The Christmas Carp

Amidst the Velvet Revolution in Czechoslovakia, a young boy tries to hold on to a simple holiday tradition.

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SUPERIMPOSE: PRAGUE 1989, AMIDST THE VELVET REVOLUTION

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

A small, sparse flat filled with muted colors. MICHAL DVORAK, early 30s, hammers a nail into the wall. The white wash paint chips off as he does. His wife KAJA, early 30s, sifts through a box filled with CHRISTMAS DECORATIONS.

KAJA
We cannot cancel Christmas.

MICHAL
I did not say cancel. We will celebrate. But it will be without presents and without the carp.

Hidden, ALEXANDER, 10, listens in unbeknownst to his parents.

KAJA
Michal, we have money to buy the fish. It is a tradition.

MICHAL
We have it today. But what will happen tomorrow? My job...

KAJA
What is happening is good for us. It is good for everyone.

MICHAL
Maybe. But for now, we must be cautious.

Kaja hands Michal an Advent calendar. He hangs it up.

KAJA
What do we tell Alexander?

MICHAL
No need to tell him right now. We will spare him what we can.

EXT. HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Alexander moves away from the door, distraught.

INT. ALEXANDER’S BEDROOM - LATER

Alexander readies himself for bed. Kaja comes in.
KAJA
Have you said your prayers?

ALEXANDER
Yes mama.

KAJA
You are such a good boy Alexi.
Such a good boy.
    (kisses his forehead)
Good night my brouček.

Kaja leaves. Alexander lays in the dark, eyes wide open.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Alexander stares at the Advent calendar. Kaja, wearing a ragged coat, runs in carrying a similarly ragged coat.

KAJA
Come. Come now. You will be late.

She throws the coat on Alexander and ushers him out.

EXT. SCHOOL - DAY

KIDS run out, Alexander included. Three boys, PETR, EMIL, and DANIEL shove him down laughing. Alexander stands.

ALEXANDER
You use the force of your muscles because your brain is too small.

Petr goes to shove him once more but a TEACHER breaks it up. The three boys disperse. Alexander watches them walk away.

EXT. PRAGUE STREETS - LATER

Alexander walks the cobblestone streets of Old Town. He approaches an OLD MAN. They exchange unheard words. The Old Man looks around and nods for Alexander to follow him.

EXT. BACK YARD - CONTINUOUS

The Old Man and Alexander enter the back yard.

OLD MAN
What do you have to offer?
Perhaps this jacket?

Ha. That jacket is more worn than my mother-in-law. Your boots.

These were a gift from my babicka.

They are the only thing on you worth anything. Boots or nothing.

Alexander, now wearing thin slippers, goes from barrel to barrel looking at the carp within. He stops at a stand.

(handing over coins)
I would like one please.

This will not pay for a whole fish.

There must be something I can buy.

I can give you some leftover bits for stew. But that is all. I’m sorry.

Alexander walks alone holding a bag. He is about to walk out into the square when he is stopped by a POLICE OFFICER.

You cannot go this way. Another protest today. Unless you want to join it, you must go around.

Alexander looks past him to see a LARGE CROWD, surrounded by more OFFICERS. Alexander turns and heads down an alley.
EXT. ALLEY - CONTINUOUS


PETR
Maybe my brain is small, but brains do not hurt. Muscles do. Prdoch.

He stomps the bag again then leaves with Emil. Daniel stays until Petr whistles. Destroyed fish parts litter the floor.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Alexander, bruised, stares at the Advent calendar. Angrily he tears it down, ripping it up. Kaja and Michal enter through the front door and are taken aback by the sight.

KAJA
Alexander! What are you doing?!

ALEXANDER
Why do we pay attention to this God who gives us nothing?!

Kaja calms him with a strong hug. She looks at him.

ALEXANDER (CONT’D)
When he takes Papa’s job and changes things for worse?

KAJA
What happened to your face?

MICHAL
And where are your boots?
(no response)
Alexander.

ALEXANDER
I sold them.

KAJA
Sold them? For these slippers?

ALEXANDER
For the carp. Carp bits anyhow. These boys from school ruined them. They ruined everything! And no Christ was watching over me!
KAJA
He watches over us, my bruczek. He
gave us each other to lean on and
get through this time.

MICHAL
It is not for you to worry about my
job or what to do this holiday.
You are just a boy.

A knock. Kaja and Michal exchange a look. Michal opens the
door. On the other side is Daniel, hands behind his back.

DANIEL
Mr. Dvorak. I am Daniel.

ALEXANDER
It was him! Go away! Prdoch!

KAJA
Alexander!

DANIEL
I was there. I did not hurt you
but I did not help you either. I
am sorry. I came to offer this.

He brings his hands in front and hands Michal a large carp.

MICHAL
(surprised)
Where did you get this Daniel?

He looks to his feet. He is also wearing ragged slippers.

DANIEL
I am sorry Alexander, for Petr but
more for myself and what I did not
do. Forgive me. Merry Christmas.

Daniel turns to leave.

ALEXANDER
Your feet must be cold. Mine are.

Daniel turns and smiles. Alexander smiles back.

ALEXANDER (CONT’D)
Come eat with us. We have plenty.

Daniel accepts the invitation with an even bigger smile.

THE END