

# 1

Christmas Eve today and Marty sent me out with Foster and Allen Malcolm to do a job in Lemonview. It wasn't hard, just cold, and I wished I was home. Allen left around 5, and Foster went home for dinner. I said, "Aren't you taking me home?" because he picked me up, but he said no, he was busy and I could come up if I wanted. Went up to his apartment, figuring I'd have to stay the night if Marty didn't come by—and knew he wouldn't cause it's Christmas. Foster was having a sort of party, and all these guys came over and I didn't know any of them. Stayed in the shadows for a couple hours, but couldn't stand all the smoke and stuff, and then a couple of the guys started bothering me and I just beat it. No reason I gotta hang out with those losers just so I can get dinner, I'm thinking, but when I get on the street I'm only thinking how cold it is.

I got five dollars, so I can either get a bus home or something to eat—one or the other. First I think, I'll eat at home, but then I start thinking about home, and Marty drinking, and his friends there, and I think maybe I rather not be home right now. So I bought a sandwich, and ate it on the street, and started walking. Made it downtown, but by then I'm freezing, and I text Marty and say, "If you down this way pick me up, got no bus money." I know he ain't down this way, and ain't gonna be, but I'm really cold now. He don't write back for a while, and by that time I'm on Broadway, and he says, "Stay at Foster's."

"I left. They were messing with me."

"Stay at Jenkins, then."

No way I'm staying at with that guy. I'd rather sleep in the park. So I quit texting—Marty will think I went to Jenkin's, and that's fine. I'll figure something out, or I'll walk home.

I stood on Broadway awhile. Lights and a lot of happy people to watch. And a cop, so I started moving. Then I came to this big church, where a lot of people were going in, so I went in. Thought maybe I could hole up in a closet or something and sneak out in the morning. It was big inside—huge. Went up to the balcony, way up in the back corner, but still so many people came that soon all the seats around me were full. The service started, and it was sort of like a lot of singing and a play about the baby Jesus. I think because the music was so beautiful, I fell asleep really fast.

When I woke up, the place was empty. A couple voices murmuring downstairs, but I don't see anyone, and the balcony is deserted. I sit up straight, and something falls into my lap. A twenty-dollar bill and a note.

*Son,*

*I don't know you, but Jesus does, and he wanted me to give you this.*

*He loves you and has wonderful things for you to do.*

*Merry Christmas!*

*Robert Ardly*

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I just stared at it in the dim light, and then I was kind of freaked out. Like, this is bait, or a bribe, or a set-up. I stand up and look around but there's nobody there. Then I'm not so freaked out, but confused. What guy drops a twenty in the lap of a fourteen-year-old he's never seen before, and walks off? Like, maybe I look like a homeless kid, or an abused kid, or whatever, but nobody just give money to a kid like that for no reason.

By the time I'm out on the street I'm thinking, I don't care why that guy give me a twenty, I'm gonna use it quick and get out of here. So I get on the bus and in an hour I'm home. I went to 7-11 and got a hot chocolate. Went upstairs—hoping I was late enough (it was almost midnight), and Marty and the guys were gone. Lucky, real lucky. Went into my room, and sat down, and suddenly realized it was warm in there. The heat must be working again. Lucky. Three times lucky in one day is a lot for me, so I think it was a good day. A really good day.