

The Night we Saved Christmas

by R J Tomlin

T'was the night before Christmas, and all through the town,
Not a noise could be heard, not one single sound,
Distant stars twinkled magically over the sky,
Filled with wispy grey clouds, with the moon hanging high.

All the families were tucked up in bed, fast asleep,
Not a word, not a whisper, not a pop, nor a peep,
And as the street by my house was coated in snow,
I lay down on my bed, peering out the window.

I could never sleep on this night, since the day I was born,
Seeing vision of gifts I'd receive in the morn,
A new book or new game to add to my stash?
A shelf full of films, or a truck full of cash?

I heard a ding from downstairs, the clock just struck midnight,
But what I saw next... an incredible sight;
A great shape appeared, gliding over the moon,
Santa Claus had arrived, and not a moment too soon!

He swooped in the air, swerving in a great arc,
Flying over the churchyard, the school, and the park,
Drifting over the rooftops with grace and with glee,
Santa Claus here for Christmas, with a present for me.

But then I saw something else; a quick flash of light,
A spark and a flame, something burning quite bright,
After a moment I knew... something wasn't quite right,
Santa Claus' sleigh had somehow caught alight!

A funnel of a flame shot out from the rear,
I stared on in horror as he struggled to steer,
As I watched with my eyes, I couldn't behold,
Santa Claus' great sleigh spiralled out of control!

It skimmed off the rooftops, fell into a dive,
Clipping off someone's chimney that crashed on the drive,
It took tiles from the roof, tore the pipe from its bracket,
The noise of it all making such a great racket.

It rocked and it buckled, it spun round and round,
I watched on in horror as it swooped to the ground,
And moments before it met the concrete,
It slipped in the alley at the end of my street...

Suddenly there was a terrific clang,
A bop, then a boop, then a crash and a bang,
The sound of snapped wood, broken metal and more,
And Santa's great sleigh wasn't there anymore.

For a moment I froze, simply stared into space,
Not able to fathom what had just taken place,
Then I threw on my slippers, grabbed my scarf from the drawer,
Wrapped up in my coat and headed out the front door.

The first thing I felt was the chill in the air,
As snow coated my clothes, and fell in my hair,
Like a soft, furry blanket of falling white powder,
As if the town was a cake that was covered in flour.

My skin felt like paper, my bones felt like ice,
I ran for the alley without thinking twice,
A moment later I reached it and slipped through the walls,
Shielding myself from the snowy downfall.

The alley was dark, a musty, tight space,
I saw my breath fogging in front of my face,
As I walked to the end I saw nothing but black,
Had Santa's great sleigh really fallen off track?

I took a step closer, and then as I neared,
A slight light came down, and a faint shape appeared,
It was like some kind of rocket-ship, wide and quite tall,
Though its front end had crashed straight into the wall,

Curved edges, tall frame, and right on the back,
Stacked up with huge boxes; a gigantic sack,
And right in front of the sack that was filled to the brim,
A figure was sat there... it had to be him.

I reached the great sleigh and I came to a stop,
And looked up with wonder at the figure on top,
The alley was dark, his appearance concealed,
But as the clouds drifted past, the moonlight revealed,

I imagined his face; rosy cheeks and pale skin,
A big fat white beard, and a gleeful old grin,
But as I stared in their eyes, the face that looked back,
Wasn't white with red cheeks, in fact... this person was black!

Their skin a dark brown, their hair tight and curly,
Their body short and slim, not big and not burly,

Long lashes, plump lips, with a permanent tan,
In fact, this person I saw wasn't even a man!

"Hang on..." I said, and there was a pause.
"Who the hell are you? You're not Santa Claus!"

The woman turned to me. "Name's Nicole, old sport.
But my friends call me Saint Nick – or Nicky for short."

"Now wait just a second..." I said, "this can't be true.
You're meant to be a fat old man, aren't you?"

She gave a long sigh. "Oh dear, oh dear...
Not to be rude, kid, but I get this spiel every year.
'How come you're a black woman with a little afro?
You're meant to be an old man saying ho-ho-ho!'
Well I'm sorry, kiddo, to burst your little bubble,
but I am the real Santa, so I hope that's no trouble.
Besides... seven billion presents, made up all right,
packaged and wrapped, delivered all in one night,
placed down by the tree, all careful and nice,
if you think a man's capable of that, think twice!"

"But Santa what happened? Your sleigh was on fire.
The sight from my window was dreadful... dire!
It was plucked from the sky, and then... then it crashed.
Now the front has been dented, and the side has been mashed!"

"It's a pretty old engine," she said, "the mechanics are busted,
the hinges are bending and the fixings are rusted..."

"Mechanics? The engine? I thought your sleigh ran on magic..."

She laughed. "What they teach you these days... ha! It's all bloody tragic..."

I stood there in shock, not quite sure what to say,
As she unclipped her seat belt and leapt out the sleigh,
She lifted the bonnet, and smoke all flew out,
Then she quickly leaned in and fiddled about.

"Ah, there it is..." she said, "the rocket combustors,
they've short-circuited the engine and broken the thrusters.
I'll just tighten these bolts and it should be okay,
it'll be fixed up in no time and I'll be on my way.
A quick hot-wiring should do the trick,
spark up the battery, give the engine a kick.
It's been a while since I've done this, I'm trying to think,
is it the green with the blue... or the blue with the pink?"

Though I couldn't see from where I was stood,
Whatever she thought, she must have misunderstood,
Because then came a zap, a quick surge of heat,
And next thing I knew she was blown off her feet.
I watched with dismay as she was tossed in the air,
Once again I did nothing but stand there and stare,
She crashed into the bin at the end of the alley,
With tendrils of steam rising up from her hair.

"Santa!" I cried, as I ran to her side,
I lifted the bin off her and tossed it aside,
Her head popped up between two refuse sacks,
Her eyebrows half-singed and her brown face burnt black.
To my great relief she wasn't injured at all,
I guess all that rubbish had softened her fall,
She clawed her way out of the pile of junk,
And sat up with her back resting against the wall.
She coughed very hard, rolled her eyes around their sockets,
Then she lifted her arm and reached into her pocket,
When she withdrew her hand, on her palm there did lie,
A perfectly baked and white-powdered mince pie.

"I've had it, kid, I'm calling it a night..."
She said, as she lifted the pie and took a big bite.

"What?" I said, "what are you saying?
This isn't funny, Santa, you'd better stop playing!"

"Look at me, kid, you just saw my crash.
Now my hair has been burnt and I'm covered in trash!
I'm sick of this job, it's just way too tough.
I'm sorry to say it, but I've just had enough..."

She did have a point, in a way she was right,
She was covered in rubbish, and she smelt just like... well, pretty bad.

"But you can't give up Santa..." I said, "you can't just stop.
You've still got a sack-full of presents to drop!"

"But I can't..." she said, "my sleigh needs a'fixin'!"

"But what about your reindeer? Like Prancer and Vixen...?
Y'know... Dasher, Dancer, Comet, Cupid?
What about Dunder? And what about Blitzen?"

"Well..." she said, "Prancer's retired,
Vixen was fired,
Dasher and Dancer both say they're too tired.
Comet's too old,

Cupid says it's too cold,
And Dunder and Blitzen are skiing... I'm told."

"But think of all the families, little girls, little boys,
waiting up by the tree to find a room full of toys!
A year without you is a year without Christmas,
and a year without Christmas is a year without joy..."

"Why do you care? Why do you give a hoot?
Whether or not they get presents, makes no difference to you...
My sack's right there, go on, take your pick.
You've got the world's whole collection; all the toys from Saint Nick."

As I stood at the end of the dark alleyway,
I turned over my shoulder and looked back at the sleigh,
And I once again noticed, sat right at the back,
The pile of gifts inside the gigantic sack.
I thought about her words, her sudden proposal,
All of it sat there, all at my disposal,
If I opened it up, I wondered what I would find,
But then I stopped, shook my head... was I losing mind?!

I turned back to Santa. "I can't believe this!
I don't care what you give me, or what *I* receive.
If there's one thing you taught me that I'll never forget,
it's that Christmas is about giving, it's not about what you get..."

"Look, kid... I'm not being funny,
I'm not the Tooth Fairy, I ain't no damn Easter Bunny,
I'm tired, I'm cold, I'm already running late.
If anyone wants a present, they'll just have to wait...
My job's a nightmare; you've got no idea,
I'm crashed in an alley, with no Elf or Reindeer,
I'm sorry to say it, I honestly am,
but Christmas is cancelled... at least 'til next year."

I looked down at Saint Nick with a look of disgust,
After all of the years of my hope and my trust,
I just wasn't having it, it just wasn't right,
I wasn't going to let her just call it a night.

"So that's it then?" I said. "The Great Santa Claus,
sat down in an alley, sulking about her chores.
All of those children trying to get on your list,
only to find out that their chance has been missed.
No..." I said, "you're not giving in,
I won't let those families wake up with nothing.
I'm sorry, Nicky... the world's counting on you,

now get up from the floor, you've got work to do."

On a cold Christmas Eve, in my small little town,
Within the dark of an alley, with the snow falling down,
Saint Nick turned to me, and to my great surprise,
I saw a glimmer of light... I saw hope in her eyes.
She let out a deep breath and she finished her pie,
Swallowed a mouthful, and looked up at the sky.

"That was one great speech, kid, it seems you're quite a fan...
But if we're gonna save Christmas, well... have you got a plan?"

In the dead of the night came a knock at the door,
On the snow-covered street down at house number four,
As Dad opened up he said "It's almost one in the morning!"
He yawned, rubbed his eyes. "Who on earth could be calling?!"

He looked out the doorway, peered out on the lawn,
And instantly couldn't believe what he saw,
A little brown lady standing out in the fray,
Next to a huge sack of presents and a gigantic sleigh.

And right beside her, hiding under the tree,
Was a young teenaged boy... his son; it was me,
He glanced out at it all, gave us one frantic look,
Opened his mouth and said "*What the f-!*"

"No time to explain!" I said with great haste.
"Dad we need to save Christmas, we've got no time to waste!
Come on Santa, there's no need to panic... my Dad..."

She looked at him standing in the doorway. "What about him...?"

"Well..." I smiled, "he's a mechanic."

I ran through the house, opened up the garage door,
And pulled in Santa's sleigh before anyone saw.

At first Dad wasn't happy, he pretty much lost his head,
"I don't care if it's Santa, you should be in bed!"
After he yelled for a bit, and just about went berserk,
I gave him some coffee and we got straight to work.

Whilst the whole street around us were resting their heads,
Curled up by their fires or nestled in beds,
Their stockings hung up by the fire with care,

Their pets fast asleep in the living room chair.
Down in the garage at house number four,
In a room full of smoke, tools all over the floor,
With a whir and a crank and a click and a pop,
Dad took Santa's sleigh, and he fixed up the lot...

He straightened the panels, he repaired the dents,
He loosened the hinges and cleaned out the vents,
He replaced the bearings, the cogs and valves too,
And by the time he had finished... Santa's sleigh was practically brand new.

It was just after two when he couldn't take anymore,
He put down his tools and almost collapsed on the floor,
I put his arm around my shoulder and took him upstairs to bed,
"Good night, Santa Claus. Nice to meet you!" he said.

When I came back downstairs, the sleigh was no longer there,
The garage door had been opened, letting in the night air,
I peered out to see snow falling down from the skies,
A wall of it slanted in front of my eyes.

I stepped outside and peered out on the garden.

"I didn't mean to startle," came a voice, "I beg your pardon."

I peered to my right, and right there Santa lay,
Sat out in the drive in her fixed up old sleigh.

"I guess this is it," then she said, "farewell...
When I get back home, I'll have a story to tell!"

I briefly smiled. "Goodbye Santa Claus..."

She went to start up her engine... but suddenly she paused.

"I almost forgot..." she said, "there's something I missed;
I never once asked, but what's on your Christmas list?
Whatever you want, I'll bring it your way.
Tell me... what would you like on this fine Christmas day?"

"Well..." I began, "you see the one thing I sought,
isn't really something that can be bought.
I'm hoping to be an author, to write, to inspire,
'*The next J.K Rowling*' is what I aspire.

But at the moment I have no agent or publisher; I guess you could say that I'm all by myself.
My ultimate dream is to walk into a bookstore and be able to find my book on the shelf...

So far, at least, I haven't had much luck;
over fifty rejections, quite frankly it sucks.
But I guess that's the point, the industry's tough.

Besides, some people say; *'If your dreams don't scare you, then they're not big enough.'*

I just need to somehow spread the word,
to let people know who I am so my story gets heard.
I know it sounds stupid, but what do you suggest?
After all, you are Santa, so you probably know best..."

Santa thought for a moment, she stared into space.
"I've got an idea... why don't you tell people about what's just taken place?
Make it into a story, and sell it in town.
That's sure to do it, to spread the word 'round!"

"Yeah," I said, "yeah Santa, you're right!
I'll write up a story, about this very night,
I'll print copies out and I'll hand them to all.
'The Night we Saved Christmas' is what it shall be called."

"Anyway..." she said, "I've got work to do.
Got a long night ahead of me, and it's almost half two!
I've still got Iceland, New Zealand, Alaska, Peru...
In fact," she turned to me, "you can come with me... if you want to?"

I was stunned by her words, I had to admit,
Come with her for Christmas, did she really mean it?
I thought about the journey, all the countries we'd see,
All the places we'd visit, and the whole thing for free!
Soaring over Europe, the United States too,
From the streets of Las Vegas, to the great Timbuktu,
From the deserts of Cairo, to the frozen Arctic,
Just a sleigh full of presents, just me and Saint Nick...

But then another thought arose, and after a while,
I looked up to her, and I gave her a smile.
"I'm flattered you'd ask..." I said, "but maybe next year.
There's only one place I want to be this Christmas, and that's right here."

Santa gave me a nod, then she strapped herself in,
Turned the key in the ignition and started up the engine,
And with a whir and a buzz and a quick flash of light,
Santa's great sleigh took off, and disappeared through the night...

About the Author

I know these parts are very boring, so I'll try my best to make it as short as possible. So, here goes...

Hi, my name's Ryan, I'm 21-years-old, and I write books. Last year I wrote a book called '*The Transition*' and it was something I was incredibly proud of. Now the traditional route would be to send it to a publisher or agent in the hope of getting it approved and being offered some kind of 'deal' – but this was the sixth book I had written, and the other five before that had faced nothing but rejection. With so many books being published every day, and so many other authors out there, I needed to do something different, to somehow make myself stand out, so after I finished my degree earlier this year, I spent 100 days coming out onto the streets of Leeds to promote it – literally!

I had so much fun, met so many great – as well as a few strange – people, and all round it was a fantastic experience. And after the 100 days were up, with a few sales behind me, I decided to send my book off to agents and publishers to see if I had a chance this time. But guess what?
Still no luck.

This isn't a sympathy vote or a sob story; I have to accept that that's part of life – sometimes we succeed and sometimes we fail. It's hard getting knocked back all the time, but I'm just so incredibly determined that I'm simply refusing to give up. I know it sounds cheesy, but my ultimate dream is to become a best-selling author, I've written the book I want to take me there, now all I have to do is keep spreading the word...

So thanks for purchasing my short story/poem, it honestly means the world. As I've said, the main reason I'm doing this is to promote my latest book, so if you get the time please check out the flyer that was attached to this page. If you want to keep up to date with some of the things I'm doing, or want to get in touch for any reason, follow me on Twitter and Instagram – @rjtomlin on both.

And, of course, Merry Christmas! ☺