

When Santa met Ian

(2009)

Twas the night before Christmas – and Santa was frantic.
He was due in an hour across the Atlantic
And though all the presents were waiting to go
Tied up with ribbons, the sleigh in the snow,
He was still in his study amid screwed-up drafts,
Of the verse he was writing for *his* Christmas card,
Weeping and wailing while pulling his beard
And sobbing to Rudolph: “It’s just as I feared –
I’ve it left too late. Oh, what will they say
If nothing arrives upon Christmas day?
Oh Rudolph, please, help me! Have you an idea?
I know you’re only a red-nosed reindeer,
And rather more partial to modernist prose,
But what should I do? Oh, God only knows...
I’m desperately lacking the skills necessary
To scribble a card that is liter-ary...’

The red-nosed one thought for a moment, then spoke.
‘If you ask me, I blame that Mortimer bloke –
He writes daft verse each year for his friends –
I can’t bear to look at the rubbish he sends.
But as he’s to blame, let this be suggested.
Let’s speed in the sleigh down to old Moretonhampstead
And you can ask Ian to help with your verse.
Let’s face it. His efforts can’t get any worse
And at least you’ll have something to send out on paper,
If you feel you must copy his Yuletide caper.
‘Brilliant!’ said Santa. ‘Well, gee up, then, lad –
We’re off on a quest for a poem that’s bad.

Oh, little town of Moretonhampstead,

*What swear words fill thy air!
As Ian tries to write a Christmas poem
And pulls out all his hair.
But in thy dark streets shineth
The lights of Santa's sleigh
The hopes and fear of Santa-and-his-deer
Are found in thee today*

Santa took the chimney route - he didn't stop to knock,
And Ian looked up from his desk with something of a shock
Amid a pile of crumpled drafts and broken lines of verse
astonished by the sight – so much that he forgot to curse.
In fact he quite forgot his utter lack of inspiration
For the sight of Santa there kick-started his imagination
And suddenly he was writing, typing fast and furiously,
And new ideas for this year's poem came forth so copiously
That soon old Father Christmas was a-dancing round with joy
'This is just the thing! One goes to every girl and boy,
To every man and woman that doth dwell upon this earth.'
At which point Ian looked up. 'In that case, what's it worth?'
I'm sure that you appreciate my utter loyalty –
And won't neglect to pay me a quite juicy royalty.'

Then Santa looked me in the eyes.
I'll pay you in carrots and mince pies.

Happy Christmas 2009

Ian Mortimer