

'Don't want no mir'cles'

Old Sam shuffled out of the grocery store, his gnarled old hand clutched a small paper bag containing six cans of plain-label tuna and a box of tea. He'd used the last of the December social security money to buy them. He and Luke would have to tighten their belts a bit in the next week, until January's social security check came.

He moved slowly down the dark, deserted street, tottering a bit in the brisk winter wind. "Shoulda borrowed Luke's walking-stick," he thought to himself as a particularly strong gust nearly stole his feet from beneath him.

He turned the corner and discovered the sidewalk and most of the street blocked by a miniature sleigh and eight tiny reindeer. They

Chris McCubbin

were quite real, he could see the hot breath streaming out of their little nostrils. A green-clad dwarf, about two feet high, was perched on the enormous sack that occupied the rear of the sleigh. The dwarf was merrily playing "God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen" on a set of pan-pipes.

"Ho, ho, ho!" the driver boomed out predictably. "If it isn't old Sam!" The fat man reached behind him and pulled from his sack a brand new wool, plaid parka with bright red quilting on the inside. "Merry Christmas, Sam!" he cried holding out the coat.

"Mind moving that thing a foot or two?" Sam asked politely, ignoring the coat. The sleigh didn't move. Sam heaved a sigh and turned towards the street to go around the long way. With a puzzled look on his ruddy face the driver cracked his whip and the deer edged forward a bit. "Thank'ee," Sam mumbled, continuing on his way.

The next corner was even worse. A glowing angel 30-foot high floated over the sidewalk. "Behold, Sam, I bring you glad tidings of great joy!" the angel changed to the accompaniment of thousands of invisible stringed instruments.

"Many years ago I appeared to a group of shepherds with news of a great gift . . ." the angel went on. Sam idly reached into his grocery sack, wondering if the pleasure was worth the sacrifice.

"Like you, those shepherds were poor and simple men . . ." That did it. It was worth it. "Now I am come to this plough . . ." the angel stopped, choking, as a can of plain-label tuna, thrown with surprising force, flew into its trashcan-sized mouth and lodged in its throat. Sam moved on, chucking to himself.

At last Sam reached his own building. He opened the door — and found himself in a

medieval banquet hall. A bonfire roared in the enormous hearth. "Right this way, my lord," a liveried butler said, bowing low and indicating an immense buffet, groaning under towering trays of delicacies.

Sam stepped back outside, shut the door firmly, and reopened it. The familiar, rickety stairs to his apartment stretched before him.

As he entered the apartment a feeble but comforting glow from the space-heater greeted him at the door. His roommate, Luke, was sitting at the ancient card table, tin plates and a box of crackers were already set out. "Get the tuna fish?" Luke asked.

"Yup, tea too." Sam put the sack down and went to get the can-opener.

"Got mir'cles agin this year." Sam remarked as he returned from the kitchenette.

"You had one too, eh?" Luke asked.

"Had three. What happened here?"

Some little brown elf fellers. I shoed 'em out with the broom."

"Umm." Sam opened a can of tuna and the two old men ate it on stale saltines while they sipped tea made with luke-warm tap water. Sam told Luke of his adventures on the way home.

At the end of the meal Luke pulled out his pocket-watch and checked the time. "Half-past nine. Couple more hours, it'll be Christmas and we won't have to worry 'bout no more mir'cles this year," he remarked.

"Good thing," Sam said.

The front door opened and the room filled with light. A warm breeze, scented with rare spices, blew across the apartment. Somewhere, far off, an immense choir sang.

"That's it," Sam said, rising. "I'm gonna throw this one out with my own two hands!"

"Be respectful, Samuel," Luke admonished him. "It's the Lord."

Sam turned around. Sure enough, it was God. The Lord stood over ten-feet tall, but He didn't need to stoop as He entered the room. He wore a white robe and was built like a football player. Long, snow-white hair and a beard cascaded down the front and back of his garment.

"Evening, boys," God said, "I think you dropped this, Sam." He put a can of plain label tuna down on the table. "Mind if I sit down?"

The roommates stood, respectfully. "Evenin' Lord, take my chair," Sam offered.

"No need," the Lord said, settling into the solid gold throne that appeared behind Him.

"Uh, Lord, these old floors ain't too sturdy," Luke said as the room groaned ominously under the throne's weight.

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