

Hubert Gets His Christmas Wish

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Stave I: Big Voices Between The Cotton Balls

Christmas Eve came upon the neighborhood like a murmur. The starless night wrapped the sleepy houses in a layer of downy snow. Hubert, a bright, round faced four year old, watched from the window as the flakes drifted past in a pianissimo flurry. Cotton balls, he called them. There were a lot of cotton balls tonight, thought Hubert as he wrapped his short, pudgy fingers around the balusters of the staircase. Mommy and Daddy were using their 'Big Voices'. They seemed to be using their Big Voices an awful lot these days. Hubert reckoned that since Mommy and Daddy were bigger than he was they needed Big Voices. Big Voices always brought tears to Mommy and grumpy stomping from Daddy.

If that's what it means to be a grown up, I don't think I want that, thought Hubert. Sure enough, Hubert heard the same grumpy stomping from Daddy as he left the room while Mommy let out stifled cries from behind her hands. The cotton balls fell silently outside the window. Hubert quietly made his way to bed.

"How can anyone be sad tonight?" Hubert asked his favorite stuffed bear, his best friend in the whole wide world, Mr. Fuzzywomps. "It's Christmas Eve! Grownups don't know what they are missing!" Mr. Fuzzywomps tipped over, seemingly in agreement with Hubert's statement.

"I don't get it. Teacher helped me make them a card. Did they not like it? I got Daddy his favorite soda. You remember, the one in the silver can that says 'brewed fresh?'" Mr. Fuzzywomps looked up at Hubert from his spot on the floor.

Hubert racked his brain, searching for where he went wrong in his Christmas spirit. He was convinced that when Mommy and Daddy were using their Big Voices, it was because of him. Why else would his name come up so much in their conversations? Hubert, though young and innocent, was beginning to notice a pattern that led up to the Big Voices. Usually Mommy would sit him down at the kitchen table opposite Mr. Fuzzywomps and demand he finish his homework. Hubert would oblige and turn over his work to her to check it out which would lead to her becoming frustrated. Hubert would sit quietly while Mommy lectured him about taking his schoolwork more seriously, about how at his age he should be preparing for the future, and about Mr. Fuzzywomps.

After her tirade, Mommy would send Hubert to his room. Every night at 6:30 on the dot, Daddy would come home. Mommy would talk to Daddy about Hubert's homework, his lack of preparation for his future, and Mr. Fuzzywomps. More often they had been coming back to Mr. Fuzzywomps. What, they asked themselves, would a boy at the age of four still need with a stuffed animal? Maybe that's why the boy wasn't taking his schoolwork seriously. Maybe the bear was keeping him from acting like an adult. Mommy and Daddy would often come to the conclusion: maybe the bear should go.

So, one might say he had a vested interest in Mommy and Daddy's holiday happiness. He felt that their understanding and appreciation of the wonderful day of Christmas was purely and solely his responsibility, and by gum he wasn't going to let them down. He swept up Mr. Fuzzywomps from the floor, sat down next to him at the plastic desk that Daddy had set up in the corner, found his crayons and paper, and got to work.

"We need a plan," said Hubert to Mr. Fuzzywomps. "A plan to save Christmas. What should we call it?" Hubert scratched his chin thoughtfully with the end of his green crayon.

“I know! We’ll call it ‘Hubert and Fuzzywomps Plan to Save Christmas from Extinction!’ That should do nicely!” Mr. Fuzzywomps’ plastic eyes gleamed in wonder at his owner.

Hubert set his crayon to the paper, struggling to write the words. Though he truly was a bright boy and had a deep love of reading and writing, Mommy and Daddy seemed to not be as impressed with his abilities. Every time they would tell him to write something for them he would do it to the best of his ability, beaming with pride. However, when Mommy and Daddy looked over his work, they never seemed to be as proud as him. *They keep bringing up the ‘D’ word, that darn ‘D’ word!* Hubert had heard Mommy and Daddy talk about it many times, but he still had no idea what it meant. Hubert sat brainstorming ideas with the help of Mr. Fuzzywomps, though truth be told Mr. Fuzzywomps was hardly carrying his weight.

“Hmm, this is taking longer than I thought,” said Hubert. “We don’t seem to be getting anywhere. If only we had some help.” Mr. Fuzzywomps fell sideways out of the chair. “I mean professional help.” Hubert looked outside at the cotton balls falling through the black night sky. It wouldn’t be long now that Santa would make his way to the house. Maybe Hubert would get that new picture book, the one about the moon and the room. *Santa’s pretty great, thought Hubert. When he uses Big Voices, it’s different. He’s so happy all the time.*

A bolt of inspiration struck! Hubert leapt to his feet, sending Mr. Fuzzywomps flying across the room.

“Santa! I’ll write to Santa! It’s so simple, Mr. Fuzzywomps! Mommy and Daddy always laugh when they see Santa on the TV. Whenever Daddy sees Santa ringing the bell at the grocery store he always puts his garbage in the kettle next to him, because we all

know Santa hates litterbugs. We can write to him and Mommy and Daddy will be happy, and they'll leave you alone and let us stay together!" He looked outside at the steady stream of cotton balls. A look of worry reflected back at him from his window. "But is there enough time to get a letter to the North Pole?"

Hubert anxiously tapped his chin. He nodded sternly, sat himself at his desk, and started frantically writing to Santa. He poured his heart and soul into the letter, telling Santa about how he was the model son.

'Teacher helped me make Mommy and Daddy a card, but it was still my idea,' he wrote. 'I get Daddy his soda every night, the one in the silver can...' he continued. *'All I want'*, Hubert concluded in his letter, *'is for Mommy and Daddy to stop fighting. I don't need the book about the moon anymore, I just want them to be happy.'* He scrutinized his handwriting, checked his spelling twice, and sat back. A dreaded thought sent him into a cold sweat.

The 'D' word. What if Santa doesn't like his letter because of the 'D' word, whatever that was? Mr. Fuzzywomps gave him an encouraging look.

"Get busy livin' or get busy dyin'", said Hubert as he folded the letter. He took extra care to write Santa's name big and bold on the front. He opened his window, caught a few of the cotton balls in his hand, and threw his letter to the wind. It sailed into the starless night and faded into the darkness. Magic, he was sure, would deliver the letter safely and soundly to Santa's lap while he was en route. Besides, if miracles really did happen, tonight would be the night they were most likely to occur. He shut the window, fed Mr. Fuzzywomps a cotton ball, and tucked himself into bed.

Stave II: A Midnight Visitor

Sugarplums did indeed dance in Hubert's head as he slumbered. Mr. Fuzzywomps kept his nightly vigil, as was his duty. The cotton balls had ceased their relentless flurry and the silver moon cast its light over the land, filtering through the frosted windowpanes and gently kissing Hubert. His little face, so serene in his dream, played out the occurrences. His eyes darted back and forth under their lids as he dreamed of skiing with Mr. Fuzzywomps. He could feel the rush of air on his cheeks, hear the sound of the birds in the trees, and he could smell the snow.

This snow smells funny, he thought in his dream. *It smells like when Mommy forgets to turn off the fireplace.* It was so pungent that his little nose crinkled in disgust. His eyes peeked open to the darkened room. Hubert turned to Mr. Fuzzywomps who was watching the corner of the room as usual. He took a deep sniff and to his surprise he could still smell the terrible smell.

"Mr. Fuzzywomps, was that you?" asked Hubert accusatorily. "You have to say 'excuse me' when you do that!" Mr. Fuzzywomps stared at the corner, insulted by Hubert's insinuation. Hubert rolled over to check his window for the telltale sign of Santa's impending visit. The frost was thick, obscuring the winter landscape. He rubbed his palm against the window to get a better view. The bad smell seemed to be getting worse.

That's when it happened.

A red flickering light reflected in the window. The frost around the edges melted and streamed into a puddle at the base of his window. The moonlight was replaced by a blinding red light coming from the corner where Hubert's desk sat. His crayons melted and

ran onto the carpet. Hubert clutched Mr. Fuzzywomps to his chest, shocked at what he was seeing.

Out of the blinding red light walked a towering, hulking figure. Its head, adorned with two black horns, scraped the ceiling and left two track marks in their wake. The carpet seemed to melt around the smoking sharp hooves the creature balanced on. Its wide frame blocked the door and the window, leaving Hubert and Mr. Fuzzywomps trapped and at the mercy of the beast. Hubert's eyes adjusted and he was able to see the creature's face for the first time. It was that of a man, bearded, with black eyes. He had a smokey grimace on his face.

Hubert stood up on the end of his bed. He left Mr. Fuzzywomps behind at the pillow and observed the intruder. "I don't mean to be rude sir, but shouldn't you knock before you go into someone's room?" asked Hubert in a steady voice.

The giant's eyes widened. "You sent for me," he said in a low grumble. His hulking claws held out a letter with Hubert's handwriting on it. Hubert inspected it.

"This was for Santa. Did you steal this from him?" asked Hubert, now pulling up his pajama pants in indignation.

"Little one, you are mistaken," said the giant. "You addressed it to me. To Satan." He poked at the name on the letter, which indeed did read 'Satan'. Hubert felt his stomach drop. A cold sweat broke out over his body. He felt so silly and ashamed.

"Oh no," he said, collapsing to the bed. "Oh no, that means that Santa didn't get my letter! That means that Christmas is ruined!"

Satan shifted uncomfortably on the spot. "You mean...you didn't send for me?" he asked, sounding a little hurt.

“No sir,” said Hubert, his voice starting to break. “I think it must have been a trick of the ‘D’ word again. Mommy and Daddy have been trying to get me to fix my writing.”

“The ‘D’ word?” asked Satan as he scratched his dark beard. “You mean ‘dyslexia?’”

“I think so,” said Hubert. “Yeah that’s it! Dyslexia! Mommy and Daddy say that I’ll never be able to go to college because of that and that’s why Daddy gets to spend all his money on his soda.”

“Ahh,” said Satan. “That is...really...um...do you mind if I sit down for a bit? It’s kind of been a rough night for me.” Hubert nodded and Satan sat at the plastic table. “Daddy sounds like a wonderful person. I’d love to meet him.”

“Well, sometimes he is,” said Hubert. “Like when he lets me and Mr. Fuzzywomps help him clean the lawnmower blades in the summertime. They get so shiny after we wipe them down. Or, when Mommy visits her friend Frank in the city. She let’s me and Mr. Fuzzywomps listen to whatever we want to in the car while she and Frank help each other exercise. At least, I think that’s what they do in the house. She’s always sweaty and out of breath when she gets back to the car.”

Satan crossed his trunk-like legs. “Mommy and Daddy seem like quite the pair. Who may I ask is Mr. Fuzzywomps?”

“Oh, that’s right! I haven’t introduced you.” Hubert brought Mr. Fuzzywomps over to Satan and presented his paw. “Mr. Fuzzywomps, may I present to you Mr. Satan.” Satan grabbed Mr. Fuzzywomps’ paw and shook. His paw was instantly crushed and turned to soot under Satan’s enormous claws. A smoking stump was all that remained in his wake.

“Um, I can fix that,” said Satan frantically. He waved his hand and a shimmering set of gnarled black claws replaced the smoking stump of Mr. Fuzzywomps paw. Satan grinned sheepishly and gave it back to Hubert.

“Thanks,” said Hubert as he tucked Mr. Fuzzywomps back into bed. “Him and me have been friends since forever. There aren’t many kids in the neighborhood to play with, so it’s just him and me. Pretty soon...Mommy and Daddy will take him away too.” He turned back to Satan, who was admiring Hubert’s room. “I’m sorry to have bothered you, Mr. Satan. I’m sure you must be busy. You don’t have to stay if you don’t want to.”

“Oh, no,” started Satan. “I...I was...I was kind of looking forward to being able to visit someone.” He hung his head low, his eyes watering. “I was really glad when I received that letter.”

“You were?” asked Hubert astonished.

“Truth be told, I’m fairly lonely this time of year. Too much ‘peace on Earth and good will towards men’ makes for a slow season in Hell. Not much happens. I keep telling myself that this year will be the one where I start writing my book, but I never get around to it. I just spend my days wondering if anyone cares anymore.”

Hubert nodded. “I feel that way sometimes when Mommy and Daddy use their Big Voices.” He looked up at Satan and smiled. “You don’t like Big Voices either, do you?”

“No,” said Satan. “God uses Big Voices sometimes and it scares me real bad.” Hubert patted Satan’s leg consolingly.

“So,” continued Satan, “I felt kind of honored that someone remembered me. It was nice. Boy, it’s been a while since I felt that. That’s why I want to help you, if...” Satan looked away sheepishly.

“Yes?” prodded Hubert.

“...If you have use for a big ol’ knucklehead like me.”

Hubert stood at attention on the edge of his bed and nodded officially. “I’m sure we can figure something out!”

“Wonderful!” Satan beamed at the little boy as a single tear of blood ran down his cheek. “What can I do for you? What can I give you? Infinite power to smite your enemies? Control over the dead? Maybe you’d like to start your own cult?” Satan shifted in his seat. “Or I could get rid of your dyslexia if you like.”

“The ‘D’ word?” chuckled Hubert. “Why, Mr. Satan, if it wasn’t for the ‘D’ word you and I would have never met and become such good friends!”

“I guess you’re right!” chuckled Satan. “Dyslexia saved the both of us from a pretty miserable Christmas. Well, anything else you want my boy, merely name it and it shall be yours.”

“Do I have to sell you my soul?” asked Hubert innocently. “Isn’t that what they always do in the movies?”

Satan let out a booming laugh, rattling the windows. “My boy, you are too young to make a bargain like that! Besides, what would I want with the soul of a four year-old? Consider this is a gift!”

Hubert stroked his hairless chin and thought for a moment. Many kids in his position would be tempted to ask for the moon and be twice as greedy to take it, if for no other purpose than to rub it in others faces. Boys in his class told stories about throwing temper tantrums in order to receive mountains of gifts from their parents, offerings to appease the volcanic fury of their grade-school masters. Hubert was different, though. He

was quite content with his crayons and his books, even if he did ask Santa for the book about the moon and the room. No, Hubert thought about something special, something that Mommy and Daddy and even *Santa* couldn't give him.

Security.

"Well Mr. Satan, I was thinking just now and I don't know about most other people, but I think that life can get pretty scary sometimes."

"It's wonderful, isn't it?" mused Satan.

"And I think that it's easier to get through life if you have someone there to help you through. That's why I have Mr. Fuzzywomps." Hubert looked over to Mr. Fuzzywomps who had fallen over onto his replacement claw.

"And even though Mommy and Daddy don't really show it," continued Hubert, "I think that they are each others best friends too. So, I think what I want most is what I wrote to Santa for. I want Mommy and Daddy to stop fighting and be happy."

"Such a selfless child," said Satan as he pulled himself up to his full height, poking two new holes in the ceiling with his horns. His hooves cut through the carpet, leaving little patches of singed fibers. "I don't understand it, but it shall be done. A gift to a friend for making me feel wanted and needed on this most dreadful of holidays." Satan raised an eyebrow. "Is that all? Are you sure there is nothing else that I can do for you?"

"Well," started Hubert sheepishly, "if you could make it so Mommy and Daddy don't take away Mr. Fuzzywomps, that would be ok too. He's just about the only friend I have in this world." Hubert stopped and smiled at Satan. "Well, him and you."

Satan wiped another tear of blood from his eye and smiled deeply. "All this shall be done. Everything you ask for."

Hubert smiled. He reached out his hand to Satan. Satan smiled back and grasped his tiny hand. The room filled again with brilliant red light as the two of them shook and Hubert slipped into a peaceful slumber, Mr. Fuzzywomps cuddling curiously at his side.

Stave III: A Gift To Some...

The gentle sunlight enveloped the bare winter landscape outside Hubert's window. Cotton balls had littered the ground, creating a sea of undisturbed shimmering white. Christmas had come at last. Hubert looked over the serene scene with wonder and delight.

"Isn't it beautiful, Mr. Fuzzywomps?" Hubert turned to the spot where Mr. Fuzzywomps had lain in the night, but did not see him. "Mr. Fuzzywomps? Where did you go?" He scanned the room, but could not find his fuzzy friend. A dreadful thought pierced his serenity. *Did Mommy and Daddy take him from me?* Panic rose in Hubert's chest. He leapt out of bed and rushed down the stairs, skipping every other step, terror growing with each leap and bound.

A flurry of thoughts created a blizzard of misery inside him. *Suppose Mommy and Daddy have already gotten rid of Mr. Fuzzywomps. Suppose everything that happened last night was just a dream. Suppose Christmas goes down as the day the world turned against me.* Hubert landed in the living room. A cackling Yule log filled the fireplace with dancing flames.

"Mommy! Daddy!" cried Hubert. "Where is he? What did you do to my friend?" Hubert raced into the kitchen and threw open the garbage can lid. Aside from Daddy's special soda cans that said 'fresh brewed' on them, it was empty. He flew outside to the big garbage cans. Again, no success, only Daddy's soda cans.

"Where is he?" cried Hubert as he ran back inside the house. "Where is Mr. Fuzzywomps?"

Hubert could hear the sounds of angry footsteps making their way across the floor upstairs. The creaks and groans grew louder and more distinct as the pair of rudely woken parents stomped their way down the stairs to see what the clatter was. A grizzled man and a flustered woman greeted Hubert in the living room.

“What the hell is going on in here?” grumbled Daddy, wiping the slobber from a restless sleep off his stubbly chin. He turned to Mommy, who was attempting to pull her badly permed hair out of her face. “Brewski. Now,” he scowled at her.

“What’s the boy saying?” asked Mommy.

“Where did you put Mr. Fuzzywomps?” pleaded Hubert. “I can’t find him!” Daddy scoffed and Mommy shook her head.

“How should I know? He’s your bear,” said Mommy.

“Yes! He’s *my* bear! You can’t take him away from me!” cried Hubert.

“Enough!” boomed Daddy, using his Big Voice. “Look behind you.” Hubert spun around and wiped the tears out of his eyes. Sitting placidly on the floor, looking up at the shoddily decorated Christmas tree was Mr. Fuzzywomps. Hubert rushed over and swept him up into a frantic hug, complete with affectionate kisses and a sigh of relief.

“You must have left him here when you snuck down to see your presents,” said Mommy accusatorily. Hubert scanned the tree but did not see any presents.

“Yeah, it’s been a lean year,” said Daddy as he cracked open a ‘fresh brewed’ soda. Hubert didn’t care. He had his friend back which was all that mattered.

“Ugh,” Mommy scoffed, “I don’t know about this attachment you have to this bear. This isn’t right.” Hubert looked up at Mommy and scowled. “It’s time you grew up.” She bent down and wrapped her twisted fingers around the neck of Mr. Fuzzywomps.

“No, no! Don’t take him, Mommy!” Hubert sobbed as he clutched his beloved bear with all his might. Mommy wrenched it out of his grasp and held it aloft.

“Look at this thing! It’s filthy!” announced Mommy, holding Mr. Fuzzywomps at arms length. “It looks like it’s been covered in soot. And what did you do to his paw?”

Hubert looked to Mr. Fuzzywomps poor paw being shamefully displayed by Mommy. Not his paw, his *claw*. *Mr. Fuzzywomps has a claw? Maybe last night wasn’t a dream.*

Dream or not, what happened next was very real. Mommy stalked over to the fire, Mr. Fuzzywomps captive in her arms. Daddy propped his feet on the chipped coffee table, sipping his soda. Hubert stood helpless in the center of the room, pleading with both grownups to release his friend.

It did not work.

With a fatal swoop, Mommy cast Mr. Fuzzywomps into the flames of the Yule log that cackled gleefully in the fireplace.

“NO!” cried Hubert as he watched the flames wrap themselves around his stoic, silent, once cuddly friend.

He collapsed onto the floor into a puddle of tears. His world had come to an end. *This, he thought, is what it must be like to be an adult. To have all that was precious and good in life taken away from you in the roar of Big Voices.*

And there was laughing! *What sickness, thought Hubert, lived in Mommy and Daddy that they should laugh at this scene?* Only it wasn’t coming from Mommy and Daddy.

It was coming from the fireplace.

All three of them turned slowly to the cackling Yule log, which was *actually* cackling. Mommy and Daddy screamed in horror. Hubert merely tilted his head in curiosity. The flaming remains of Mr. Fuzzywomps were *moving*!

“Mr. Fuzzywomps, are you ok?” asked Hubert as he rushed over to remove the grate. Mr. Fuzzywomps leapt gleefully off of the fire. He giggled as the flames tickled his stubby little tail. With a quick flick of his wrist he extinguished the flames covering his body. His fur, his plastic eyes, even his leather nose were all still in tact, albeit a little smokey.

Hubert lifted Mr. Fuzzywomps into his arms and gave him a big hug. Tears poured down his face and onto the fur of his friend.

“It’s ok, Hubert. Everything’s alright,” said Mr. Fuzzywomps in a low, smokey voice. “They can’t hurt me. Nothing can hurt me anymore. You’ve got your Christmas wish!”

“You mean that last night *wasn’t* a dream?” asked Hubert excitedly.

“Of course not!” said Mr. Fuzzywomps as he wiped Hubert’s tears away with his claw. “Our visitor gave me life to make your Christmas wish come true. I won’t ever leave you, my friend. I’ll always be there to protect you. Nothing bad will happen as long as we are together, I promise you that!”

Hubert gave Mr. Fuzzywomps an enormous hug and set him down. The two best friends nuzzled up in front of the fire and basked in its warmth. Mommy and Daddy plastered themselves against the wall, giving the boy and his bear a wide berth. Daddy’s drink had fallen out of his hand and was leaking onto the carpet.

“Wait a minute,” said Hubert to Mr. Fuzzywomps. “I’m so happy that you are safe and that we can still be friends, but what about Mommy and Daddy? Are they going to be happy too?”

Mr. Fuzzywomps turned to face the petrified pair of Mommy and Daddy. He bore his sharp, jagged teeth and flashed his blood red eyes. Mommy shuddered at his gaze. Daddy let out a feeble squeak.

“They will if they know what’s good for them,” said Mr. Fuzzywomps with a toothy grin.

And with that, Hubert had the best Christmas he’d ever had.

The End