

## The Gift

Beyond the treacherous ice of the North Pole was a small area of forest. Hardly inhabitable, there was more of a blanket of snow than there was vegetation. However only one person was able to call that forest home, and that was the lumberjack.

He was a relatively ordinary man who preferred to keep to himself. But it was easy to say that at first impression, the lumberjack was menacing in appearance. He was a rugged man with a permanent scowl. With an ax in hand, he was always ready to start the day's work. His everyday routine had remained the same ever since he settled in the forest. The mornings and afternoons started with a venture out into the woods. However, one day he came across something new. A deer with an injured leg was lying in the snow shivering. He looked down at the animal in pity and reached down to pick him up with care. With a spare blanket, he carried the deer back to the dim yellow lights that were his cabin.

He was very hospitable to the animal as the first thing he did he bandage his injuries. Though whenever there was a time, the deer would constantly try to get up and walk towards the snow before falling back down again. The lumberjack sighed as he watched. *Was it a family he missed?* He could only wonder. But it was obvious to him that wherever the animal had come from, he wanted to return to as soon as possible.

Weeks passed since his first meeting with the deer. The snowfall that occupied the forest seemed to increase as the days neared Christmas. But time was anything but relative for the lumberjack, for he would barely make the effort to keep track of the days on a calendar, nor did he have the company to spend the holidays with. Was he lonely? Yes. Even on the night of

Christmas Eve, he sat alone on the porch content with this fact. But the deer was sleeping a foot away from the lumberjack.

Looking in his direction, he reached and pulled a blanket over the animal slightly before retreating back to the steps of the porch. A scar had healed over where the deer's injury was. It was a sure sign that he will leave to wherever he came from soon. The lumberjack smiled in relief. "You should be good to go in a day or so," he murmured before lifting a mug of hot cocoa to his mouth. Gazing upward now, the fluorescent green and blue hues of the northern lights painted the sky in exotic color— A rare but beloved sight for the lonely man. He always had the best view from his cabin porch.

The lumberjack enjoyed the sight for a good moment before being disturbed by something new in the sky; a strange beacon coming from beyond the lights, moving too fast to be a plane and too bright to be a star. He gasped in shock as the beacon shone down on the icy tundra before him. Where it landed, an old man dressed in red and white stood before what looked to be a sled. The appearance was familiar from the wonderous stories those many years ago; it was Santa Claus himself.

The deer's ear twitched. Looking towards the snow, the animal suddenly lifted himself up from the porch and flew towards the sled, greeting the man with great enthusiasm. The lumberjack staggered forward. He could only be amazed at this as he watched from the sidelines.

"Dasher!" Santa cried in relief and extended his arms to hug the deer. It was obvious to him that the deer belonged to Santa. The lumberjack awkwardly looked over and gave a smile, tipping his hat. Santa Claus then turned in his direction.

"Thank you, I must give you a gift!" He called.

"A g-gift? But I'm no kid anymore sir'," the lumberjack stuttered, dumbfounded.

“Nonsense my friend! You have given me a great gift, and that was returning one of my reindeer to me safe and sound,” Santa Claus shook his head and let out a hearty laugh. He then turned on one foot and gestured his hand to an empty seat in the sled. “How about a trip to the North Pole?”

He rose from his seat and boarded as Dasher the deer finally took his place alongside his other friends in front of the sled. With a quick lash of the reins, the lumberjack and his new friends rode off into the night sky.