

There Arose Such A Clatter - A Christmas Story

Written by CJ McKee Copyright 2007

It can't be only two A.M. I swear it's later than that. I thought to myself as I sat up in bed so quickly, my wife nearly fell out of bed. She snorted a couple of times and turned towards me, her arm swinging haphazardly through the air in search of my torso. Even in the dim light, I could see her eyes open and look up at me.

"I thought I heard something." I said, my dark eyes piercing hers.

"What?" She whispered in a hoarse voice as she sat up and leaned on one arm.

"Dunno. Shh. Listen!"

Silence.

There it is...did you hear?

"Did you hear that?" I said out loud this time.

"What?" She responded again.

A sound like a deep car audio system pumping out the bass from some hip-hop song echoed off the walls from the ceiling. I grabbed her arm and her head slipped off and hit the pillow.

"Hey!"

"Sorry. You heard that, right?"

"It's probably the neighbor's T.V. again, hon."

I shook my head and looked up at the ceiling and watched the shadows from a tree outside the window dance across the textured surface. "No."

Another sound, deeper within the house, a scraping...no, a tumbling!

"Ok, that's it. I need to find out what's goin' on." I stated as I threw the covers back and slipped on my sandals. I grabbed my robe and shivered as the night air surrounded me before I was able to get my robe on. "Stay here. If you don't hear from me in about ten minutes, call the police." I whispered close to my wife's face.

"Nuts to that, I'm going with you!" She stated as she scooped up the cordless phone sitting on the bed stand.

I sighed, nodded and opened the door. It, of course creaked loudly and we both cringed. After a moment of waiting for any response, we made our way into the hall and tiptoed past our daughter's

room. My wife walked in to check on her but she remained asleep; none of the noises seemed to faze her. She closed his door and nodded for me to continue on.

Just as we took a few more steps, we heard what sounded like rocks hitting a concrete floor. I pursed my lips and held out my hand towards my wife to tell her to stop. I reached around the corner into the laundry room and grabbed the heaviest, largest object I could find. Unfortunately it turned out to be a bottle of bleach. My wife proved more competent and obtained the three foot wooden ruler hanging on the wall. Well ok maybe it wasn't that much better.

I shrugged to her and we made our way to the living room using the corner of the hallway as cover. What we saw nearly made our hearts stop and confounded our brains.

There by the twinkling light of our Christmas tree knelt a being that appeared covered in fur. It was impossible to tell the color of the fur since the multi-colored lights blended into various hues and shadows. We could also hear grunting and wheezing from the strange creature as it moved in and out of the branches. In the darkness of the room and the shadows cast by the Christmas lights, we could not see a clear image of its head. It appeared to have fur everywhere on its face and what seemed like floppy ears and four eyes!

Suddenly, it sneezed! Loud!

We both jumped, my wife dropping her ninja yard stick across the linoleum floor. It clacked against the floor and gained the attention of our guest.

In one swift movement, the creature stood and raised its arms so it nearly dwarfed the Christmas tree. The wheezing grew in intensity and it seemed as if it took a deep breath before it finally bellowed.

"HO...HO...ACK!" The creature hacked and coughed, two of its four eyes falling to the floor. "Oh, do forgive me. I am...unwell."

Our jaws hit the floor along with the creature's eyes. I reached back and let my hand drift along the wall until I found the light switch and snapped it into the "on" position. There before us, in a red furry costume, big black belt, oversized hat, stood the man himself.

The red part of his costume appeared more like a maroon with a thin film of soot from our chimney darkening its once bright hue. The white fur lining was matted and stiff, the ends burned black from the fires and smoldering embers in untold numbers of fireplaces. His beard had yellowed and thinned. The glasses he now picked up from the floor and replaced on his nose were fogged and slightly bent.

"Santa?" My wife finally managed to squeak.

"Yes my dear, it is me." He replied, almost embarrassed to admit it.

“What happened to you?” I asked while attempting to hide the bottle of bleach behind my back.

“Nothing.”

“Nothing?”

“No.”

“But your clothes, your beard, your health...”

He chuckled quietly enough to prevent another cough. “’Tis normal for me, son. By the time I have neared the end of my long, night’s route, as I have now, I have flown around the globe in the cold night sky behind eight smelly reindeer, climbed down tens of thousands of chimneys, placed hundreds of thousands of presents under hundreds of thousands of trees, eaten five hundred pounds of half-baked cookies, drank a hundred gallons of milk and made an ungodly number of trips to the bathroom.

“It starts out okay. I really look forward to those first couple of dozen cookies to give me the sugar rush I need to make these deliveries, but towards the end I come down from the sugar rush and feel like a wet sponge. The milk is great to wash them down, but I have become lactose intolerant over the years of drinking so much milk. Thus the bathroom trips you see. My back is killing me, I haven’t slept in weeks getting everything prepared and Mrs. Clause nags me to the point of hysteria!”

We both stood there with reindeer eyes caught in the headlights. What do you say to something like that? The poor man. He doesn’t sound so jolly after all. “Santa, why do you do this to yourself every year?” I asked.

Just then a small voice called out from the hall. We turned to look down the hall to see our daughter walking up to us and dragging a blanket behind her. “Mommy?”

It was too late. She reached the end of the hall before we could stop her. She saw Santa.

“Santa?” She said half asleep. Then her big green eyes grew to three times their original size. “Santa!” She ran over to him and jumped up and down on the floor in front of him. “Santa, Santa, Santa!”

We ran over and grabbed her, pulling her back from the tired old man who looked like he was about to yak. “Honey, Santa’s not feeling well right now. We are going to let him rest a moment and you can talk to him later tonight, okay?”

She turned to Santa and looked up at him with wistful eyes. “Santa? Are you okay? What’s wrong?”

Santa chuckled slightly, stifling a cough. “Just a little tired, sweetie. I will be fine.”

With that, our daughter ran off to her room, blanket in tow.

“Is there anything we can do Santa?” My wife asked. Then we looked at each other as if to read each other’s mind. *I can’t believe we are talking to Santa Clause.* “You can rest here as long as you like, you

know. Do you need anything? Some warm milk perhaps? She stiffened and gave him an apologetic smirk. "Er, I mean *tea*?!"

"If you wouldn't mind. Mrs. Clause gets worried if I am late. Would you call the North Pole and tell her I will be a bit behind this year?"

"Of course we will." My wife replied and I reached for the phone. "Um. Right. North Pole." My fingers hovered over 4-1-1. Then I thought better of it. "Um. What's the phone number?"

Santa repeated the phone number and I dialed. This all seemed so surreal. Calling the North Pole? Santa sick in our living room? Talking to Mrs... "Clause! How are you? Um, your husband, Santa...Kris. Er, Mr. Clause is not feeling well. He is resting for a bit at our house." I looked at Santa and shrugged. His eyes twinkled and he chuckled.

I turned on the speaker so all could hear this gentle woman's voice. "Well, dear me, I told that man he needed to take it easy. We're not getting any younger! Thank you so much for taking care of my little Kris. Can I talk to the poor thing?" I handed Santa the phone and politely walked into the kitchen so he could talk privately.

"Can you believe this?" I said to my wife incredulous.

She merely shook her head and smiled. What we caught of the conversation between Santa and Mrs. Clause was sweet. Then, both of our heads turned into the direction of the living room as we heard a small voice again. We knew our daughter had returned. Kids have no sense of time.

We peered around the corner to scold our daughter for disturbing Santa when we caught our breath. There she stood with her little doctor's kit, wrapping his ungloved hand in gauze. She then took her blanket and wrapped it around him tucking in the corners behind him. Satisfied with this, she took out her plastic stethoscope, placed it on his chest and asked him to breathe. Santa did as instructed and breathed slowly so as not to cough in her face.

Our daughter, as if sensing our watchful eyes, turned to us and raised a cup of water from the table. "Can I please get some elkie-selser?" We smiled, and I nodded pulling a package of Alka-Seltzer from the top drawer in the kitchen. I opened the package and dropped the tablets into the water and watched them fizz to life.

My daughter took the cup from me and handed it to Santa. "Take two and call me if you don't feel better. Ok? You feel better now?" Then she raised her finger up in a warning, wagging it back and forth. "But only if you stay warm and get lots of rest!" She finished crossing her arms and looking at both of us pleased as can be. Then she turned to Santa and offered a sheepish grin.

Santa looked at her, smiled, and nodded. Then he looked up at both of us and smiled ever wider, the redness returned to his cheeks, the twinkle in his eyes grew brighter and he placed his finger along his nose.

He gave a playful nod in our daughter's direction and chuckled. "And you asked me *why* I do this every year?"