

MAKERS ALL

a Christmas Story for family and friends

by
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There came a time when the candle of the world flickered.

There was a terrible sickness upon the land. It traveled upon the air; invisible, and uncaring where it went or who it hurt. It was a strange sickness: some it laid low, others it left lifeless, but most chilling were the ones who felt no ill at all, for they were the unwitting minions of the sly sickness. It needed them healthy, you see, so that they could carry it further and faster than any wind; messengers, heedless of what they carried to their fellows.

Thus, none could know for certain whether they were truly free of it.

The sensible thing to do was to shelter among one's own for a time, until such day as the illness had passed. One does not go wandering when there are wolves about, after all; one stays safely indoors, with the doors barred and the fires high. The wise and the simple alike saw the truth in this, and hid themselves away.

And this was, in its way, as bad as the sickness itself.

To be sure, an indolent few found it a luxurious time-- naught to do but eat and sleep!-- and these few were like bears, content to gorge and then hibernate without neither a care nor a thought for what might come next.

Most, however, found separateness and solitude troubling. Idleness gave way to boredom, and boredom to sorrow, and sorrow to a kind of madness. We are not meant to be idle, nor to be alone. We are meant to out in the world, shaping our wishes into deeds and our deeds into memories-- not just the memories that live in the mind, but memories as things *made*, things to be held, or tasted, or admired, and-- most of all-- things to be shared.

Sharing had, itself, become a memory, and when we slept, we cried, for we had never known such loneliness.

And far, far to the north, the Saint heard our cry.

Hidden far beneath the Arctic ice, at the center of the Saint's vast realm, the makers streamed from all directions into the great hall. They murmured nervously to themselves, uncertain of what was happening but filled with dread, for they knew that something huge was underway... and how could it possibly be good? It was only April! Their Master never awoke this early. Yet the call had come from Blaine himself, the Saint's right hand and the head of all making, commanding that they gather at once. No, this could not be good.

Gazing over the hall from a grand balcony, the Saint surveyed the thousands of nervous creatures below him, eyeing them with both affection and confidence. There had never been a task they could not meet, and he knew they would meet this one as well. “How much longer?” he murmured to Blaine, who stood attentively at his side.

“We’ve only a few dozen stragglers to go, sir,” the maker responded crisply. “Will you be addressing them directly, or would you like me to--”

“Me,” the Saint answered.

Blaine nodded as though nothing could be more normal than these circumstances. “Very good, sir.” But then, because circumstances were *not* normal, and because even Master Makers are not immune to nervousness, he asked “Should I assume that this gathering is related to the great illness among the mortals?”

“It is about the illness that comes from the illness,” replied the Saint.

Blaine mulled the vague answer for a moment and then began “I wonder, sir, if you--” but he was not permitted to finish his thought.

The Saint had lifted his arms, filling a space as vast as if he meant to embrace a mountain. His deep voice rolled through the hall, filling every ear: “GOOD MAKERS!”

The murmuring stopped instantly. A keen ear might have fancied it could hear the world spinning on its pin, so complete was their silence. The Saint knew that this stillness was powerful in its own right, with its own echoes, and he let it lay upon them for a moment before continuing in the slow, deliberate tempo known to all great orators:

“You have served me, and the mortals whom *I* serve, for as long as any of us can remember. I am proud in the knowledge that your devotion has been as miraculous as your abilities. You have made anything needed, anything asked, from wondrous toys to graceful garments to clever keepsakes. Now I must ask that this day we make, together, a thing never before made in these icy halls.”

He paused. Their hunger for work was a kind of invisible tremble, as though the very air itself was an eager hound, desperate to be loosed. He gave them his charge:

“My dearest friends: We must, this day, make hope.”

The Saint had continued explaining his thinking to the Makers, while Blaine stood to the side, cataloguing the things necessary for the Saint’s wish to become reality. They would all have to happen in just the right way, yet Blaine felt no doubts; he served the Saint of All Giving, and the gift the Saint envisioned would be the greatest thing they had ever made.

And its delicious genius was that the mortals would do all the real making.

“They are alone, and they are frightened,” the Saint had explained, “and with that fear comes its twin, despair. They have forgotten how simple acts may shape whole worlds. And so, our gift to them this year will not be things already created. Our gift will be the means for them to create for themselves-- the means, and the insight, and the skill, and the faith.”

The Saint’s plan consisted, at its heart, of the provision of only two things: materials, and, more delicately, the willingness to pick them up and work with them. “They need the stuff, and they need the spark,” he commented later to Blaine. The stuff wasn’t so great a problem; yes, it was challenging, but they had made and magicked things into countless homes over countless years, and this was no different. To be sure, a few of them fretted at the loss of things they felt might be misused or clumsily handled (a master gem-cutter might grumble at the surrender of all his diamonds, after all) but everything was nevertheless gathered, and sorted, and made ready.

The thing the Saint called “The Spark” seemed to Blaine to be the more problematic half of the scheme, but the Saint waved a hand as though it were no challenge at all. “Once I’ve returned from my deliveries, we’ll all meet again and I’ll lead us through that bit. Couldn’t be simpler.”

So it was that the Saint took to the skies that very night, carrying precious items to every corner of the world, the raw materials which in years past had been used for the creation of gifts beyond number. Now those things *were* the gifts: Fine silks and handsome stones, gleaming gems, supple skins and soft furs, copper pots cunningly nested, tools of every sort, wrought from the strongest materials (materials which seemed somehow to guide the hand of whoever held them.)

There were vivid paints and dyes, and rich blocks of fine-grained wood that seemed to have shapes bursting from within them. There were yarns and ropes of every thickness and color, needles of every size, with hoops and aids to the stitchers’ hands. Acres of canvas. Miles of paper, fine-pressed, well-milled, and so very thirsty for the ink of new stories, (which was itself bottled and capped and ready for use, with the distilled essence of “once upon a time,” dark and limitless.)

It was the stuff of making.

The Saint worked through the night and returned to the pole just before dawn of the next day, exhausted but not yet done. Again, Blaine ordered that his fellow makers meet in the great hall, and again he stood ready as the Saint addressed them:

“Now, my makers, I ask that we join hands.” He reached for Blaine, and the head maker marveled to feel his slim fingers in the grip of the massive, ancient hand.

The Saint continued: "Close your eyes, my friends, and clear your thoughts of the tumult and confusion of these past few hours." Blaine felt the tensions leave the room slowly, felt his own mind emptying, like the sky after a storm, clean and clear.

"Now, my makers, see your workbenches and desks and shops, and think back to that creation you knew was your finest, that work which you knew bore every last ounce of your most perfect skill, every gleam of craft, every facet of your knowledge. Think of it not with pride in your work, but with love for the thing itself, and for the mortal who would soon hold it.... and if you weep at the memory, let it be tears of joy at the wonder of the making." Blaine, eyes still closed, felt sure that a thousand cheeks gleamed at remembering; his own surely did.

"And now!" The Saint's voice went everywhere, filling every heart. "Let this image be the string of memory's bow, and pull it back, stretch it tight, as tight as you can pull, and make ready to let fly to all points south. Pull the memory tighter... tighter.... get ready.... LOOSE THE MAKING!"

A thousand voices cried out in rapture as they did just as the Saint exhorted, sending their most powerful thoughts of making out, into the air, flying to every corner of the world.

Every arrow found its mark.

Mortals awoke all over the world, suddenly possessed of strange desires which had been absent so long as to be forgotten. The desire to paint a portrait, or to whittle an owl, or to weave a wall hanging. The desire was like a kind of itch; fingers suddenly longed to hold a needle or a knife, a brush or a bobbin, a sharp chisel or a length of fine chain. And as they moved from their beds with sudden restlessness, their eyes widened to see what awaited them-- the exact tools and materials needed to make what they imagined.

Nor did it stop there, for when they had these items in hand, it was as though the gifts whispered to them, and pulled at their hands and fingers and minds in such a way as to guide them in their work.

Within moments, the whole world was bent in focused joy as they made things.

Simple things. Complex things. Candles and cookware and kites, jams and jellies and jewelry, model ships and miniature trains, poems and portraits. Those who lived alone felt themselves smiling absently as their creations took shape; large families hummed and murmured absently, glancing up at one another in the wonder of this feeling... for there is no feeling better than that of the world being shaped by your hand.

But no-- I speak falsely, for there is *one* feeling which is even better: The feeling of giving what you have made to another. And that very night, the mortals availed themselves of this feeling, too, for they crept about, all giggles and grins, leaving their newly made wonders for their friends and neighbors, on porches and stoops, boxed and beribboned. They were *all* the Saint now, you see? They were the makers and the Saint all in one, and what could be more wondrous a feeling than that?

And fear? Why, fear had been shown the door without so much as a goodbye or a backward glance. We had no time for fear.

We had things to do.