

The Tale of Santa's Little Hinderer.

By

Anthony Lund

Word Count : approx 1700

Claus knew he had a problem.

“How did you say it got in there again, Nobby?”

Nobby the Elf looked embarrassed. It was normal for someone with bright pink blusher on their cheeks.

“Well,” Nobby began. “He just pushed forward and stuck it up the crack in front of him.”

“Ah,” Claus mumbled, scratching his beard and dislodging an icicle of drool. “How many times do I have to tell you, Nobby? Don’t let them stick their horns in the crack.”

A pace ahead of them, Comet grunted and attempted to pull his antlers out of the hole in the shed.

“Hang on, boy,” Claus said, patting the reindeer on the rump. “I’m trying to think. Nobby, I think we’re going to have to pull him out. It’s the only way.”

Claus took one side of Comet’s head. Nobby brought a ladder and made his way up to the other.

“Take hold of him,” Claus said, “and on the count of three pull. One”

Claus gained a sturdy hold on the antlers and braced his foot against the wall.

“Two”

Nobby grabbed a handful of reindeer fur and an ear. The ladder teetered.

“Three!”

* * *

The dark shadow of a sleigh crossed the night sky. At its head trotted Dasher, Dancer Donna Blitzen, Cupid, Prancer, Vixen and Barney – the goat.

“But you didn’t exactly tell me where to get hold of him,” Nobby continued to protest.

“Hmm,” Claus grumbled, picking dry blood from his finger nails.

“Anyway,” Nobby said, “Mrs Claus did a good job with the stitches. He’ll be right as rain in no time.”

“I only need him once a year, Nobby.”

“There you go then. Even better. That gives him a whole thirteen months to recover.”

“Twelve months,” Claus sighed.

“Really? My time does fly, doesn’t it?”

“Not fast enough,” Claus said. “Where are we going next?”

Nobby reached down into the glove compartment. Oddly, there were actually a pair of gloves inside, along with The List.

“Right, two ticks. Let me just focus. Hang on I just need a bit more moonlight.”

Nobby tilted The List. Then turned it. Then leaned over the edge of the sleigh.

A sharp gust of wind sped by. Claus was aware of a brief fluttering sound, and a small strangled yelp.

He turned slowly to find Nobby staring back at him. The elf looked like someone had inserted a foot pump in his rectum and performed Riverdance on the pedal.

“Where...?” Claus asked, asking no more for fear of receiving the answer.

“Himeiii iieeih iieeiighm,” Nobby whined, gesturing wildly.

Claus offered his own gesture that shocked a passing witch and knocked her off her broom.

He looked over the side of the sleigh. Far below, the moon illuminated the ground. More precisely, it illuminated a vast body of water that thrashed and thundered under the stormy weather conditions.

“Nobby,” he said. “Get the wetsuit.”

* * *

The sleigh landed on the roof of a detached house in Scotland, leaking seawater into the frost-coated tiles.

Claus stepped out onto the roof, his boots squelching with each footfall.

“I didn’t think the wave was going to—”

“Shut up, Nobby.” Claus said. “Pass me the sack.”

Nobby removed the towel from his head and clambered over into the back of the sleigh. He picked up a dripping sack from the pile and pulled it out. Claus took it and squelched across to the chimney.

Nobby discretely followed, trying to work out why something tinkled every time he moved.

Claus squashed himself implausibly through the grills of the grate covering the chimney pot. No one said his work needed to be logical. The fat bastard delivers presents to children all over the world in one night and miraculously knows when they are asleep and when they are pretending for God sake. Logic just doesn’t come into it.

Inside, Claus emptied his sack on the carpet and rummaged around in the contents.

“Two for him. Three for her. One for him. Six! Why is there always one greed kid in the family?”

Claus arranged the gifts around the room, stepped back and admired his handy work. Perfect as always.

He took a step towards the kitchen, then paused and listened. Something had rustled and jingled. He heard nothing further. Perhaps he had spent too much time with those damned sleigh bells. Maybe he should use a trumpet instead.

Claus walked into the kitchen. He flicked on the lights and gawped.

The table that should have contained a piece of Christmas Cake and glass of whiskey was instead occupied by a feast of Marks & Spencer's goodies.

Claus drooled on his boots. After all these years of having to somehow dispose of the meagre offerings the children of the world left him, someone had finally given him the spread he deserved. He didn't even like Christmas Cake – almonds gave him a rash and the fruit gave him the runs – and as for the whiskey, well he would rather milk one of the reindeers into a glass.

This was more like it though.

He popped open the bottle of wine and poured out a glass. Sweet goodness after sweet goodness he opened and sampled, eager to taste as many as possible before packing the rest into the empty sack for the ultimate doggy bag.

Suddenly the rustling jingle from earlier returned, this time with the volume knob cranked up to ten. In the living room Nobby arrived in a cloud of dust, a tangle of fairy lights and a bellow of "Oh shit!"

Claus poked his head around the doorframe. The elf lay in the middle of the floor, trying to untangle his ankle from the knots of green wire and flashing bulbs. He took hold of the wire and gave it a gentle tug. The string of lights vanishing up the chimney jangled but didn't release him from their grip.

Claus watched the elf tense.

“Mphf ghemgh!”

Claus desperately tried to chew and swallow the huge mouthful of food preventing him from shouting a warning. Somehow, he knew it was never going to happen.

Nobby took a firm hold of the lights in both hands.

Claus took firm hold of his throat as he tried to swallow too soon.

Readers took it for granted that what was about to happen would be nothing sort of devastating.

And they would be right.

Nobby yanked the lights with all his might, feeling a momentary sense of euphoric satisfaction as the wire grew slack before the noise began.

Up on the roof, seven reindeer and a goat looked about nervously as row upon row of flashing lights tore loose of their fastenings with the roar of a speeding train. Glowing snowmen dislodged from their holders, climbing Santas toppled from their ladders and fibreglass reindeers took momentary flight before crashing to the ground in a cacophony of smashing and splintering.

In the living room, Nobby looked at the handful of lights and wire, then at the chimney which seemed to be filled with so much noise, then finally at Claus who was turning blue and banging a fist on his chest. Nobby looked pale.

Somewhere on the upper floor someone was awake and running across the bedroom floor yelling about getting a shotgun. Nobby grew paler with each passing second.

Behind Claus, the kitchen window exploded and a huge grinning face entered through the hole and slammed into the red-suited Saint's back. A chicken bone fell

from his mouth with a loud wheezing breath and Claus collapsed under the weight of the oversized decoration.

Nobby passed out just as the living room door flung open and the sound of a gun being cocked rattled in his ears.

* * *

“But– ”

“Shut up, Nobby.”

“I didn’t– ”

“Shut up, Nobby.”

“But really I– ”

“Nobby, if you don’t stop talking I’m going to chop your bol– ”

The cell door opened and a chunky policeman looked inside. “I really wouldn’t say things like that in here. You’re in enough bother without adding murder to the charges.”

Claus stood up and marched over to the officer. “Look, I’ve told you who I am and what I was doing in that house. I’ve even admitted to my incompetent elf causing the damages.”

“Ah, yes,” the officer said. “Of course you did. Look at it from our point of view though. We get a call from a concerned homeowner who has been wakened in the middle of the night by someone dismantling the decorations from his house. This homeowner then enters his living room to find a small man wrapping up the aforementioned decorations into a neat bundle, while a big fat man is lying on his kitchen floor after eating a large helping of the family’s Christmas lunch. Then to top it all off

we find a mountain of stolen presents on the roof in a cobbled together sleigh that seems to have a goat in place of one of the reindeer.

“Tell me if I went wrong anywhere.”

Claus gave Nobby a sideways glance that burned with unsaintly promises.

“Just make sure all of those presents get to the right people,” Claus said.

“They’re all labelled.”

“Don’t worry,” the officer said. “We’re already onto it. We don’t want the children disappointed because some bloke decided to go on the rob.”

“Oh and get me my representative,” Claus said.

“Name?”

“Frost. Jack Frost. Oh and just one more thing.”

“What would that be, *Mr Claus?*” the officer said with the slightest hint of sarcasm.

“Can you come back in about five minutes and charge me?”

“We already have.”

“You can add GBH.”

The officer looked at Claus, then at a still paling Nobby, then at Claus again.

“Why do they always come out at Christmas?” the officer asked himself as he closed the door.

As he walked down the cell block, the officer smiled to himself. There were some very strange people in the world. Jack Frost indeed.

And from somewhere behind the closed door, an erratic screeching voice could just be heard yelling, “Remember you’re a saint!” before the usual sounds of a Friday night in the cells took over, underlined with a constant, jolly mantra that filled the night with a sense of Christmas spirit.

“Ho. Ho. Ho.”