Time was running out. I leaned as far over the railing as I could, trying to get my teachers attention. She had forgotten. How could she forget!? This was a life or death situation, and she just forgot? Names were read off the list, one after another. They were alphabetical, and I was very good at the alphabet. I had exactly three more names until mine was going to be called. I just needed her to look at me, then she would remember. Another name. How is she so calm and chatty in such a tense situation? Another name. I waved my hands in a desperate attempt for her to look at me, as the parents in the audience stared at me, wondering what was wrong with the little girl on the far left of the stands. Another name. I felt like I was going to pass out. My life was ending. I was in preschool, and my life was ending. Then it happened, and I felt my heart sink. My name was called, and I knew it was all over.

Monday was the day that I found out my life would end. I was finger painting in the corner like any other morning. Then I heard the news, “Attention boys and girls, at the end of the Christmas Pageant, we will have a very special guest!” said Mrs. Berry to the classroom full of drooling, wide-eyed kids.

“It’s Santa Claus. Santa is the surprise!” said a girl in my class named Janet. “My older brother already told me that Santa comes every year after the Christmas Pageant, and each kid gets to sit on his lap!”

Everyone gasped, and cheered with excitement. That is, everyone but me. I could not be near such a horrifying creature. Why did I have to tell him what I wanted for Christmas? He’s supposed to be magic, so shouldn’t he just...know? Most preschoolers, in fact every other kid in Mrs. Berry’s class, would be thrilled to sit on Santa’s lap and tell him everything.
I loved Christmas, and I loved the idea of a mystical man, who watched you all year to make sure you are a well-behaved child, and then delivered presents to your house to award you for your good behavior. Yeah, the idea of Santa was great, but the thought of meeting him in person made my stomach feel sick. Other kids could just spill their deepest hopes and desires to him like it was no big deal. However, at the age of five, I was a complex child. I did not trust him.

I went through the rest of the school day without speaking to anyone. I sat in the corner of the brilliantly colored classroom. I stayed completely still, in hopes that everyone would just forget I was there. The stuffed animals around me helped me to blend in. All the kids walked past me. I sat perfectly still until the bus arrived to take me home.

“Mom, my life is ending,” I whined to my mother that night, as she speedily moved around the kitchen, preparing dinner.

“I’m sure your life is not ending, what happened?” she replied.

“They are forcing me to sit on Santa’s lap after the Christmas Pageant. They are making all of us tell him our secret wishes for Christmas, in front of the whole, entire gym!”

In, what I realized several years later, a sarcastic reply my mother said, “Oh no. You’re right! Your life is ending! How will you ever survive?”

“I don’t know. That’s why I need your help. You need to tell Mrs. Berry that I can’t do it!”

“Alright, I’ll call her and let her know you are too afraid.”

“No!” I shouted. “If you tell her it’s because I’m afraid, everyone at school will find out and call me a big baby!”

“Well, then you can tell her yourself.”

Great. Just great. I was not good at talking to adults. It made me nervous. It was like they could see through me, and they knew everything I was going to say before I said it. They knew what I was thinking. Mrs. Berry would be able to tell I was afraid, but I could not let her know that was the reason.

The next day during playtime, I shuffled up to my teacher’s desk. I told her I needed to talk to her about something, but that the other kids couldn’t hear. She walked me out into
the hallway, bent down so that she was eye level with me, and asked me what the problem was.

“Mrs. Berry, I am very sorry, but I cannot participate in the ‘fun surprise’ that takes place after the Christmas Pageant.” I attempted to say this in my most adult-like voice, but I could tell she heard the slight quiver in the back of my throat.

“You can’t? Awe, why not? It would be so much fun to sit on Santa’s lap with all of your friends around!”

I looked down at my feet, and said nothing. She then said, “You’re scared aren’t you?”

My head whipped up as I replied with a sharp, “No! It’s because my mom won’t let me! She thinks that Santa is bad for kids. She hates him, and does not want me to be exposed to that.”

This threw Mrs. Berry off. I could tell by the change of expression on her face. She did not know what to say. There was nothing to say except, “Okay.”

I lied. I had told my first lie, and it was to a teacher! I couldn’t believe it. It wasn’t even a good lie. What child’s parents think that Santa is bad for them? She must have known I was lying. What was my life coming to? I guess I was growing up. Grown ups have to lie. That was it, I was a grown up now.

Wednesday night came faster than I could have imagined, but it was here. The night of the Christmas Pageant. Waiting in the hallway to make our grand entrance we all stood in a single file line, against the wall. You could tell that everyone had been forced into the clothes they were wearing. No child would select any of the outfits being worn by my classmates. I had never seen so many little boys in khakis and bow ties (that were tied incorrectly.) They all wore leather shoes that were so shiny you could see your reflection in them. The girls all had tights, and big poofy dresses on. I wondered if anyone’s was as itchy as mine. Mine seemed poofier than theirs. I hated being dressed up. I hated this whole night.

After practicing all of our songs, nobody seemed too worried about the evening. I even felt pretty good about the night. I wasn’t nervous at all. I’m lying again. I was a nervous wreck. I had a bad feeling about all of this. Mrs. Berry told me she would signal to me, from
the side of the stage, when Santa was about to come. Then I would stand off to the side until all the kids had already gone and talked to Santa. Then come back on stage for the final song. It seemed like a good plan, but that was only if Mrs. Berry did not get distracted, which happened all the time.

Then she forgot. She left me on that stage. I shouldn’t have trusted her. She sat on the side of the stage gabbing with the Principal. They laughed and ate Christmas cookies, as if my life would not end in only a matter of minutes. I could feel my palms getting sweaty as I heard the first, “Ho, Ho, Ho.” This is when I knew my life was over. It had been a pretty good five years, but I always thought I would make it farther than this. Every kid, except me, jumped up and down as ‘Santa’ came walking in, ringing his jingle bells. However, I was completely stationary, trying my hardest not to throw up on Jimmy in front of me. This was not good. I needed to get her attention. I needed to get away from...him.

Wait, Jimmy was in front of me! Jimmy always knew how to get out of things. He could get out of the classroom, and be gone for two hours without anybody noticing. He was my last chance. After whispering his name three times, I hit the back of his head.

“OWW! What do you want?” He said as he turned around.

“I need you to get me off of this stage, now.” I replied.

“Why? You are going to miss Santa.”

“Don’t ask questions Jimmy. The less you know the better.”

“Sorry, I can’t help. It’s almost my turn.” Jimmy said nonchalantly.

Then he got called, and ran up excitedly. Great. There went that idea. I bet he wasn’t even really sorry.

I knew he was not the real Santa. It was obvious by his fake plastic beard that didn’t quite hug his chin just right. Another giveaway was that this man could not have weighed more than 120 pounds. Santa is supposed to be jolly, and fat, not skinny and lanky. Other kids were fooled by his disguise, and gave in by doing exactly as they were told. However, I was smart. I knew he was a fake.

I had studied the routine before, and I knew it well. A kid walked up to Santa, and got boosted onto his lap by an elf. When the elf was a safe distance away the child would
begin to whisper into “Santa’s” ear. The imposter would listen carefully, then whisper something back to the kid and give him a candy cane. Then the kid would walk away with a dumb smile on his face. I was not going to fall for it.

After waving my arms around like a fool for about five minutes, I realized the reality of the situation. I was not going to get off of this stage in time. My name was read, and the room began to spin. My heart was beating so fast that I was certain everyone could see it through my dress, which seemed to be getting poofier by the minute. Everyone stared at me as I stepped off of the platform and began to walk toward ‘him.’ It seemed like I was walking for miles, when in reality it was no more than seven steps away. The elf came face to face with me, and said, “Come on kid, Santa ain’t got all day.” I gulped, as he lifted me onto Santa’s lap. He stared me in the eyes, “And what would you like for Christmas little girl?”