

A Little Bit Of Magic

Elizabeth Duivenvoorde

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A bone chilling breeze carried large fluffy snow flurries through the air. I brushed the balls of white off my lavender jacket with the sleeve, keeping my fingers hidden within. I couldn't remember the last time I had a pair of mittens to trap heat around my hands.

A group of people dressed in identical red jackets shuffled past. They climbed the steps of a small white house and knocked on the door. The door opened to reveal a young couple dressed in matching Christmas sweaters. Their faces lit up when the crowd burst into song.

At first their voices were scattered. By the second verse the singers came together to form a harmony. The lyrics of *Silent Night* danced through the air and into the hearts of the men and women passing by. They stopped to watch. Some even joined in singing.

I inched towards the pedestrians. Moving blonde strands of hair from my eyes, I swallowed a lump in my throat before joining in the song. No one protested. My stomach filled with thousands of butterflies.

The carolers led the rest of us in the closing of the song. The couple thanked us all. The group moved down the steps and to the next house. The rest of the people resumed trenching through the snow to their separate destinations.

I was ignored. Invisible. People tend to ignore the homeless on a daily basis. But it's worse closer to the holidays. They're so focused on preparing for Christmas. Besides, who would want to help a freak? A girl cursed with horns.

A young man bumped into me, his shoulder knocking mine. I moved back and rubbed my upper arm. He stopped and turned to me. I craned my neck to see his face. Black strands of hair escaped through the bottom of his wool hat. "I'm sorry. Are you alright?"

I bobbed my head and pulled my hat down, covering my ears. "I'm fine."

His blue eyes trailed over my face. "Okay. Later." He walked off.

I rubbed under my frozen nose. I needed to find somewhere warm. A Tim Horton's caught my eye and I forced my numb feet to carry me there.

Heat embraced me. Burnt coffee assaulted my nostrils. I slipped into a booth and curled up, hoping to stay hidden. Clumps of snow drifted past the coffee shop window.

"Hey." A woman in a light brown shirt with a Tim Horton's name tag stormed up to me. "Are you going to buy something?"

I licked my cracked lips. "I-I'm sorry. It's just--"

"Either buy something or get out."

My stiff limbs worked to help me slide out of the booth. I stood. Keeping my eyes on the floor, I dragged my feet. She followed me.

The cold breeze attacked my face when I exited. Hands shoved me forward. The ground got closer. I reached out. One of my palms slipped on ice and my head hit the snow covered pavement.

The blackness subsided and my eyes opened. A few people, including the employee who shoved me, crowded around. I propped myself up slowly. My ears burned and I brought my fingertips to one of them. The exposed, pointed ear was warm to the touch. If I could feel them, then these people could see them. And my horns. *Oh gosh, not the horns.*

My eyes shot around until they landed on the grey hat, covered in snowflakes. I snatched it and pulled it onto my head. Whispers exchanged as I stumbled to my feet.

The man from before walked up to me. A soft smile danced across his lips. His grey jacket matched his hat. "Hello again."

"H-Hello." I moved past him.

He grabbed my arm. I froze.

"Come with me."

My chest tightened and I looked to him. "W-What? Where?"

His smile grew. "Somewhere warm. With food."

"A shelter?" Most shelters kicked me out as soon as they saw the thick twisted goat horns.

His eyes looked up and his head moved side to side. "Sure." He pulled me along.

Protesting would have been the ideal thing to do. But I had nothing to lose.

He led me to a black car.

My lip quivered. "W-What's your name?"

"Ernest." He opened the passenger side door.

I stared at the tan seat. *What was going on?*

"What's your name?" He asked in return.

"Paige."

"Well Paige, do you believe in Christmas miracles?"

I opened my mouth to answer, but nothing came out.

Ernest grabbed a handful of something from his pocket and tossed it in my face. The dust flew up my nose and my legs shook. He caught me when I fell and moved me into the car. He got in shortly after and we began driving. I fought sleep, but the fight took more energy than I had.

I squinted at the bright white walls. I sat up on the stiff bed. Slowly, I slid off it.

There was a change of clothes spread across the top of a small grey dresser. A red dress with green snowflakes scattered over it in no particular pattern and white cotton around the bottom and at the end of the long sleeves. A forest green pair of leggings sat next to the dress. A red hat with two cut-out holes as well as white cotton around the area that hugged the head sat on top of the leggings.

I picked up the short dress. The soft fabric warmed my still frigid fingertips. Without hesitation I changed out of my dirty street clothes and into the red and green outfit. The hat fit perfectly, and my horns fit through the holes that had been cut out.

A bell jingled and I looked around the room. A pair of red slippers that narrowed to a point at the toes rested on a wicker chair in the corner of the room. A bell sat at the point on each shoe. I removed my worn out shoes and pulled on the thick footwear.

Curious, I exited the room. A red and green hallway with tinsel hung along where the wall and ceiling meet led into a large living area, a kitchen, and the front door. There was no one here.

Without hesitation, I wandered out into the cold. *Where am I?*

White tundra spanned out as far as the eye could see. A small stable stood next to a snow covered landing strip. It led into a wooden garage door connected to the massive building I just stepped out of. It looked like a factory had body checked a little brick house.

Grunts filled the air. Hugging myself instinctively, I walked to the stable. The door slid open soundlessly. Nine male deer and a doe resided in the barn. Each of them had their own pen. Bells jingled as the creatures moved and shifted.

“Dunder, chill,” a female voice cried out.

I followed the voice and froze when I spotted the young woman. Her dark brown hair complemented the massive deer antlers that sprouted out of the top of her head. Lively brown eyes shot to me. “What are you doing in here?” she snapped. “You’re going to get them all riled up.” She unlatched the gate and stepped out of the bulky deer’s pen. Resting her hands on her hips. Her outfit matched mine. “Well?”

“I-I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to.”

She rolled her eyes. “Did the big guy send you?”

“The big guy?”

Air rushed in behind me and she straightened. "Evening, sir."

I glanced over my shoulder.

A man dressed in a red jacket with white trim, red pants, a red hat, and black boots slid the door shut. "Hello Clarice. How are they? Ready for tonight?" He faced us; his fluffy white beard hid everything below his pink cheeks. "Oh, hello."

My throat constricted. *Where the heck am I?*

"Yes, sir. They'll be ready by the time the toys are done," Clarice nodded.

His soft blue eyes focused on me. "I suppose I should inform Ernest that there is no need for your wakeup call."

I bit the inside of my cheek.

He extended his hand to me. "Come."

I gaze travels over the plump rough hands. "Where am I?"

Clarice walked to a section of the wall that was covered in decorated harnesses. I'd never seen so many bells in my life.

"Come," he repeated.

I swallowed hard before taking his hand. He led me out of the barn and back into the large building.

This time, the house wasn't empty. Girls and boys all in red and green scrambled around the area, singing, cooking, and laughing. WE walked back down the long hall and into the room I'd woken up in, but it was no longer white. Lavender wallpaper covered the walls, a white metal bedframe supported a twin bed with ivory blankets, and a pink dresser sat in the corner. It looked like my old room. "Where did all this come from?" I whispered in awe, blinking back tears.

The man smiled. "From you."

I peered up at him. "What do you mean?"

He straightened his hat, causing the bell at the end to sing. "This is your little bit of magic. Treat it well." He headed for the door. "I'll see you at the caroling."

When the door closed, I sat on my bed. Before my mind could start to comprehend all that had happened, a knock came from the door. I opened my mouth, but no words came out. I coughed to clear my throat. "Come in."

A young man with dark hair stepped in. Rabbit ears fit through holes of his hat, one of them flopped over. "Hey. How're you feeling?"

I blinked my eyes slowly. “Am I dreaming?” First deer antlers and now rabbit ears?

Ernest grinned. “No.” He bowed. “Welcome to the family.”

I bit the inside of my cheek. “W-what is going on?”

He rose and smiled. “We’re misfits. Nick takes in people like us and gives us a place to live, jobs to do.” He sighed pleasantly.

The sound filled my chest with warmth.

Ernest took my hand. “We’re going to miss caroling.” He tugged me out of my room and back outside.

We joined the crowd of horned and large eared men and women who stood by the runway. Clarice was hooking the deer up to a silver and gold sleigh.

A young girl with elephant ears and a teenaged boy with moose antlers carried out a large red sack. They tossed it into the back of the sleigh.

The bearded man came out and Clarice backed away from the deer. “All set.”

He raised a hand in response and climbed in.

A low hum filled the air. I glanced at Ernest. He was humming. All the guys were humming.

Clarice grinned, and then opened her mouth, allowing a series of soft lyrics to escape while following the rhythm of the humming. “You better watch out. You better not cry. Better not pout. I’m telling you why.”

The rest of the mob jumped in. “Santa Claus is coming to town.”

I laughed when I joined in. My voice blended with the others around me and created a little bit of magic of our own.

The deer lifted the sleigh off the ground and up into the sky.

Our song came to an end and Saint Nicholas called down to us. A smile spread across my lips.

“Merry Christmas to all and to all a good night!”