. Amy fell into his arms. She pounded on his chest and cried deep wonderful tears. She told him how worried she was. How she was scared he was hurt. And then she told him of her love. Somewhere in their embrace Santa left and Tom told her his story.

He was afraid. She was so pretty. She was so smart. He wanted to give her everything, but couldn't even pay for dinner at a bad diner. He was just a poor mechanic. He was alone in the world. When they saw the lights at Christmas he knew he couldn't give her what she deserved. He didn't know how to say goodbye, so he left. He felt so ashamed about what he had done, what he was, but didn't know how to fix it. Then he met that damn Santa.





Santa had asked what was wrong as they sat on the same bench in the park. Tom told him his story. The old man took him by the neck and brought him to her door. On the way he told him if he truly loved someone to trust them. Tell them the truth. True love will stand by you no matter what. It's not what is in your pocket, but in your heart that matters.

When the story was done, Tom reached into his ratty old jacket and pulled out a simple pawn shop ring. Then and there he asked her to be his wife.

Amy smiled at the thought. Not only because they became man and wife, but because they never did find that Santa. She would have loved to have him come to their wedding at city hall.



Chapter 4


Amy pulled into the parking lot at the VA. She sat in the car and looked at the big building and remembered the last Christmas. It was then she almost lost Tom the second time.

Tom had joined the National Guard. They both discussed it. She was against it and nervous. But it promised extra money they needed and they would train Tom in computers. Plus if he served enough he would be able to afford college. It would be a chance to move up. If things worked out, maybe even a few kids. Amy grinned at the last thought.

So Tom had joined the Guard and put in his time. The extra money did come in handy and through his connections, they met the man that rented them her current home. But it wasn't long before Tom got the call and had to go to Afghanistan. He deployed just before Thanksgiving and they had a couple of frozen turkey dinners to celebrate the upcoming holiday before he left.

Amy was always worried while Tom was away. She had just gotten the job at Joe's diner and learning the ropes kept her attention. It was small solace, but at least Tom would call every night he could. Things seemed to be moving well, until the soldier showed up at her door. He assured her that Tom was only wounded. His legs had been hit and he couldn't walk right now. He was being moved back to Germany and once he was stable he would be moved to the closest VA hospital. It did little to calm Amy. She wanted to see her Tom.





She went to work the next day with tear-stained red eyes. She tried to work, but spilled a coffee on a man wearing a Santa suit. It caused a bit of a commotion and Joe moved from the grill to see what was wrong. Santa just raised his gloved hand and the diner became quiet. With a motion to Joe and a wink to another waitress Santa took her hand and led her to a booth alongside one of the doors. Amy fell apart as he put his arm around her and just listened. Two cups of coffee appeared and the room seemed to fall away as Santa took charge. After a moment Santa stood up, took Amy by the hand and took her home. Waiting at the door was a small woman in uniform.



The woman took her inside where Amy packed a few belongings and then followed the woman out to a car. They travelled to an airfield where a big burly National Guard cargo plane stood ready to take off. She was bundled into the plane and taken to her Tom.

Amy didn't remember much of that trip. It was the first time in an airplane and the first time in a foreign country. But all she cared about was seeing her Tom. She remembered walking the long hall and dying with each step. She was sure she wouldn't get there in time. Sure her Tom might take a turn for the worse. She needed to see him so desperately. Then she was led into his room. All the tubes and machines were working and beeping, but between them all lay her Tom. His eyes were closed and he hadn't had a shave. His legs were all bound in bandages. He looked terrible and Amy never felt so small and helpless. She





reached out and touched his hands. His eyes opened, those wonderful, marvelous eyes, and through all the tubes and pain he smiled. Amy cried and cried.

It seemed so quick. No sooner was she there than they were making arrangements to take him home. She stayed by him the whole time. They even arranged for her to fly home with him. All the kindness from all the strangers and she never even got to say thank you. And she never even knew who the Santa was in the diner. The least she could do was give him a new cup of coffee.

But here she was at the VA coming to see her Tom. Coming to find out when he could come home. Coming to see when they could be a family again.



Chapter 5

Tom was waiting in the wheelchair. He met her at the door to his room with a huge hug and a smile. They went to a recreation room where they could talk and laugh. Tom said he



saw her in the parking lot. Amy told him about the generosity of the customers and they could be together for at least another two hours. They moved over to the television and watched a show with the other patients. Then

they moved to a small corner and began planning their future again. Amy yawned softly.

“Tired, Amy? You work too hard. You shouldn’t come here so much. You should take a day off.” Tom said.

“If I did I would just come here anyway.” Amy sighed with a small grin.

An orderly called Tom from the doorway.

“Be right back.” Tom said.

Amy looked around and saw all the patients starting to drift back to their rooms. She checked her watch and noticed that she would have to leave soon. A nurse walked over towards her to pick up some debris.

“Are you Tom’s wife?” The nurse asked.

Amy warmed to the term “Tom’s wife.”



“Yes I am.” Amy replied.

“Well, you must be getting ready to have him home, huh?” The nurse smiled.

“I didn’t think he could come home yet?” Amy replied.

“As long as he can get in and out of the house, he can. Didn’t he tell you?” The nurse asked.

Tom was wheeling himself back to Amy with a smile on his face.

“Got to go, honey. They want to put me to bed.” Tom smiled.

“Can you come home, Tom?” Amy asked.

Tom stopped wheeling the chair and his smile faded to concern. He looked first at Amy and then stared daggers at the nurse.

“I can if I can get in and out of the house, Amy.” Tom replied.

“Well, what does that mean?” Amy asked.



“It means I need a ramp for the wheelchair.” Tom replied.

“Oh.” Amy responded at a loss as what to say.

“Look, Amy. I’m going to be alright. I’ll walk again. It’ll take four, maybe five months and then I won’t need the ramp. I’ll keep working here. I’ll get home soon.” Tom said more pleading than explaining.

“But, I’d like you home now.” Amy cried softly.





Tom reached over and stroked Amy's face.

"I know honey. I want to come home so bad. But we can't afford to build a ramp. I'll stay here and work on my legs. They'll get stronger soon. I know they will. Then I'll come home." Tom sighed.

"But, Tom." Amy began.

"Amy, it is all I can give right now. It's all I can do. Let me try." Tom cried softly.

Amy stood up to stoop down and give her man a hug.

"All right, babe." Amy replied softly.

Amy knew how this was hurting Tom. He hated to see her come from the diner to see him. He hated that he couldn't contribute to their welfare. It tore at him to see her work so hard and he did nothing but sit in a wheelchair. This fight, this little fight with his legs to make them work again was all he could do to help their family. She had to let him fight the battle. But she wanted him home so badly. A thought quickly crossed her mind.

"But what if Santa brought a ramp?"

Amy grinned.

Tom laughed. He was well aware of the Santa that brought them together and the Santa that brought her to him.

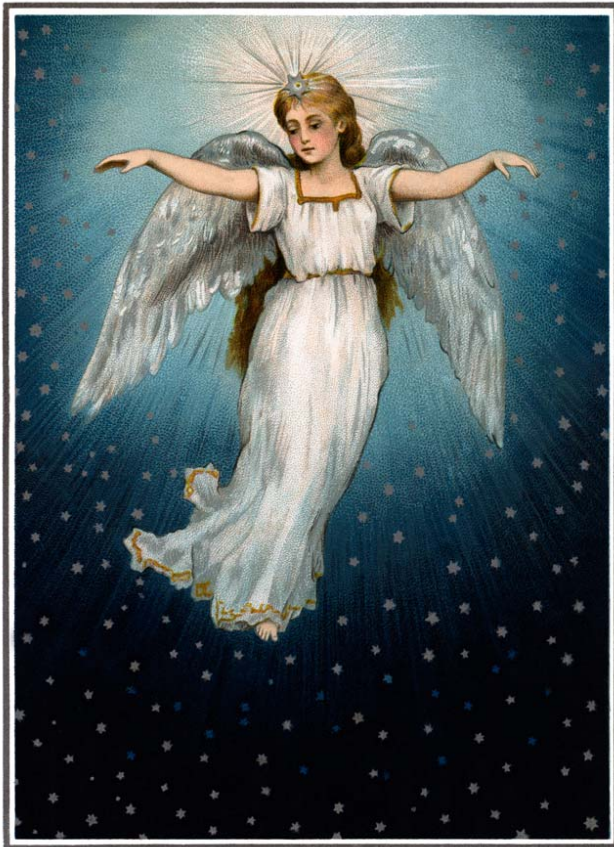
"If Santa wants a ramp, Santa gets a ramp. I'll use any ramp that Santa brings." Tom smiled.





Amy gave her man a hug and kiss. As the nurse wheeled him to his room Amy turned toward the elevator.

“I’ll see you soon.” She said as she waved.



Chapter 6

It was a rare day off, but Amy was up with the dawn. She was going to see Tom later in the evening, but today she had to see if she could help Santa. Amy had on her old jeans and a sweatshirt. She was out in the back shed working through Tom's tools. If nothing else, Tom had tools. He needed them to be a mechanic and do his trade. Amy had little knowledge of what all of these things did, but she did know a saw and hammer when she saw one.

Amy pulled the tools to her chest and heaved them out to the front stoop. It was only three little steps to the front door and her Tom could be home. She was sure she could build a ramp



that went up three little steps. Amy went back to the shed to find the wood Tom kept handy. She found two long pieces and brought them out next to the stoop. It was then she saw her neighbor from across the street looking her way. He waved and started across the street.

Amy froze. No one had come to her house since before the election and that didn't turn out so well.

"Hello." The neighbor said as he got closer.

"Hi" Amy replied.

She was glad she had a hammer close by.

"Do you need help carrying the wood? It seemed a bit large for you." The man grinned.



His smile put Amy at ease.

“I think I could use the help. There is a lot more than I expected.” Amy replied with a grin.

They started walking back to the shed.

“What are you building? Another Christmas display?” He asked.

“What? Oh, no. I’m building a ramp.” Amy replied a bit bewildered. It never occurred to her that people would think she was putting up a Christmas display.



“A ramp? Why would you need a ramp?” He asked.

Amy hesitated. She didn’t need to burden her neighbor with her problems. But she didn’t know any other way to explain herself.

“If I build a ramp my husband can come home from the VA.” Amy replied steadfastly.

The man stopped walking, turned and looked at her.

“I am Ahmad. I am very pleased to meet you.” Ahmad said and held his hand out to shake hers.

“I’m Amy.” Amy replied and shook his hand.

“Your husband was hurt in the wars?” Ahmad asked.

Amy shook her head in the affirmative.

“Afghanistan.” Amy said.





“Wars take too many things away.” Ahmad said with a sigh.

Amy caught upon the sigh and asked quietly.

“Did the wars take anything away from you?”

“My son. He volunteered when he came of age. It was in Iraq.” Ahmad replied with a sadness.

Amy reached over and gave Ahmad a hug. She was so glad her Tom was alive, but knew how closely she came to losing him. Ahmad shuddered a little under Amy’s attentions and then pulled away.

“Is that why you don’t have any Christmas decorations? Because, you son died?” Amy asked.

“What? Oh, no. Not because my son died, because of my religion. I am Muslim.” Ahmad grinned. He was taken aback at the change of subject.



“Oh. I’m sorry. I didn’t mean anything. I was just glad I wasn’t the only one on the block without Christmas lights.” Amy smiled.

“No problem. Let’s go see what kind of wood we have.” Ahmad replied with a laugh.

As they were rattling around in the shed Amy noted a red hat with a white ball bobbing at the fence. It was at the house on the left and the man that got into a fight with the man at the house





on the right. Amy raised her head to look his way and was met with a wide grin. Amy smiled back.

‘You all right in there?’ The man at the fence asked.

Hearing the question Ahmad looked out from the shed.

‘Trying to build a ramp, but not finding all we need.’ Ahmad replied.



‘A ramp? How big?’ The man asked.

‘Big enough to get up the front steps. It’s for her husband. She wants to get him home from the VA.’ Ahmad replied.

‘VA, huh? Which war?’ He asked.

‘Afghanistan.’ Amy replied.

‘Well, Bill’s got the best lumber. I’ll bring over the saws and nails.’ The man responded.


‘Bill? Whose, Bill?’ Amy asked.

‘The old coot on the other side of your house. And I’m Frank. Pleased to meet you.’ Frank replied as he headed towards his garage.

‘Martha, call Bill and tell him to bring some lumber next door.’ Frank yelled towards the house as he moved to get the tools.

Ahmad grabbed some lumber, looked at Amy and shrugged his shoulders. Amy grabbed some other wood and headed to the front stoop.





By the time they had dropped their wood in a pile, Bill from next door had come to take a look at all the fuss.

“Martha called and said you needed wood. What’s that old goat want wood for?” Bill asked.

Amy noted Bill had on a really red coat. It was warm and just filled his girth.

“Needs to build a ramp to bring her husband home from the VA.” Ahmad replied.

“Afghanistan?” Bill asked pointedly.

Amy nodded in assent. Her eyes were wide with confusion. How did this become a street project? And how would these two combatants ever get along?

Frank was making his way over with a couple of saw horses and an electric saw. Behind him bringing a box of tools was a small wry woman of determination. Frank saw Bill and each eyed the other as if panthers ready for a fight. The woman just shooed past them and went up to Amy.



“Really, those two old fools. Hello, my name is Martha. Frank says your building a ramp?”

“Need to get her husband home from the VA.” Ahmad replied.

“Well, there’s a nice chill out here. We’ll need some coffee. You have any on hand dear?” Martha asked.



Amy eyes started to well up. She couldn't repay these people and she couldn't even give them a cup of coffee. Martha, wiser, than her years quickly assessed the situation.

"Well no matter. Sheila and I have that covered." Martha replied and headed towards Bill's house.

"Don't have near enough two by fours." Ahmad shouted out.

Bill took his eyes off Frank.

"Need some two by sixes for the base. There's plenty enough in the shed. I'll get some." Bill replied.

"You'll need a hand." Ahmad said and headed off with Bill.



Frank began setting up his saws and measuring distances. Amy just nodded and went where she could lend a hand. It wasn't long before Ahmad and Bill were back with a load of wood. Martha was coming back to the front lawn with another woman of substance beside her.

"This is Sheila. And you are?" Martha asked.

"Oh, my goodness. I'm sorry. I'm Amy." Amy replied shyly.

"Well nice to meet you. Martha says your husband got hurt in Afghanistan. What's his name?" Sheila asked.

The men were beginning to get into the build and suddenly Amy seemed irrelevant to the effort.





“Shouldn’t I be doing something?” Amy asked.

Martha and Sheila sighed and smiled.

“Amy you are. You truly are. Your little ramp is patching up a big hurt, brought on by very big egos.” Martha replied.

“What do you mean?” Amy said bewildered.

“Those three have been buddies since primary school. All three went to the service together. But 9/11 drove the first wedge between them. Bill and Frank would have little to do with Ahmad because he was Muslim. Been Muslim since he was born, but all of a sudden after the bombing everything changed. You saw what happened between Bill and Frank during the election. I’ve never seen them so angry at each other. They haven’t talked since that day. But they will help a fellow vet. Never leave them behind.” Sheila replied softly.

The ladies had moved back to let the men work.

“So how did they handle it when Ahmad’s son died?” Amy asked in innocence.



“Benjamin’s dead? We thought he had moved away.” Martha replied and started to cry.

Sheila leaned over and put her head on Martha and wept quietly. Amy hugged them both and tears started to stream down her face as well.

Martha walked over to Frank. She leaned down and whispered in his ear. Sheila had done the same to Bill. Both men stopped what they were doing and moved to Ahmad. It took





little for him to realize they knew. He stood up and both men hugged him hard. Tears flowed freely and then as one they lowered their heads in a silent prayer. It crushed Amy's heart to watch. Sheila and Martha just stood aside with tears in their eyes and hankies in their hands.

Ahmad placed a hand on Bill's shoulder and then Frank's. Then he stooped down and picked up a plank. Wiping his eyes once more, Ahmad moved to set a foundation. Two more sets of hands joined his and the ramp slowly began to form. It wasn't long before the neighbors up and down the street began to wake and walk by. Many stopped by to chat; others lent a hand where they could. In about three hours stood a solid ramp with hand rails and treads ready for any wheelchair. Martha had everyone stand for a picture. She snapped it and showed it around. It was then that Amy noticed that Frank had the hat, Bill had the coat, and Ahmad had the red pants. Santa was here, but he had come in the form of a whole community. Amy smiled and laughed. Tom was coming home for Christmas. Santa had built the ramp.



Chapter 7

Ahmad suggested they go meet Tom. He figured there might be a little resistance to their help. Amy didn't know why, but was glad for the company. Bill and Frank piled in Ahmad's car and the four of them headed to the VA. Amy didn't need to give these vets any directions. They knew how to get to the Veteran's Hospital.

Ahmad told Amy to introduce them and then to leave for a moment. They would tell Tom about the ramp. It all seemed mysterious, but Amy was grateful for the help and agreed to their request.

When Amy found Tom he was in rehab, giving it another go with his legs. She was so proud of him. He smiled his large smile when he saw her and then concern grew across his face when three men followed her inside. Amy introduced their neighbors and did as they asked. She left for some coffee.



She returned some fifteen minutes later and it looked like long lost brothers had found each other at last. They were laughing at some inside joke and comfortable in each other's company. Tom grinned and his eyes smiled.

"I hear that Santa built a ramp." Tom smiled.

Amy grinned.

"Yes he did. And you are coming home for Christmas."



Tom grinned and laughed and began to get all excited. Then he yelled.

“Home for Christmas!”

The orderlies and patients in the rehab cheered and clapped at the news. Congratulations were handed all around. Ahmad, Bill, and Frank all left Amy behind to be with Tom. Ahmad assured her that one of them would be back in a few hours to take her home. Amy hugged Tom and sat in his lap.

“Wheel me home, my main man.” She grinned.

Tom took them both to the rec room for some time together.



Chapter 8

Time had slowed to a crawl. It was the day Tom was coming home. But still she had to put in her time at the diner. Joe was relentless in his teasing. She almost threw a cup of coffee at him two or three times, but it was all good fun and she was so excited. Still the clock just never moved. However, her tips were piling up. All of her regulars had conspired to let each other and the rest of the diner know her man was coming home today. Each tip had doubled and Roger and Adam had left a ten spot each. Amy was flush with money and was even thinking of buying a string of lights for the front door. Finally time had come and Amy rushed out the door, Joe wishing her well on her way out.



Amy went to the service station and pumped five gallons into the car. It felt good to put that other gallon in. Then she moved down the highway to the VA. She played Christmas carols the whole way and burst into the parking lot right next to the patient's entrance. There waiting for her was her Tom. He stood on crutches as they placed his wheelchair in the trunk. She was so proud of him she could have burst. Then Tom scrunched in the car and put on his seat belt. The grin couldn't be wiped off his face.



Amy leaned in and gave Tom a passionate kiss then started the car and hit the gas. They were going home! Tom and Amy laughed the whole way there as night began to fall. Christmas lights twinkled along the way. Finally they turned onto their street and every home's lights were ablaze. Amy slowed down to look, a new feeling of being a part of something gripping every fiber of her body. They idled up to the curb next to their home and Amy began to cry. Martha, Sheila, Frank, Bill, and Ahmad



were all at their front door waiting for them. And their whole yard and house were ablaze with Christmas lights. Amy had finally gotten a house with lights.

Other neighbors moved forward to help Tom out and get his wheelchair. Amy was hugged by everyone as she looked at the marvel before her. Amy pushed Tom up the ramp and to their friends. They hugged and someone somewhere began singing carols. Soon the whole crowd joined in. Finally Martha shooed everyone away so Tom and Amy could be home for Christmas.

It was in the silence that Amy understood. Life, like Christmas, was meant to be shared. That people are at their best when they work together, when they trust each other, believe in each other and themselves. Disagreements come and go, but we





must lay down anger, fear, and prejudice to work together. It is only then that feats great and small are accomplished. It is only then that families and communities, good communities, are created.

Amy opened the front door then sat down in her man's lap. She looked up at the Santa blinking atop their portal. She gave Tom a squeeze.

“Wheel me home, Tom.”







Don't Forget Santa's Cookies!







***Merry Christmas
and
Happy New Year***

