

*Earache*

The sparkling lights zipped by overhead as the young boy and his family, stuffed inside of a coffee brown Chevrolet Nova, with tons of brightly wrapped presents scooted down the freeway. Although the drive was about ten minutes, little Lambert thought it was an eternity. His seat itched his body as he tossed and turned in the back seat with all of the excitement that a six year-old tornado could muster.

'How much longer dad, are we almost there?' He didn't even wait for an answer. His eyes gazed out of the backseat window, and with a neck like a swivel, scanned every inch of the horizon to find something new to talk about. 'Dad, why is Teddy so fat?' The image of his fathers softball teammate from the night before clung to him like superglue on fingertips. Although this man was slightly overweight to say the least, Lambert is perhaps the most curious child on the face of the earth. Although he is only six, he wears heavy, soda-bottle, spectacles that drooped down his nose from their oppressive weight. His mother cried when she found out he had to wear glasses at such an early age.

'He won't have any friends,' she sobbed as she sipped her coffee and milk and sucked on a menthol cigarette. He wouldn't feel ashamed of his glasses until middle school, where the kids are exceptionally mean, and the cruelest kids had the most pull.

All of the blacktop experiences slowly faded into the dim, lamplit street in which he would soon be opening tons of brilliantly wrapped gifts from all sorts of people. The carpet would be covered with the shrapnel of opened presents, that the dog would eventually tear to shreds.

The brown beast always had a place just out front to unload the steel tomb's bounty. Little Lambert scuttled up

the stair in lightning fashion. Upon entering the house, a tree painted white with red bulbs and shiny silver threads hung from the branches. The smell was always the same, rich pine mixed with the musty smell of canine fur. The furniture, all stained, rich, dark oak, ran up and down the walls, surrounding the den and the first big screen TV and CD players. The sofa is an enormous mass of leather and pillows that made bumps on Lambert's skin when he first sat down, from the lingering chill that would not be ousted by the glowing hearth.

From the den, it was straight out the back door into the wild wilderness. Three separate levels held children running and screaming at the sight of their cousins, aunts and uncles. Lambert went to the very top, right next to the pond with oraginsh-gold fish oscillating back and forth in the mossy water. Lambert's foot slipped and got a little wet, but he wouldn't tell anyone. Then he might have to go inside and sit with all of the adults, when he wanted to run free like the rapids and waterfall that spilled down from level to level, until it reached a small pool at the base of the yard, where one's sailboat made from an elm tree would make it, if it was good enough.

Lambert disobeyed the cries of his aunt and mother, who called for him to come sit and eat. There was too much to see, and he didn't get to spend much time at this place that he truly loved. He would wait for a couple more minutes, or until the large mound of ants would devour a lone spider as it got too close. By this time, he had forgotten all about the red, green and gold mountain of toys, trucks and puzzles that lie beneath the tree. No matter how he looked at them, all of the trees seemed sad, like they were away from home. 'Why does the tree look sad, mom?' Before she could attempt to respond, he was running off with his toe-headed cousins,

up the stairs, into the bedrooms. Every time Lambert visited his cousins, he would dive into the green-carpeted room, and he would scratch his knee on a hard piece of glue that had been stuck to the rug ever since he could remember. He had forgotten about it this time as well. Time to get a bandage. He glared at the spiny, thorny, adhesive as its spikes and ridges hissed back. He would tug and pull to try and rip the gunk off of the floor, but it never worked.

'Just leave it. It'll never come off, that's what my daddy says,' said his cousin who is just as mobile as him. Time to eat. The dining room table was covered with piles and piles of fresh, steaming food. Stacks of turkey, ham and roast beef alongside mashed potatoes, yams, green beans, and anything else that humans call food. He ogled the table for awhile, but his finicky tastes resulted in a slice of ham and two scoops of Jello with bananas to sit, exiled from the mounds of helpings that were designed to join him. He didn't care about food any way...

Ouch! His ear started to hurt again. Like a dull, raging bull, the acute pain in his eardrum began to ring true. Suddenly, he could not eat a thing, and he even forgot about the gifts. He was tired now and wanted to go home.

The others greedily gulped the remaining portions, except his grandpa, who took forever to eat, just to piss the kids off. The rite began, as his cousins and tiny brother proceeded to dole out the shiny boxes, that somehow diminished in color and brightness. He thought that they even looked smaller. The entire family became engulfed in an onslaught of vicious tearing and ripping that could be heard only beneath the cries of elation and joy at what lay in store for them within the mysterious boxes. A tear rolled down Lambert's cheek as he sat and watched the melee

as a backdrop for the packages that lay before him, just out of reach.