

# Gus and a Present for Rowdy

by D.A. Chase

Illustrated by Ryan Francis Peirce



“My, My, My. What have we here?” Gus the Swedish elf, a tomte, known for watching over all animals was moving from one reindeer to the next, smoothing their coats as he passed each one.

A small whirlwind circled through the herd of reindeer in the valley at the edge of the North Pole village near the Tomte Towers and the Northwoods. It was cold and the air froze in puffs with each breath the animals took.

Rowdy, a short wide reindeer was lowering her head complete with antlers, and dove into the center of the peacefully grazing others. Not getting their attention, she scraped her front hoof in the snow, snorted, and ran full force into the middle of the group and in and out of them all before returning to the forest edge. She peeked at the group of her relatives from behind a tree to see if anyone looked her way, and dropped her head. No one even bothered to notice. Maybe it was because she wasn't important like her famous cousin with the red nose. He was up in the sky circling with the other 8 reindeer, gaining altitude with Santa and the sleigh for their Christmas Eve ride. Or maybe it was because she ...just wasn't important.

The nice thing about reindeer for a tomte is that they too are a bit miniature, standing at just 3 feet – 5 feet at their withers (shoulders), and Rowdy was a miniature of that proving just the right size for Gus. She hid as he approached her.

But truly, as you can guess, if she hid her front side behind a tree, her backside would stick out the other side. Her small leaf shaped pointy tail wagging up and down was certainly no help if she didn't want to call attention to herself.

Gus, a friend of all animals pulled the special treat of an apple from his pocket and offered it to the puffs of fog coming from behind one large Scots Pine with its flaky brown-red bark.

First, a big shiny black nose appeared sniffing the offering, then 'poof' and 'crunch', the apple was gone. The nose shyly appeared hoping to find another, but all it found was the red-gloved hand patiently waiting to be considered. Gus left his hand extended as he leaned around the tree seeking the eyes of the little round reindeer.

Rowdy backed up a step and then paused. Her curiosity outweighed her uncomfortable-with-anything-new feeling, and she blinked back at him over her slender muzzle.

"I see a lot of me in you small Rowdy. It is hard to find your place in the world when it all seems so settled and works fine without us, right?"

The herd had moved off and further down the valley, foraging through the light snow for some greens, and were out of earshot for the two new friends.

Rowdy pranced sideways, back and forth, her eyes ever on the strange little tomte. So, Gus just leaned his back against the tree with one leg bent at the knee, showing off his striped socks, the soul of his bright red boot resting on the trunk. He pulled the long tail end of his sock hat over one shoulder, then reached into his pocket and brought out his Christmas-card-looking snow globe. Standing it on his hand, the wary reindeer watched it pop into the round shape of a real snow globe, complete with snow fluttering down over the familiar courtyard with the huge Candy cane gracing the center.

When Gus turned the globe ever so slightly, Rowdy could see herself and Gus standing just where they were, at the edge of Northwoods. She came closer to admire all the detail of the scene inside the Snow Globe Communicator. And Gus let her take her own time, just spitting out a soft whistle as he stood admiring the surrounding valley.

Rowdy dropped her head down drawing her eyes ever closer to the magical scene inside when she huffed in surprise and took a big step back. She shook her head as if she couldn't believe what she had seen in the small glass ball.

Startled by her jump, Gus looked back into the communicator and was shocked. His brown eyes stretched even bigger than usual and his jaw with the pointy beard dropped the other way reaching the 2<sup>nd</sup> button of his bright blue coat. He started to lose his grip on the globe and caught it just in time before it reached the ground.

The sky was littered with brightly wrapped presents, tumbling in a long wide line over the very valley they stood at the edge of. High above the sleigh was being yanked this way and that with the straps of the harness flying loose like ribbons. Santa was hanging off the front edge trying to grasp the reins flitting all around the wheeler reindeer nearest to him.

Both Rowdy and Gus turned from the globe to look up... Rowdy tossed her head and the white dewlap hanging below her neck moved back and forth.

She looked pleadingly at Gus.

"I don't know how we'll do this, but we've got to help. We'll figure this out together," Gus said much more confidently than he felt.

Rowdy nodded up and down, antsy to do something.

"Bingo!" Gus said using the latest term he had heard while visiting the 'lower states'.  
"I've got it! Santa will catch the reins all right, but we can collect all of the presents before they

smash to the ground!” Gus grabbed the burlap sacks that he had thrown to the side after adding the tasty barley to the reindeer’s breakfast.

He reached for the first sack, took off one glove holding it just inside the opening, wrapped both around his mouth under his unusually large nose and started to blow. The glove expanded to the size of the sack. Then both grew as one until it was the size of Santa’s. Satisfied, Gus took off his other glove and did the same with the second bag. “May as well make it as easy as possible to gather those presents,” he said judging the number of parcels falling like snowflakes.

He dragged the huge sacks across the snow to the very nervous Rowdy. Dropping them at her feet so she could smell them and determine they were not a threat, he slowly reached her soft bristly neck and smoothed her coat.

“Want to do something thrilling?”

She looked at him through wide eyes and at first nodded excitedly, then backed away shaking her head violently, no!

“Ah, come on. They need us up there,” Gus said in his strange nasally voice. “Those packages have kids names on them. We’re the only ones who can help.”

Still not reaching her, he tried again. “Think of it like a game of catch. I’ll be on your back and we’ll have these two bags open ready to catch the falling presents. You can fly can’t you?”

She nodded vigorously.

“I did already know that. I watch the reindeer practice and you are the first one to arrive and the last one to leave. So now, let’s put all that practice to work.”

“And I, being a tomte, am very fast myself. Between the two of us we can gather all the presents and get them back to Santa’s sleigh before anything more can happen.”

Looking up, Gus said a little nervously, “And we’d better start, right now!”

The other reindeer saw the packages hurtling to the ground, and tried to take off, but one got knocked out of the sky by a free flying skateboard. He landed and crumpled nursing a bruised hind leg. And as quickly as the herd had started to fly, they chose to hide amongst the trees for fear of being hit.

Rowdy looked down to see the fallen reindeer and stuttered in the air for a moment. But with the encouraging tomte on her back, she looked up instead.

Instantly the two were working as a pair of ice skaters. One leaned out to catch a green box with a big red bow and dropped it into a burlap bag while the other moved them under the next falling object. As Gus got the hang of it, his arms whirled around like windmills, catching and tossing presents as Rowdy glided with super speed all over the skies.

Gus reached for the last big object, a huge globe of the world on a stand. But the ball with oceans and continents spun, forcing his hand to slide off, and his body followed...all the way off Rowdy’s back and into the empty space below.

“Ahhhh!” called the tomte.

Rowdy cocked her head as she heard the sound just as she had the falling globe in her sights.

She looked back and forth deciding which one she should save first.

Little did she know that a tomte, who is scared out of his wits, loses the ability to disappear, and is as solid as a human. And he was now tumbling over and over again sure to land with a splat on the hard lightly snow-covered ground.

Rowdy, with a decision made, dove for the falling tomte. The globe was passing just above her head and the tag hung down in front of her eyes for just a moment. “School for disabled children”,

Just then, Gus had an idea that pulled him somewhat closer to not being scared out of his wits. He could blow!

So, as the huge globe passed over his partner, Gus focused on the flying object and puffed once, and felt himself fail. He started to shake and turn another summersault. Then he blew again, harder this time and then again, and he didn’t tumble, just fell more like an arrow, straight down.

He blew again and watched the globe bounce with every puff in the air like it was playing hopscotch.

As his confidence in his result started to build, his fear started to fade. And he floated, stable for a minute in the air as he blew. He knew he couldn’t stay like this. He either had to land somewhere so he could keep blowing, or disappear to reappear somewhere solid, and that would surely mean the globe would crash into a million pieces.

Rowdy swung down under him just as he gave a last puff, with sweat dripping down his brow.

“That’s it! That-a-way Rowdy!” he said as they flew after the falling globe.

“I’ve almost got it,” he said grabbing for the stand this time so it wouldn’t slip and turn from his hands. “Success!” Gus held it high, like a huge trophy, before the weight of it brought his arm down and nestled the base on top of the pile of toys in the sack.

“Ho! Ho! Ho!” was heard billowing across the sky as the sleigh had finally righted itself and the reindeer, including Rudolf flew into sight. “Oh, another extraordinary reindeer...and a tomte,” said the big man in red.

“Rowdy the reindeer and Gus the tomte at your service,” Gus said grandly in his funny nasally voice.

“Thank you, my friends, for saving Christmas. Gus, is it? I expect I’ll be hearing more about you and your helpful ways. And Rowdy, we could use your enthusiasm and ‘quick to the call’ actions working with the team. We’ll talk when we get back.”

All nine of the reindeer nodded happily at the turn of events. That short, stout little reindeer had saved all of the moments of happiness that accompany every present Santa delivers.

Rowdy blushed until she turned red from head to toe, after all, she was Rudolf’s cousin. And quickly flew above the sleigh, keeping pace with the speeding reindeer.

Gus untied the two wondrous magical burlap sacks and lowered them carefully into the back of Santa’s sleigh, depositing all of the toys, except one. He grabbed the strong stand of the globe, putting it on Rowdy’s back in front of him.

“Santa,” Gus said in his odd high-pitched voice, “could Rowdy here, and I deliver this one? And maybe just this once the kids could meet us?”

“Ho! Yes! You are on to something my boy. Others helping others deliver joy and good cheer is a wonderful idea! I see it happening all around the world. It is the best to see the unexpected, magical offering of something special given anonymously. It is what I love best about my job and am happy to share the joy it brings to the giver as well as the receiver with anyone and everyone who wants to share in the love of the season! Off with you now, and well done!”

As Rowdy and Gus flew over the valley on their way to someplace called New York, they dipped and spiraled in the air for the pure delight of it. The reindeer below had come out to call their congrats to the pair. And the best was just ahead of them. Delivering the world to those who, just now, are homebound.

“See, how special each one of them is?” Gus said as he really noticed each child. “Just like us, a little odd, a little different, and yet have a talent we just had to find.”

Rowdy landed beautifully and Gus rang the doorbell. It was really early morning by then, and the headmaster opened it warily, and then threw it wide with a few children peeping out from behind his legs.

“Come around to the back where the windows open to the patio so all of the kids can see you,” the squatty man with a santa-hat bobbing on his head said waving his arm and leading the way. The narrow path led to a snow-filled courtyard.

“I’ve got this,” Gus said in his odd voice. He took a deep breath and blew the patio clear of snow and the clouds smiled and moved along, allowing for the sun to make its rays reach down and warm the space. The doors opened and all the children, from babies to teens, could see a real reindeer, and the Swedish tomte named Gus.

Rowdy slowly approached and allowed each child to reach out and touch her nose. For those still bedridden, she came to the glass and blinked her big eyes at them and was delighted to watch them giggle. One window had a boy in a bed that sat a little farther away and her breath caused the window to fog up. She shook her head thinking, then licked a big swipe across the pane. Rowdy’s big dark eyes came right up to the glass so she could see him, and he couldn’t help but see her. It brought an unexpected laugh and the whole group looked up and smiled. George never laughed or spoke to anyone, and yet it happened on this Christmas morning!



“Ho! Ho! Ho!” Gus said, then added, “I’ve always wanted to say that. We are just the delivery service for this special gift. The world is yours!” he said showing the globe on a stand as big as he was to all of the kids. Then Gus bowed a little and carefully handed the huge globe to the smiling Headmaster.

“Thank youuuu,” he said bowing to the weight of the great globe.

Gus grinned put the back of his hand to the side of his mouth whispering to the portly man, “There are small wheels on the bottom that will make it easier for you to move it around.”

The headmaster nodded gratefully.

“I see that Santa has already been here,” the tomte said looking into the main dining hall. Wonderful things from all over the world decorated the tree and a present for each child lay wrapped under it as well. “There are children in every town big and small,” he said as one child reached up and spun the globe. “Each one is unique and important, just like you. Never stop dreaming,” Gus said as he climbed on Rowdy’s back.

“If there is one thing I am learning, it’s that we are all like a puzzle piece in this great big world. We’re all necessary to make the picture beautiful and complete. Come on Rowdy, you’ve got a position to fill, and a place you have always belonged, they just didn’t know it yet!

She curtsied by lowering her front leg and then with two jumps, they were off to the North Pole once again.

“Wahoooooo! Merry Christmas!” Gus exclaimed as they drove out of sight.