



## **STORY: GIOVANNI'S TOY SHOP**

An Original Christmas Story by Dianne de Las Casas

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Once upon a time, there was an old toy maker named Giovanni. His favorite pastime was making beautiful toys. His toy shop sat on the corner of a busy street. Giovanni's store was full of all kinds of wonderful toys - airplanes with propellers that spun round and round, dolls with curly tresses in pretty pink dresses, trains that whistled proudly, soft stuffed animals to hug, shiny new cars that zoomed across the room, wind-up toys that made lots of noise, and marionettes that danced with the tug of a string.

It was the holiday season and everyone shopped at Giovanni's Toy Shop. Giovanni could not keep up with the demand. People streamed into the store and bought his beautifully made toys. Although he made more toys than ever before, nearly all of his toys were gone.

On Christmas Eve, people straggled into his store for last minute shopping and left the shelves bare. The only toy left was a lonely little bear sitting upon a high shelf.

"Hmm," said Giovanni, "I forgot all about you." Giovanni positioned his ladder and climbed to the top shelf. He pulled the bear down. The dust-covered bear was missing a button eye and the stuffing fell out of a large tear in his back.

Giovanni held the little bear in his hands and whispered tenderly, "You poor little bear. I am going to spruce you up." Giovanni dusted off the bear and placed him on the work bench in the back of the toy shop. Giovanni replaced the bear's one button eye with two shiny gold buttons. He patched the rip in the bear's back with a piece of scrap red plaid fabric. The little brown bear seemed to smile at Giovanni.

The door bell tinkled as a man and a curly-headed girl scurried in, out of the snow. Giovanni hurried to the front of the store. He saw that the little girl had only a thin, tattered coat to shield her from the cold. She gazed at the empty shop.

"Daddy," she said, "I thought you said this was a toy shop."

Her father answered, "That's what the sign says, Sarah - Giovanni's Toy Shop."

Giovanni smiled warmly and responded, "It IS a toy shop, dear. It's been a busy season and all my toys have sold. That is why my shop appears so empty." Sarah's little pink lips quivered and tears dripped down her rosy cheeks.

It pained Giovanni to see Sarah crying. It was then he remembered the little brown bear. "If you'll kindly wait a moment, I'll be right back."

He hurried to the back of the store and returned with the bear behind his back. Giovanni said, "Close your eyes and hold out your hands." Sarah looked at her father expectantly. He nodded and she held out her hands. Giovanni handed her the bear. When she opened her eyes, she squealed with delight. She squeezed the bear tightly and kissed his nose. She exclaimed, "Your name is Patch and I'm going to take good care of you!"

Giovanni said, "That's the perfect name. Patch has been waiting for just the right friend to love him and give him a good home. He's been waiting for you!" Giovanni winked at Sarah.

Sarah grinned and said, "Thank you." She held her new little brown bear to her chest.

Sarah's father turned to Giovanni and whispered, "How much do I owe you?"

Giovanni replied, "Nothing. Please accept it as a Christmas gift."

The man shook Giovanni's hand and thanked him over and over. Then he led Sarah out of Giovanni's Toy Shop. She held her bear in one arm and waved to Giovanni with the other. She could not have been happier. Giovanni hummed a Christmas tune as he closed his toy shop. Sarah's joy was a gift more precious than the most beautiful toy in the world. It was a wonderful Christmas.

