

KELVIN BUECKERT

Rumors of Christmas

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Introduction



Where did we come from?

How did we get here?

These are valid questions for us all to ponder, however, here we will only consider the questions as they relate to the story at hand.

This story began life as a play called, "Memories of Our Town, Gladstone." It was performed at our local train station museum in the summer of 2019. After that production was complete I was considering the future of the script. After a bit of thought, I decided that even though it was originally a summer show, this story line would actually make a good Christmas story as well. With that thought in mind I changed a couple of the songs, a few

of the details, and re-titled the story, “Rumors of Christmas.”

This is the story you are about to read.

I’ve also included some photographs from the original production for your entertainment and/or aggravation.

Cheers,

-Kelvin Bueckert

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1

Morning



The town was covered in the grey dusk that comes just before a dawn.

Still, it was a day full of hope and optimism for the future. So much so that Simon, a middle-aged farmer, was whistling as he strode along the snow-packed trail that some joker on town

council had titled a road.

His cheerful gait slowed as a mournful melody caught his attention.

What the sam-hill was goin on there at the train station?

Simon squinted, taking in the sight of a trio of women sitting on the edge of a railway handcart. They were singing. As the sky overhead was painted in the brilliant colors of dawn, their dirge spiraled downward toward a merciful end.

It was going to be a good day. At least if Simon had anything to do with it.

"Merry Christmas Margaret."

"Merry Christmas Simon." Margaret, a thirty something young woman, didn't even look up as she grumbled out this greeting.

Undeterred by this icy welcome, Simon continued his effort to spread the spirit of the season. "Merry Christmas Gertrude. "

"Merry Christmas Simon." Gertrude, like her sisters, was dressed in a thick black dress. Her mood seemed calculated to match the color of her clothing.

"Merry Christmas Hilda!" The gloomiest looking woman of the bunch, Hilda didn't see fit to answer this cheerful greeting at all. Still, Simon persisted. "Merry Christmas Hilda!"

"What's so merry about it?" Hilda finally snapped.

"My my. You all sound like you've been eatin' rotten fruitcake again." Simon couldn't help but chuckle as he surveyed the mournful scene before him.

"Oh you know how it is!" Gertrude sighed.

"Whatever floats yer goat. I'm just glad ta see ya'all in such a good mood fer a change."

"Thanks. We've got to find what joy we can in these dark and evil days." Hilda forced her head up, revealing eyes circled with

the evidence of a night of sorrow.

“Dark days? Hah. Let me guess. Y’all got dumped again, didn’t ya?”

“Men round here sure don’t know what they’re missin.” Margaret spat into the small snowdrift at her feet as if to emphasize this important point.

“If you ask me, there’s something sinister going on in this town.” Hilda shivered as a gust of wind caught her head of dark curly hair. “You can feel it in the air.”

As of on cue, the three busybodies rose from their perch on the handcart.

“That’s right. And we’re going to find out what it is. Come along Ladies. Let’s not dwaddle.” Gertrude marched off along the side of the train that stood parked beside them. The two other busybodies followed behind her like obedient ducklings.

“You go out lookin fer trouble, don’t be surprised if ya find it!” Simon shouted after them. The busybodies paid no attention whatsoever to this helpful advice. After a moment he shrugged and turned his attention to his assigned project for the day.

Decorating the platform of the railway station for Christmas. The project had been delayed long enough already.

It was time to get at it.

As Simon hoisted a heavy evergreen tree into place he heard footsteps approaching behind him.

“Pardon me Monsour.”

“What do ya need a pardon fer? Ya just got here.”

“Pardon? I do not understand...somehow I come here here to Austin and...”

“Austin? I’m afraid yer in bigger trouble than ya think ma’m.” Satisfied that the tree before him was stable in its position, Simon turned to face his questioner.

A lovely young woman stood before him. She wore a flimsy blue dress, fancy lace gloves and a charming expression of confusion.

"Trouble? What do you mean? I good citizen. I obey all laws."

"No. No. It's not that. I'm just sayin, somehow or other ya ended up here in Gladstone."

"Gladstone? Sacre Bleu! I really took a turn didn't I?"

"A turn for the better I'd say." Simon extended a grease stained hand in an expression of friendship. "Names Simon WestLake. Pleased ta meet ya...?"

"Marie Fontaine." Marie glanced around her as if noticing her surroundings for the first time. "So this here is Gladstone?" A sarcastic chuckle puffed from her sophisticated lips.

"What's so funny about our town, Gladstone?"

"Nothing. It's just so...funny and...quaint..." The sarcastic chuckle had now become a torrent of giggles.

"Quaint? What exactly are ya tryin ta tell me ma'm?"

"Sorry, I did not mean it like that...I was trying to say that I...I..." Marie struggled to compose herself.

"Let me take a wild guess. Ya just moved here into town."

"Yes. Last week. I come here to work." Marie took a deep breath. "Today I am looking for the Mullers. Can you help?"

"I can tell ya where they live, but I'll warn ya, them Mullers are a mighty strange bunch, they don't like strangers much."

"Oh. They will want to see me. See. My work is midwife."

"A midwife? Why didn't ya say so?" Simon strode along the station platform and pointed into the distance. "The Muller place is up thata way." Simon swiveled to face his young student. "If I were you I'd change my mode of dress if I was goin up there."

"If I were you I would not wear a dress. Now, how do I get over there?"

"Take that trail." Evelyn, a very proper young schoolteacher, pointed toward the forest trail she had just exited. "The Mullers live at the end of it. Simon's right though, you'd be wise to change into something a little warmer if you're going up to Big Grass Marsh."

"I took three years university in the old country. I think I can take care of myself." Marie shoved Evelyn aside. "Good day Madamoselle." Was her parting shot at Simon as she headed toward the forest at the edge of the station grounds, her fragile blue dress flapping in the chilly breeze.

"Good day Madamoselle. Hah. Just don't come runnin to me if ya trip an break yer leg." Marie only waved her hand at this as if she were dismissing a foolish child. Simon couldn't help but chuckle at her audacity as he returned his attention to the task at hand.

"Are you almost done here?" Evelyn crossed her arms as she surveyed Simon's frantic efforts to decorate the tree. "Christmas is coming fast you know."

"Yep. If nothin goes wrong, I should have this all finished by supper time. What are you doin here anyway, aren't ya supposed ta be teachin school?"

"I should be, but the school board told me not to come in today."

"Why not...ya got too many big ideas fer that little country schoolhouse of yers?"

"No. No. It's not that. The children have been doing so well in their studies, the school board figured they would close early to let them celebrate Christmas a little longer."

"Huh. That's pretty fine of'em."

"It sure is. Anyway, have you seen Adam around here this morning?"

"Adam? He just ran off thatta way lookin fer ya." Simon pointed at the forest trail he had just directed Marie toward.

"Really? I met him last night. Ahem. I've got a feeling that he's finally ready to ask me to court him."

"After ten years? Goodness Evelyn. No need for ya ta keep on wonderin. If ya hurry ya can catch up to'em and talk to'em yourself. Like I said, he just went off that way."

"I'll try catch up to him. Thanks Simon."

Evelyn made a fine straight profile as she strode along the station platform toward the forest. The picture of a woman in control of her destiny.

"Who was that woman you and Evelyn were just talking to?" Gertrude's sour breath filled Simon's startled face.

"You know what dark tales the newspapers tell about these newcomers." Hilda wailed into his left ear.

"It's almost as bad as what they say about the people who've lived here all their lives." Margret chimed in from her place on the edge of the firing line.

"Tosh, Margaret. You know it's far far worse than that." Gertrude sneered.

"Ya sure got that right, that newcomer is gonna bring a whole lotta trouble into this town." Simon attempted to break free from the cluster of busybodies surrounding him. He failed. In fact, the more he struggled, more intense the questioning became.

"Really now? How did you find that out?" Gertrude's accusing fingernail was dancing before his wide terrified eyes.

"Tell us everything!" Hilda snapped.

"You know the old sayin, there's nothin as good as bad gossip!" Margret spat at ground, missed, and hit Simon's leather boot instead.

"Why do you say she's going to bring a lot trouble into this town?" Gertrude bellowed like a Gestapo agent on a bad day.

"Cause she's the new midwife." Simon saw his opportunity and burst out from the prison of chattering ladies.

"Humph, you're making one of those little "jokes" of yours again, aren't you?" Gertrude crossed her arms and raised her wrinkled nose a little higher.

"I'm just sayin, there's more useful things ya could be doin than frettin about immigrants." Simon felt anger rising inside him as he surveyed the damage done to the Christmas decorations he had labored all morning to set up.

"Frankly, I think we're just being sensible." Hilda looked to Gertrude for support and received it in the form of a pat on the shoulder.

"Heh. If ya wanna be sensible, the committee raisin money for the poor and downtrodden could use a few more willin hands." Simon lifted a broken evergreen branch from the ground where it had fallen.

"Oh, we're far too busy for those sorts of things." Gertrude proclaimed.

"I can see that." Simon offered the broken branch up for inspection.

Hilda brushed the bough of evergreen to the side. "We live in troubled times Simon, we have to keep an eye on what's going on."

"A very close eye." Margaret pulled a pair of binoculars from her winter coat and began to survey the grounds of the train station. The picture of a scout searching for enemy troops.

"Speaking of which, I think we better go and find out what that newcomer is up to!" Gertrude brayed as she spied her purse, hanging from one of the branches that still remained on the

evergreen tree.

“She looked ta be up to about five foot six ta me.” Margret muttered as she continued to survey the snow-covered grounds.

“Don’t be foolish Margaret!” The evergreen began to sway as Gertrude tugged on the straps of her purse. “This is serious business. We need to keep our eyes open! Yes, I think we’re onto something big this time.” With that the purse sprang free from the branch that had held it. As the tree collapsed behind her, Gertrude clutched her precious purse to her chest. “Hurry up ladies. We mustn’t dabble when there’s work to be done.”

Just like that, Simon was alone. He surveyed the decorations strewn around his feet. The Christmas tree leaning like a drunk against the station wall.

“I tell ya. Some people keep their eye on everythin except the ball.” Simon muttered as he began picking up the ruins of his project. “So much fer bein finished by supper time.”

2

Afternoon



The weather had grown colder throughout the day. Christmas was in the air. Simon was thankful that he had been able to make some progress after all. After a determined effort, the tree had been pruned and decorated. All it needed now was to be crowned with the glittering star of gold in his hand.

Simon scrambled up the wooden ladder. He was anxious to

complete the project and head home to the supper that his wife Ruth was preparing.

“Good afternoon Simon. I was wondering if...”

“Funny, I was just thinkin bout trouble an here ya are.” Simon jiggled the star, attempting in vain to get it to accept its position in life.

“I do not understand.”

“I guess you wouldn’t. Ahem. Ya find the Muller place alright this mornin?” Success! The star was in place. All he needed to do now was to finish a few more of the decorations and then he could head home. Simon began his descent to the station platform.

“Yes. I did find Muller place. ”

“Ha. I see yer dressed a little warmer now.” Simon teased as he reached the ground.

“Yes. The other dress was much too cold, you know...icy...”

Simon couldn’t help but smirk as he surveyed the slender figure of Marie Fontaine. The flimsy dress she had worn in the morning was now covered in a thick coat of fur. “It’s pretty rough country out there by the Big Grass Marsh ain’t it?”

“Oooh! You right! Is that what you want me to say!? I spend all morning looking for the Muller house and when I finally find it, Mister Muller tell me foreigners not welcome there.”

“He’d rather see his wife givin birth alone?” Simon tilted the ladder and began lowering it to the station platform.

“That’s what he said. Then he tell me to get back to town. And to hurry!”

“Herman sure ain’t the brightest lantern in the barn is he?”

“Lantern in barn? I do not understand that.”

“I’m just sayin, Herman must’ve forgotten that it was Christmas time.” Simon turned his attention from the ladder. A surge

of pride ran through him as he surveyed his handiwork. Yes, the day had been productive.

"Oh. I understand. Yes. Now he send his boy to town to beg me to come back there."

"Probably because nobody else will help them." Evelyn nodded her appreciation as she swept onto the station platform. It was obvious that the sights of the season pleased her.

"I believe that...still, I will go help them. That is my duty as midwife. But before I go, I must ask a small favor of you." Marie took a step toward Simon.

"Sorry ma'm, if I'm gonna get everything done by supper time I'm gonna hafta stay workin'."

"It not hard favor. Just take this." Marie fished a key from a pocket in her thick coat of fur and thrust it toward Simon.

"What is this?"

"A key for Father's room. I reserve room number four at the Alhambra Hotel in his name. You give him this when he come in on train...please?"

"Well." Marie's pleading blue eyes melted away Simon's resistance. "I guess I ken do that fer ya. You just get out there to Big Grass Marsh and help that poor Muller woman before it's too late."

"I do what I can. At least Muller woman is sensible. Better than some people around here." With that Marie shoved Evelyn aside and headed out toward the Big Grass Marsh.

"I don't know what I ever did to her." Evelyn was the picture of exasperation as she watched Marie vanish into the distance. "Every time I try and talk to her, she just shoves me aside."

"Could be cause yer always standin in her way." Simon grabbed a box near his feet and began pulling decorations from it.

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