

## A Christmas Letter

I drive down a double-lane highway. You know the kind. Usually runs between towns just bigger than small. No light, dark..., lonely.

I was supposed to be in charge of the family Christmas letter. Not anymore. Not since Thanksgiving and the Spam Turkey. I thought it was a good idea. Something different for a change. My wife? Kids? Not so much. Kicked me out without so much as a bite of a Spam sandwich.

Now? I'm headed for a rundown motel in a rundown town called Nowheresville USA.

In my rearview mirror, the lights of a distant car closes in. It's on my bumper, blinding me. Frightens the hell out of me.

Cherry lights start to whirl. Cop. Story of the year for this hombre. I pull over to the side of the road. The gravel underneath me makes me shaky, careful.

The car door opens. A single copper slow walks to my car. I lower the window.

The cop puts his elbow on the door frame. "Hello, Harry."

"Mack."

"Funny seeing *you* here."

"Maybe it is and maybe it isn't," I say.

"Know why I stopped you?" He smiled.

I shrugged my shoulders. "Maybe you don't like Chevys."

"Speed limit." Mac grinned again. "Five miles under."

So that's the way he wanted to play it. Okay by me.

"Out of the car."

I stared at him. "Why don't *you* get out of the car."

"I'm already out."

He had a point. I got out.

"Mind if I search your car?"

“Sure, sure you can.” I leaned forward menacingly. “If you got a warrant.”

“Easy, Harry, easy.” He looked up and down the broken old highway. “Tell you what I’m gonna do. What *you’re* gonna do. Consider it a favor.”

“A favor? From you? That’s a laugh. Last time you did me a favor you took my partridge from my pear tree at Thanksgiving. Ended up with a Spam Turkey and no family.”

“You heard me. You stay right here. I’ll be watching.” He got in his car. “Don’t try any funny stuff. He drove down the road and was soon out of view.

And then... Another red light. Not two lights. Only one. It pulled up just out of sight. I was screwed. Cop in front of me, cop in back.

I see a guy hop out of... something. Short guy. Green suit. Red shoes with toes that curled up. It was quite a getup.

The little fella had a smoke hanging out of the corner of his mouth. I took a hard look at it.

“Where are my manners?” he asked. “Need a cig?”

I nodded. He handed me the pack. I took one out and stuck it between my lips. “Got a light?” I asked.

He shook his head. “*Candy* cigs. All we allow.” He nodded back to wherever he came from. “Follow me. Big Man wants to see you.” He turned and walked away.

“Maybe I’m stayin’ right here.”

The little guy turned around, one eyebrow raised. “I didn’t ask.” He turned back around and kept walking.

Okay, I’ll bite. I took a nibble of the smoke... I mean... candy cig... and took a walk.

That red light? It got closer. Then I saw it. It was some kind of deer. With a bright red nose. Odd. Eight deer lined up behind Red Nose.

Then I saw him. Big Man sitting on a gigantic sleigh. He wore a red suit. A nice one. Black boots, thick black belt. Had a gut like ol’ Freddie at Hart’s Tavern. And a beard. Long white one. Bushy.

I walked up to him. He stared at me, took the cig from between his lips and tossed it in the snow.

“Got a letter for you.” He reached into a big bag, grabbed a letter, and handed it to me. “Read it,” he said. “Now.”

The letter had a one-word address. "Daddy." A solitary tear rolled down my cheek.

I opened the letter and read.

"T'was the Night before Christmas,  
And all through the House,  
Not a creature was stirring,  
Not even a mouse.  
When what to my wondering eyes should appear...  
*Daddy, Daddy, please come home for Christmas, we all love you so much!*

Another tear rolled down my cheek. Okay more than one. They rolled from both cheeks, dropping into the white snow.

The Big Man looked down at me from his sleigh. "You're gonna need a lift if you wanna make it in time."

I nodded. "Yeah. Sure."

I climbed into the sleigh.