

## **Jimmy Jolly's Christmas Wish**

Once upon a holiday season, there lived a boy named Jimmy Jolly.

Jimmy, like most of us, was normal in many ways, special in others, and extraordinary in a few. He loved his mother and father, his big sister, and, most of all, Christmas.

Wow, did he love Christmas!

Jimmy decorated his room year round in reds and greens, glittering tinsel, candy canes, wreaths, smiling snowmen, Santas of many types, and at the center of it all, the tree draped in lights and some very special ornaments, each exquisite and unique.

Jimmy would have decorated the whole house that way if his parents hadn't put their foot down. But that was alright. Jimmy was content in his Jolly domain, listening to "Deck the Halls" on repeat.

Jimmy was a sensitive boy. He liked things to be a certain way, so he could always know what to expect. The doctors said Jimmy was on the autism spectrum, words that Jimmy liked because they had many of the same letters as Christmas.

Jimmy's dad worked for the United States Postal Service. Jimmy was proud. He felt that was as close as someone could get to being a real life Santa Claus.

Jimmy knew Santa wasn't real life, of course. He knew all the history – from the folklore of Saint Nicholas to the Victorian era's Father Christmas and the modern image appearing in Thomas Nast cartoons. He knew about the Coke ads – he had the poster on his wall – but Jimmy would be sure to tell you that the story about Coca Cola inventing Santa was an urban legend, which is like a fairy tale, but with more brands.

He knew the secret histories of Santa too – the shamanic powers that the character embodied and kept alive in the modern world that was trying very hard to forget about magic. Much of this knowledge was distorted or lost altogether, but Jimmy had pieced together a few spells. He was a very intelligent boy, you see, and when it came to the things he cared about, he knew them inside and out.

One day, Jimmy's dad was late coming home from his postal route. Jimmy was worried. His dad always tucked him in just right. He tossed and turned, unable to sleep. Quietly Jimmy spoke the ancient mantra of yuletide slumber – the very one that in legend was used by Santa to close the eyes of would-be spies up past their bedtime. But it was no use. When his dad finally came home, Jimmy was still wide awake.

He listened to his dad's weary movements around the house as he removed winter layers and poured himself an eggnog.

"What happened?" Jimmy's mom asked. "You look a mess."

"Those teens. They knocked me down and stole my deliveries again."

"Oh honey! Why can't someone stop them?"

"You know this town. You know who Rudy's dad is."

Then they got quieter, so Jimmy couldn't hear them anymore.

Jimmy was comforted to hear his dad at home, but troubled too. As he finally drifted off to sleep, a strange wind blew through Jimmy's room, carrying scents of pine and peppermint and the far off tinkling of bells. The ornaments on his tree swayed gently, their cries almost sounding like carols. He knew what he had to do.

Some days later, Jimmy was walking home from school with his sister. A group of big kids rounded the corner ahead. It was the gang that called themselves the Ungulates, because they liked to grab whatever they wanted and "hoof it." At the front of the group was their leader, Rudy Red-Nose, named after the bright acne clustered at the middle of his face.

Some kids would be embarrassed by the name and try to scrub or medicate it away. Rudy, who knew a thing or two about branding himself, took it as a point of pride. He cultivated the pimples, pustules, and carbuncles of his nose like a careful gardener. He'd even built a custom nose guard to seal it off from any touch of soap and water during showers.

At the sight of Rudy and his gang, Jimmy's sister tried to escape the other way. She pulled on Jimmy's arm, but he slipped free. Jimmy wasn't afraid. He walked up to Rudy and stared him in the nose.

"I know you," Jimmy said.

"Do ya now?" Rudy snickered.

"You were mean to my dad."

"That don't narrow it down much. Which one's your dad?"

"He delivers the mail."

"Ohhhh," Rudy said. "So. Why are you telling me?"

"I'm telling you because you shouldn't do that. Do you know about the Christmas spirit?"

Rudy's smile grew bigger. "Oh yeah I love Christmas. Best time of year for a man of my profession." Rudy reached into his pocket and pulled out a handful of chocolate truffles, stuffing three into his mouth at once.

Jimmy didn't like the sound of Rudy's chewing. Jimmy didn't like what Rudy had said about Christmas. But Jimmy knew his Christmas lore, so he had a plan.

"Every child who is pure of heart gets one Christmas wish," Jimmy said. "I was saving mine, but I need it now."

Jimmy closed his eyes tight and wished. When he opened them again, Rudy was gone. In his place was a small porcelain reindeer with a glowing red nose. A wire, bent to form a hook, was threaded through a small hole at its head.

All around them thrummed the primordial sorcery of Christmas. The rest of the Ungulates scattered, terrified. Jimmy's sister sighed and shook her head, but she knew better than to interfere when he was channeling such power.

Jimmy picked up the figure and whispered in its ear.

“You’ll look perfect on my tree.”