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FICTION

Santa's Virtue

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Santa, His Socks and the Invention of Mulled Wine

On Christmas Eve, after having delivered all the Christmas presents, Santa discovered an unexpected relic in his reindeer sleigh: a laurel leaf. He was very familiar with it as part of the laurel wreath he had won the year before¹ in ancient Rome after an astonishing chariot race victory. Santa was unaware that the Christmas Grinch had cast a spell on the laurel leaf. Sadly, time travel was a known side effect. As soon as Santa picked it up, the leaf started to glow red and green. A swirling mist surrounded the sleigh and the reindeer, and the North Pole disappeared with a deafening roar.

As the mist lifted, Santa found himself unexpectedly in ancient Rome, specifically in a neighborhood where virtue had long since vanished. A group of courtesans stared at him in surprise, sensing a good deal. *"Well, Sweetie, red robes and hats are your fetish. Let's see what's under your coat."* Santa finally figured out where he was and turned so red that his face and suit looked the same. Confused about the situation, he just stuttered his Christmas greeting, *"Ho... ho... ho... hope, peace and love."* The courtesans winked at him. *"Okay, love? You can have that, Sweetie. Come with us to the tavern!"*

¹<https://new.thehiddencircle.com/santas-wild-ride/>

Inside the tavern, chaos erupted almost immediately. Santa fell headfirst into a bowl of oranges when he tripped over the hem of his red robe, which the courtesans had already started to loosen. The oranges flew through the air, hit the antlers of a reindeer, that was escorting him into the warmth of the tavern, and plopped right into a jug of red wine standing on a table next to the fireplace. The innkeeper yelled, *"You idiot! Spare my red wine!"* The scared reindeer shook its head, knocking cinnamon sticks, which decorated the inn's interior, into the jug. *"Enough!"* yelled the innkeeper, shoving the table aside to thrash Santa properly. But the jug rolled down, picked up some sugar scattered on the table, and fell straight into the fireplace.

Surprisingly, the innkeeper stopped. He sniffed: the air smelled sweet, warm, and spicy. *"Um,"* he said, and then he put the warm red wine away from the fire. A merchant in the corner leaned forward, and took a sip. *"This would make an excellent winter drink,"* he said with satisfaction. *"I'll call it mulled wine and sell it throughout the known world."* He tossed a gold coin into Santa's hat, which was lying on the floor. *"My payment for this business idea. You can use it to pay for the damage here."*

No one saw the reindeer drink the rest of the hot, spiced wine.

While this was going on, the courtesans pampered Santa with caresses, but when hands started pulling at his underwear and socks, Santa remembered his duties. He grabbed his hat, coat, and socks, yelled for his very drunk reindeer, and escaped the tavern, with the only thought of flying away from this strange and immoral place.

The drunken reindeer's flight was ambitious: the sleigh pulled by the drunken reindeer lurched through the air in loops and spirals. Santa was tossed back and forth while trying to put on his socks, but they fell out of his hand. An orange that had strayed into the sleigh rolled into a sock, and - whoosh - it fell off the sleigh. A boy caught it below, on the Roman Forum, and looked into the sock: ... an orange inside. He raised his head, seeing the figure in red curving through the sky in wild maneuvers. He mumbled, *"Well, if I leave empty socks out, maybe they'll be filled."* And every year at this time since then, kids hang up an empty sock in the hopes that an oddly dressed man in red will fly by again and fill it.

Santa himself had other problems. He lost control completely and crashed his sleigh into the Colosseum. Rocks splintered, dust swirled. When he saw the half-destroyed Colosseum, he was shocked. *"Oh my God, I hope the Romans get that fixed again. Now it's time to get out of here!"*

Upon his return to the North Pole after a turbulent sky ride through space and time, Santa's wife awaited him with a knowing look, her senses immediately picking up the scent of alcohol. *"Was the nonsense from last year not enough for you? And why aren't you wearing socks?"* she asked in a cool voice. Santa hit his hat-covered head in frustration when he realized the Grinch had tricked him again and felt pain. *"Ouch! What's that?"* He examined his hat and found the beautiful gold coin. He smiled. *"For you, my love. A present for Christmas".* She melted right away. *"Hey Santa! Oh my god, it's so beautiful!"* They had the most peaceful Christmas in years, not least because Santa also recalled some refined lessons from the courtesans in ancient Rome.