KELVIN BUECKERT

The Christmas That Everything Went Wrong
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What can I say? It’s been a trying year for all of us.

This is a story I wrote during a lockdown. It is set during the great depression but it deals with issues currently relevant. The story was originally intended to be performed on stage, however, as it turned out, going on stage in front of a crowd isn’t possible this Christmas.

Therefore, I have released this story in this format. I did record a radio play version of it, which, if it turns out, will be available on my website.

With that said, I hope you have a very Merry Christmas wherever you are in the world, and let’s hope and pray for a better 2021.

Kelvin Bueckert
Knock. Knock. The sound of rapping summoned Pa from the comfort of his chair to the back of his cabin.

“Merry Christmas!” He proclaimed as he opened the door to a blast of winter air.
Merry Christmas Doctor Matthews.” Larry Hodges smiled as an air of optimism radiated from his freckled features.
“What can I do for you, Larry?”
“You can take this.”
“And what is this?”
“It’s the medicine you ordered.”
“Oh yes, of course. Thank you. The Smith child has been needing this penicillin.” Pa took the brown paper bag he had been offered and began to turn toward the cozy warmth of his living room.
“That will be 2.00, please.”
“2.00?” Pa returned his attention to the eager young man.
“Payment is due upon receipt. You know the pharmacy rules.”
“Alright. I guess I can afford that.” Pa took a step backward. “Come in out of the cold while I fetch it.”
Larry followed the older man into the house. “Is Adrienne home?”
“She’s out doing chores.” Pa pulled a well-worn wallet from a shelf beside the crackling fireplace that dominated the room. “Here’s your 2.00. Don’t spend it all in one place.”
“Thanks.” Larry took the money he was offered and shoved it into one of the pockets in his ragged pants. “If you don’t mind, I’d like to speak to your daughter.”
“That’s okay with me but is it okay with her?”
“What do you mean?”
“She’s been mad at you all week.” Pa grinned. “I’ve been afraid for your life.”
“Oh. Don’t worry, I’ll just think positive and I’ll be alright.”
“Think positive huh?” A chuckle burst from Pa’s lips. “Well, go ahead. You’ve been here before, you know where the barn is.”
“Thanks pop.”
“And don’t call me pop!” Pa let out a gentle sigh as he settled back into the rocking chair before the fireplace. “What a day.” He continued muttering to himself as he fingered the bills left inside his wallet. “Well, at least I’ve got twenty-five dollars left, that should be enough...for Christmas dinner.
Knock. Knock. The urgent pounding echoed through the house. It’s going to be one of those days, is it?” Pa muttered as he headed toward the front of his humble abode.

“Merry Christmas!” He proclaimed as he swung open the door.

“What’s so merry about it?” Brian Driedger grumbled in response.

“What about?” Pa shivered as a sudden gust of wind ran over him.

“You know. Christmas.”

“Well, I’m sure you’re doing a merry business these days.”


“Thank you.”

“I mean, you still owe me twenty-five dollars.” Brian’s tone grew harsh.

“I’d appreciate payment.”

“Right now?”

“I would’ve preferred to have it yesterday but right now will do nicely.”

“Alright.” Pa hesitated for a moment and then took a step backward. “Come out of the cold while I count it out.”

“Just don’t make it too long.” Brian sniffed as he took in his poor surroundings.
“A little more money won’t make you any happier you know.” Pa felt the yawning hollow of despair open within him as he counted out all the money he had left.

“Peter, I know you mean well, but you and I live in very different worlds.”
“T’ve always thought of that as a good thing.”
“I run a profitable business.” Brian’s chest swelled as he mentioned this accomplishment. “You spend your days giving, without getting anything back.”

“What should I do? People are sick. They need a doctor!”

“Oh course. But there’s not much money in that, is there? I mean look at this house!”

“I know it doesn’t look like much but it keeps me warm.” Pa cut off another snide remark by handing over the money in question. “Here’s your twenty-five dollars.”

“It’s about time.” Brian counted the money with the practiced air of a tax-collector. Eventually, convinced that he had received everything he was owed, he placed the money into his wallet. “Are you going to the talent show tonight?”

“I don’t think so,” Pa sighed. “I’ve had a hard day.”

“You should think about it. You obviously need the money.”

“I don’t know how going to a talent show will help with that.”

“Ah. That’s where you’re wrong! Your daughter Adrienne could win the grand prize!”

“She could?” A faint spark of hope flashed in Pa’s eyes.

“She certainly could and the fee to enter is only 1.00.”

“Considering that you just took all the money I had left, I better pass. Thanks anyway.”

“Okay,” Brian strode toward the door. “If you change your mind. The competition is 7:30 at the Anglican Church.”

“I’ll keep that in mind. Good-bye now.” A sense of relief flooded over Pa as he shut out the sight of his old adversary.

“Somebody will be waiting at the door to take your money,” Brian interjected as he shoved the door open, smacking Pa in the chin.
“I have no doubt about that,” Pa muttered as he clenched his teeth against the pain. The door closed again and Brian was gone. Thankfully. Pa tossed his empty wallet to the chair before the fireplace.” Well, there goes Christmas dinner.” His eyes searched the empty room for an answer. “What am I supposed to do now?”

The sound of a ticking clock was all that greeted him.

The sound of mournful singing graced his ears. Larry crept past a stack of square bales in the entrance of the barn and then stopped. Adrienne was out there in the straw-covered space before him. The picture of a country girl. Pigtails, overalls, and an air of wholesome beauty. She was surrounded by a herd of cattle. Most of which were munching their cud as they listened to the song of their master.

_In the bleak midwinter_
_Frosty wind made moan,_
_Earth stood hard as iron,_
_Water like a stone;_  
_Snow had fallen,_  
_Snow on snow,_  
_In the bleak midwinter,_
"Wow!" Was the word that sprang from Larry’s lips.
"What are you doin here?" Adrienne snapped out of her creative zone.
"Didn’t I tell ya I ain’t interested?"
"Yes, but...I...."
"But ya can’t take a hint can ya?"
"No. It’s not that, it’s..."
"I haven’t changed my mind ya now."
"Can’t you stop talking for one minute?"
"Stop talkin’ I’m just gettin started..."
"Just listen for a minute. Relax." Larry took a breath. "This isn’t about me, it’s about your father."
"My father?" Adrienne wrinkled her nose. "What about ‘em?"
"I just saw him."
"He ain’t the same after mother died, that’s fer sure."
"He sure looked depressed."
"It ain’t right, he spends his days wanderin all over the countryside, mendin broken arms and sore bellies, and what does he get fer it?" Adrienne moved away from the circle of cows she had been serenading.
"Not enough. That’s for sure.” Larry stared into the sparkling blue eyes of the young woman before him. “That’s why I was thinking that maybe you should enter that talent show tonight.”
"Oh, I don’t know if I’m good enough for something like that."
"Come on. Think positive. With a voice like yours, you’re a shoo-in to win that competition.”
"Awe shucks." Adrienne blushed. "Ya really think that?"
"Of course. You’ll steal the show and win twenty-five dollars to boot."
"Twenty-five dollars?" Adrienne took a moment to ponder this. "We could really use the money."
"That’s the spirit!” Larry reached for her hand. “Let’s go talk to your father.”
"He doesn’t really want me ta have anythin to do with Brian Driedger and his crooked competitions.” Was all Adrienne could say as she was pulled from
CHAPTER 1

As the two young people made their way toward the small farmhouse, Pa was busy speaking into the mouthpiece of a telephone. “I understand. Times are tough. Yes, payment in the new year will be fine, thank you. Merry Christmas to you as well.” With that, the telephone receiver was returned to its place on the wooden box and the hook that had been made for it.

“What’s wrong?” Adrienne said as she surveyed her father’s expression of defeat.

“Oh, it’s nothing.” Pa forced a smile. “I was just talking to a patient, that’s all.”

“Still no money huh?” Larry chimed in.

“Not right now, but in the new year for sure. You know how it goes.”

“It might be a chicken,” Adrienne mused.

“It might be a basket of piglets,” Pa continued.

“It might be a friendly cow named Charger.”
“But the patient will pay somehow...”
“Someday,” Adrienne sighed. “It sure don’t help us much now though.”
“I guess I shouldn’t complain. It’s all in a day in the life of a country doctor. Still, I’m starting to think that Brian might be right.”
“About what?” Larry questioned.
“I’ve spent my life helping people and what have I got out of it?” Pa tugged at his handlebar mustache. “I can’t even afford to pay for the telephone the calls for help come in on.” He lowered his head in shame. “I can’t even afford a turkey for Christmas.”
“I could enter that talent show tonight.” Adrienne offered.
“No! I won’t allow it!”
“But she’s been practicing really hard, I’ve heard her.” Larry protested.
“Adrienne.” Pa felt a burst of pride as he surveyed his daughter. “I know you’ll be the best singer there but you know how Brian’s competitions are.”
“I can still try, can’t I?”
“You could try but how am I supposed to pay for it? I don’t even have 2.00 to my name.”
“I’ll pay for it!” Larry said with an air of confidence.
“I’m sure you will. With the money I just gave you.”
“Look at it this way, when Adrienne wins, you’ll get your money back!”
Pa seemed stumped by this onslaught of advice. On one side he had an overconfident young man. On the other side, he had a concerned daughter.
“I could sing mother’s favorite carol. She always told me I should share my talent.”
“So she did.” Pa bit his lip. “Well, I suppose you can give it a try.”
“Thank you!” Adrienne wrapped her father in a bear hug to show her appreciation.
“But don’t be surprised if you lose to one of Brian’s relatives.”
“There’s that negative thinking again. You’ve got to learn to think positive.” Larry lectured.
“Think positive huh?” Pa laughed. “Well, let’s how that works. I’ve got one more person to call. I’m positive they’ll pay their bill so we won’t need your help.”
“What?” It was Adrienne’s turn to be perplexed.

“Don’t look so skeptical. You heard Larry, we’ve got to think positive! One of these days my ship is going to come in!”

“That’s the right attitude pop.” Larry chirped as he gave Pa a high five.

“And don’t call me pop.” Pa reached for the telephone mouthpiece and then paused. “Adrienne. Why are you standing around? You better get ready if you plan to sing tonight.”

“Don’t worry Adrienne,” Larry assured. “I’ll get my brother and sister to help you.”

The look on Adrienne’s face betrayed the fact that she had little confidence in this plan. Still, she was committed. Or was she?

She looked like she was looking for a way of escape.
I saw three ships come sailing in,
On Christmas day, on Christmas day,
I saw three ships come sailing in,
On Christmas Day in the morning.
And what was in those ships all three?
On Christmas day, on Christmas day,
And what was in those ships all three?
On Christmas Day in the morning.

Jenny, a plain but spunky girl, was belting this out on key but not particularly well. She faltered for a moment but seemed to be about to battle on. However, a coughing fit possessed her slender body, dragging her tortured performance to a halt.

The audience clapped with an air of reserved politeness. At the side of the stage, Brian sat staring down at a small table covered in papers. As the applause faded, he looked up.

“Hmm. Very nice Jenny. It makes me proud to call you my niece. You picked a good song too...I Saw Three Ships...hm, it reminds me of all the sails we have at the store these days.” Brian took a moment to chuckle at his pun.

Meanwhile, Adrienne and Larry entered the room with two small children in tow. They loitered at the back and surveyed the crowd.

“We’re late,” Adrienne observed.

“Don’t worry.” Larry pointed to a nearby row of seats. “There’s still room back here.”

“Well, anyway, moving right along.” Brian adjusted his glasses as he squinted at the list before him. “Up next, we have, let’s see here...Adrienne Smith!”


“Don’t worry. I’ll take your place!” Larry proclaimed.

“You? Ha. Ya don’t know how ta sing.”

“Don’t worry. I’ll just think positive.”

“What? Ya got touched in the head?”

Larry turned his gaze to the two children at his feet. “You two stay with Adrienne until it’s time.”

“Adrienne, come up and take your spot please!” Brian’s harsh voice boomed through the cavernous room.

“Ahem. Pardon me. Adrienne isn’t quite ready yet. I’ll take her place!” Larry said as he strode toward the stage.

“Hold it right there son.” Brian stepped into Larry’s path. “You can’t just
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