

# Impossible Christmas Magic

by D.A. Chase

Illustrated by Ryan Francis Peirce



Sitting on the branch of a tree with his back up against the trunk, was Gus, a Swedish Elf, snoring and sputtering softly above the town square.

The little tomte had long end of his red sock hat wound around his neck like a muffler and a cat had curled up in his lap as Old Jonasson sat on the bench under that very tree, telling the children another tale about Swedish tomtar, just like Gus himself.

Suddenly, a voice boomed across the courtyard rattling against the brightly painted buildings.

“Enough OF THIS!” yelled the mayor of the small Swedish town.

“Who cares about Christmas anymore? You are taking up the street with all your colorful, and cluttered tables!”

The tall gentleman, if one could call him a gentleman at this very moment, was full of bluster on a crisp winter’s day.

Defiantly, he threw his gray colored muffler over the shoulder of his gray colored coat and thudded down the *stans*, or streets in the little Swedish town. He seemed to find the only line in the street full of mud rather than light snow, and it splattered around him with every step.

“Who sanctioned this affair anyway? Why wasn’t I notified?” He huffed down the street writing a list of the families who had a booth set up for this Christmas Street Fair.

He bumped a table and said, “Oops,” with little care in his eyes.

There, invisible in the tree above the wobbling stand, was Gus, wide awake and none too happy with the actions of Mayor Acke the human.

When the man in the neatly tailored suit reached Old Jonasson the storyteller, he stopped and all but quaked in his expensive shoes. With the story finished and the children scattering back to their parents, the gentle old Swede stood, matching the height of the self-important man and reached to pat his shoulder. “Ah Acke, How are you on this fine December day?”

“I’ve no time for stories old man,” he said sternly, and immediately looked up at the thin man with the long white beard, who still held a smile. A dog walked up to meet Acke, but he all but kicked the dog. “Away from me!”

“A rough year for you, Acke?”

“What would you know about rough as you sit and tell impossible tales all day long.” Feeling his oats, Acke stood straight and said, “They’re all lies, you know. All your stories, just lies. And I believed you!”

Just as Old Jonasson started to answer, Acke walked away knocking a table of beautiful snow globes, glass balls filled with floating snow and charming scenes. One landed with a ‘crack’ on the cobblestone street and others rolled away from the table. A man in traditional Swedish garb stopped to help the shopkeeper’s son right the table and gather the perfect snow globes of all shapes and sizes.

Acke glared at the townsfolk who offered their help, while ignoring him, the all-important Mayor. “How dare they dismiss me.” The man made a mean face at a cat that approached, then, with his big feet, stomped on by.

“No, not today,” Gus said under his breath petting the cat, then stood up scratching his head. “What is up with this human? I’ve seen this man before and never did he treat any animal this way.”

Mystified, Gus considered different options mentioned in *The Tomte’s Manual*, for doing mischief when one mistreats an animal. “No, no, not that one either,” he said flipping the pages in his head. He closed the book and the thought disappeared because Gus had a better idea.

The tomte took his place invisibly in front of and facing the tall man, and decided to walk backward and match every step the tall mayor took forward, ready to prevent him from doing any more damage.

Acke reached out for a brightly painted Dala horse carved in a traditional square sort of shape, ready to knock it too, off the table. Yet it didn’t fall.

He tried again with a wide stretch of his arms as if he were yawning, and the wooden horses of red or blue with their flowery painted saddles hardly wiggled.

Acke bent at the waist, so his long nose almost touched the wooden horses, flicked one with his long fingers, then again, harder this time. Still, the wooden carvings barely moved, ignoring him too as the townspeople had. Irritated, he moved on down the street noticing that he could not create a disturbance. “Hmmm.”

When the disgruntled man got to the petting zoo, he read the sign in front of the goat even though he knew what it said as he visited the big white goat at every annual Christmas fair. “Julbock” the Christmas goat.

The thin man leaned down and said, “You’re a fraud! You don’t help Santa. There is no Santa... there is no magic!” He opened the pen but the Christmas goat didn’t move. Again, the tall man looked around, slid into the small temporary yard bordered by wood fencing and pushed the goat on the rump hoping he would bolt through the opening. But old Jully contentedly stayed right where he was, shaking his big head at the lost man. Acke was even more disgruntled at not getting his way. Making sure no one saw him, he raised his hand and then, brought it down with a loud ‘whack’. The goat jumped and kicked back at the man, but purposely missed.

“Oh, a raging goat! Help! Save the children!” he yelled as he fell dramatically to the ground and quickly rolled a bit in the melted snow and dirt slush at the edge of the pen. Still, the goat stood, bleated a bit that sounded like a laugh and continued to chew on his straw.

Old Jonasson reached down, offering the man in the mud a hand up as others gathered to see the spectacle.

“Well, well, well,” was the high nasally voice that floated across the small yard. “Bothering the animals, are you?”

The man looked around, but at the sound of the voice of an invisible being, the knowing Swedes shook their head in disgust at the man with streaks of dirt.

“A tomte,” said one. “Surely that was said by a tomte,” said another. “Thank goodness for a tomte,” an old lady in a bright skirt said wiping off a snow globe.

“But I am the mayor of this town and... and I forbid it! I forbid any tomte...or any mention of a Swedish elf! It is a hoax, and I am here to protect the people... from the lie! That sound? Was just the wind. I forbid the mention of magic do you hear me?”

All the people had stopped still, like playing pieces on a checkerboard, and that was all Acke needed to get his swagger back.

Meanwhile, Gus was talking calmly with Julbock and offering him an apple. Before long, he noticed the people looking back over their shoulders and whispering things to each other, perhaps about the goat...and maybe even himself.

“Oh no, no, no. This will never do.” Gus said. The townspeople were packing up their brightly colored tables and calling it a day...at only 2 o'clock in the afternoon.

The clouds in the blue skies seemed to hurry by, matching the change of events below.

Acke herded the people away and out of the square until it was only the petting zoo, and Acke.

“Now, now, now,” said a voice from the tree above the man sitting on the bench all alone.

“What?” the Acke lifted his head from his hands and fear set in. “Go away ghost! I want nothing to do with you!”

“I am hardly a ghost, but I do watch over the animals. And for some reason, you are upset with them?”

“No, I don't care about them. I mean, I'm not mad at them. It's all so...disillusioning...” he said as if talking to himself. “I want to believe in all that stuff, about magic and Christmas and goodwill... but it's just not true.” He sat up and set his face to the wind. “And I am going to make sure no one else is disappointed, like me.”

“But,” Gus said now pacing invisibly before the man. “What's wrong with a little magic? Humans create it all the time.”

Acke looked around for the odd voice, but seeing nothing but the slowing clouds playing with rays of sunshine above, he went back to muttering. “There is no magic, dreams don't come true.”

“Well Sir, I happen to disagree. I watch all around. It is my job, you know. And I see people baking, then leaving it unannounced on a neighbor's doorstep. And kids, hiding a new pencil for a kid that doesn't have one to find. I see cats curling around the ankles of a person who feels lonely and a dog who puts his head on an old ladies' lap just to let her know that he's there and listening to her. Isn't all of that magic?”

Acke no longer was surprised by the voice, thinking he was talking to himself. “But I really wanted my mom to live, and she didn't.”

“Ah, but she does, in everything she taught you and every act of kindness you spread the very way she would have.”

“I don't feel much like spreading kindness, I feel wretched,” Acke said dropping his head back into his hands with his elbows on his skinny knees.

“Look around. Maybe all the decorations this year were to cheer you up and remind you of better times.” Gus said hoping to change Acke's mood just a little. “On other years, perhaps it

was the decorations your mom put up that brightened someone else's lousy year. You never know the real why. But you are in a unique place to notice the magic around you just now."

There was the sound of a small scuffle and a friendly squirrel ran down the tree and sat next to the man's knee, left a peanut then scurried away. Acke started to brush it off the bench, and Gus covered the nut with his own invisible hands that stopped it from moving. "Consider, this might be a gift."

The cat who had been sitting on a windowsill enjoying the return of the sun, stretched and came down to the square, sauntered under Gus' hand and then around the legs of Acke. The tall man automatically reached down and smoothed the cat's fur from head to toe as the calico started to purr.

"So magic is really everywhere?" Acke said softly looking around. A baker was taking a small something next door to the delight of the shopkeeper that greeted him. A small child hiding behind the shopkeeper's skirt filled a dish on the table with birdseed and more peanuts. Acke watched a friendly blue jay fly out of the tree for the treat. "My mom would have loved this."

A boy of about 10 years old came around the corner with a coffee can in his hands collecting donations for the soup kitchen that serves warm meals for anyone who needs them. He stopped short before approaching the Mayor. But Acke's mood had changed and he waved the boy over. Watching the smiles, three other kids joined the first laughing and talking as they approached the bench.

"What are you hoping to have for these people down on their luck, just now, and for the kids?" the Mayor asked as he dug into his pockets and brought out a handful of coins letting them clink into the can, then added some bills with a 'why not?' flair.

"We want to help Santa out," the tallest boy said.

"Yah, my mom's going to cook a Christmas dinner and we're hoping to find people with coats to donate, and toys under the tree for each kid," added a girl from under a sock hat that was too big for her. She turned back and nodded to the young lady watching over the children, who nodded back reassuringly.

"Tack så mycket, thanks so much!" they called each in turn as they scampered over to the shopkeeper.

"Now, wasn't that a bit of magic? You have added to all the others who have donated, to make something that didn't exist an hour ago, happen," Gus said patting his own round belly with a smile under his pointy white beard, though no one could see him still.

“I am beginning to see,” Acke said looking around at the wonders happening right in front of him that he had never noticed before.

Jon, the big man from the animal shelter was in town talking with Mrs. Alma Stromberg the librarian, and the local police officer over a steaming cup of coffee. “How are the kids doing, the ones who volunteered to help you out? the officer asked.

His deep voice carried across the square as the caretaker of animals answered. “Just needed a passion. They found friends to work with and a purpose. It is what we all look for,” Jon said and all nodded, including the Mayor.

“I might be the luckiest man in Sweden, overseeing these types of goodwill,” the Mayor said staying by the bench considering life through his new eyes. “People helping people, even if it were just a friendly ‘Hejdo’ in passing. I wonder what else has been going on that I hadn’t taken the time to notice.”

Acke stood up and walked back to the petting zoo and right up to the head of the large goat, who looked up at him, waiting. “I am sorry, so sorry. You didn’t deserve all of that...”

“That drama,” Gus added having followed the Mayor.

“Right...that drama,” Acke said agreeing with the voice he was sure was coming from inside of himself. Reaching for the forehead of the big white animal, he smiled and said, “If you say you work with Santa, who am I to say that doesn’t happen in some form.”

Julbock nodded his head and moved closer to Acke’s outstretched hand. And the earlier stress that the thin man held started to melt away.

“Spread the word. We can create magic here,” he said turning to the kids gathering around the zoo once again. “Impossible Christmas magic, in every magical, and often unnoticed way it appears!” He patted the children on their shoulders as he made his way back to the table, reassembled with a light blue cloth under exquisite snow globes.

“I’ll pay for the one I cracked and I will buy two more for gifts! he said waving to the shopkeeper who looked at him first skeptically, then with a welcoming smile.

“Ah,” Gus said to his friend Jully, stroking his thick neck. “Now and then, I gotta love my job. Humans are not so bad after all,” he said with a laughing snort. And the goat bleeted and nodded.

**“God Jul! Merry Christmas!”**