

December Story

1965

“Darcy, what would Christmas for a Swedish elf look like?” asked the eldest sister of the five Chase siblings. “Because of your Tomte Gus, I have his magical journal that I share with Dawn. It must be quite a life, watching over the animals and hiding from people.”

“Don’t you have anything on your huge bookshelf that could tell us about their Christmas?” Darcy replied, looking for their little sister Dawn behind the piles of schoolbook on the dining room table.

A voice came from behind the wall of colorful book spines, “I have read stories about how the Tomten are in the people Christmas stories, but not about what their own Christmas would be like. Darcy, isn’t writing a Christmas story one of your school assignments. You have been putting it off for a week now.”

Just then, the older brother walked by reaching for an apple from the centerpiece bowl of fruit. “I have a couple of books on Sweden,” he said. “‘Mormor’ gave them to me when I asked about our Swedish heritage. Maybe there is something in there.” He continued talking on about what else their grandmother had sent him.

Mom came in with a load of old Christmas cards she saved each year to cut out pictures for use in current Winter Decorations about the house. “When I was about your age, we had a distant cousin named Sven that came to visit and told us about a Tomte. It always sounded like such fun. Maybe you’ll find some pictures of the little elf in these.”

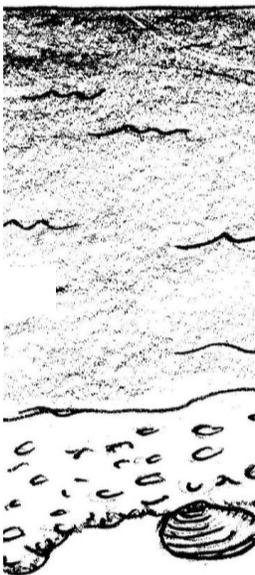
“Gee, thanks,” Darcy said dreading the butterflies in her stomach when she was required to write anything for school. She pulled out a blank piece of paper and stared at it, waiting for it to speak up and tell her what to write.

Dallan brought out his two books on Sweden and pointed to a bookmark sticking out from between the pages. “These pictures are of the ‘North Country’ where it gets extremely cold. And I think that is where your Tomte Gus is from. It has pictures of houses in the snow as well.” He put them down right on top of Darcy’s blank paper and disappeared into the kitchen.

“If everyone wants to be so helpful, why don’t they volunteer to write the story for me,” she mumbled to herself.

She moved the books and opened to the pictures Dallan had marked, just as her little brother Nickel zoomed by flying his toy reindeer. She smiled and to her relief, light gray words started to form on her lined white paper.

(see her story below)



Gus the Tomte's Christmas

by Darcy Ann Chase

The Swedish elf was dreaming of a mug of hot chocolate and marshmallows. There would be a warm fire burning in the fireplace of the farmhouse. You could see the family home painted red with white trim, from far away across the white snow of a cold winter. The North Country of Sweden was cold with a capital 'C'. His brown eyes teared up over his large round nose that started to drip. "Oh, what I wouldn't give to be there, nice and freezing," he thought while sweat dripped off his forehead. "It's one week before Christmas," he said forlorn. Gus stood hidden on a branch high in a tree on the beautiful green parkway on the top of the cliffs overlooking the Pacific Ocean.

"I will write in my journal about this terrible place," he said to himself. "There are no animals that need my care, no barnyard cats to play tricks with. If it weren't for Sven, I would be happily freezing at home." Gus was watching the boy with the blonde hair and blue eyes immersed in this strange new world.

"I hear you Gus," the boy of about ten said over his shoulder. "We are only here for a visit. Who knows, this might be the best Christmas ever."

The little man in the blue coat and black belt with the big square silver buckle, disappeared from the tree and was instantly sitting on the ground next to his friend's feet, with his white journal open.

'Once upon a time, there was a very handsome Tomte, with nothing to do...' he sniffed as he wrote. He used the tail of his long red knitted sock-hat to wipe his tears away.

He faded away as Sven's cousins: Susan and Mary, walked over with a frozen chocolate covered banana for the three of them. "This is a typical day in California," the older sister Susan said. "Fog in the morning, sun in the afternoon. The radio said it is 70 degrees."

"Don't forget the amazing sunsets," Mary added with her eyes looking up imagining the glorious sight."

Sven nodded. "This is all very different from Sweden," he said with a weak smile.

"There is a Christmas petting zoo over there. They have Santa's reindeer and a goat," She pointed to a place farther down the parkway. "But we don't have time for that today," Susan said walking back to the family car.

"I would really like to see them," Sven said longingly as he followed the girls. "Maybe tomorrow?"

"Tomorrow is Christmas Eve. We have an awful lot to do," Susan said. Seeing his disappointed face, she added, "We'll have to see if there is any time left."

Sven nodded, "It's ok. There are reindeer to see in Sweden when I get back. Thank you for today. It's been fun."

That night, when Sven and his cousins were fast asleep, the little Tomte appeared at the petting zoo. The caretaker was snoring loudly. So, the little man with the striped socks introduced himself to each of the reindeer and they instantly recognized a kindred soul. Gus walked over to the goat and said, "You too are far away from home." 'Jultomte' will need your help tomorrow night, for children are waiting for him in Sweden too.

Just then, there was a movement behind the short fence and the gate creaked open. The reindeer started to move to the opening, ushered by two big men in black from head to toe. Gus heard a truck pull away and drive by down the Palisades.

"Yulbock," Gus said using the goat's Swedish name and stroking his neck while he thought up a plan. "We need to get them back." The white goat nodded and offered the Tomte a ride. Gus climbed on to his back. Instantly the two were traveling through the air looking down on the coastal city looking for the gray truck.

"There," pointed Gus. "There. It is pulling into that warehouse." The goat smoothly flew down and landed near the corner of the building and Gus slide off and stood talking to the upset four-legged friend. "It's ok, we will get them back," he said calmly.

He left the goat prancing nervously, and invisibly entered the large empty building with only some hay bales and eight reindeer in the shadows of the back corner.

A big man's back was turned away and he was yelling into the phone. "I want the North Pole. Connect me to the North Pole. I have something very valuable that the man in the red suit is going to want to pay me for."

Gus appeared in the corner with restless reindeer smoothing their coats as he talked quietly to them. He told them Yulbock was just outside and would guide them back to the park where Santa would find them. He sent them one by one out the side door while the other man walked in from the back.

"The deeries are getting away," screamed the man and the one on the phone dropped the receiver while a women on the other end was still explaining that she could not place the call to the North Pole as it was their busiest time of year.

Just then, Gus chose to do what Tomte's do when animals are not treated well: cause mischief.

One hay bale flew through the air and tripped the new man as he started after the fleeing reindeer. The first bale was followed by another that landed on top of him, with three more piling on top, pinning the groaning man to the floor.

A whirlwind of hay surrounded the bigger man and the cord of the phone wrapped around his ankles causing him to come crashing down. Laying with his face on the floor the hay tickled his nose and he started to sneeze. As he tried to rise, he continued to

sneeze. Hay was all over his black clothes and sticking out his hair. There were even some pieces of hay that continued to dance in the air around his nose causing him to sneeze so hard he blew the phone off the desk which caused the cord around his ankles to jerk hard again.

Meanwhile, the team of eight escaped into the open yard finding their companion waiting impatiently to be off. With the goat in the lead, the reindeer flew two by two. You might already know their names and in what order they paired up. They arrived back in the park just as the sleeping caretaker snorted and woke himself up. He peered with his lantern around the pen counting as he went. “Yep, they are all there.” He started to make himself some coffee as the morning was beginning to break.

“All is well,” the Tomte said softly when he reappeared among the animals. He went over to the goat and whispered his thanks into his ear.

Just then, way off in the distance, Gus could hear the jingling of bells. The animals all looked up into the sky knowing their big evening would be here soon.

Gus returned to the house and was sitting with his legs, in striped socks, crossed in front of him, on the floor next Sven’s bed. He was busily writing in his journal when Sven leaned over the edge. “Good morning, Gus.” Not getting an immediate answer, the boy in the pajama bottoms with Christmas trees all over, rolled back on to the bed. “I know you may think this is a boring Christmas, but let’s make the most of it. Ok?” The concerned friend waited patiently.

“Will do,” Gus replied in his little voice. His tongue showed between his lips as he feverishly wrote this story in his journal.