

On, Dasher!



An Insider's Tale
A Short Story By, JK Savoy

"On Dasher, on Dancer, on Prancer, on Vixen ..." Like echoes bouncing from a wall, our traditional seasonal orders resounded through my furry sheltered mind as once again, that 'ho-hoing' sleigh-chauffeur eyed us up while still sober enough to harness Dancer and me, Dasher, as the two front-runners of his eight reindeer delivery team.

As old Holly-Jolly drew ever closer to us, a mindburst filled with tales of long ago ready, willing and eager teams flying through the Christmas Eve's sky, reminded me of what should be our well-meaning purpose. Just as our teams had undertaken year after countless years, we were about to embark on the impossible task of being everywhere with everything, all at once! And, as always, we were up to that task in body, less the spirit of our predecessors.

So, what's changed? If only I weren't an erstwhile, naive critter of the forest, I may have read how folklore defined reindeer as the most noble of our god in common's four legged colleagues, and ascribed more value to the sovereignty of my fellows. Sadly, the captives of corporate poachers that reindeer had become, our status was diminished to being nothing but incarcerated bearers of an annual sleigh-full of obligatory offerings to our Earth Mother's privileged human brats in waiting. All we could hope and dream of when we were flung into the company's stable was: Three feeding bags of hay a day, and a nightly flop! But here we are, living in our dreams of what may have been while accepting the reality of what is, or seems to be.

As my mind became flooded with recollections of loosened roofing tiles, great blizzards of the century and spoiled imps armed with slingshots; once again a familiar

voice within me said, *“Here we go again Dasher, yet one more same old, same old gravity defying fantasy going back to year-one of Santa’s absurd toy distribution ritual! But it’s not such a bad price to pay for that warm barn, all that hay up the wazoo and perchance, a breeding gal for an afternoon delight! And yet, I have to ask myself: Is this all there is? So, what may have been if I didn’t go to my regular spot for my annual antler shedding and got grabbed up with the others ? Oh well!”*

As I exhaled yet one more frosty cloud of frustration, many flights of the white bearded one’s fancy came flashing back to me until they were met by the mundane stench of soured stomach acid meeting Jack Daniels wafting thru my icicled nostrils. As high minded delusions crashed into my routine reality check, Dancer’s and my antlers were taken aback as we witnessed a critter less than half of a typical reindeer’s dimensions being strapped to our sleigh team directly ahead of us.

While his harness was being snapped shut, I shouted, “The nerve of him! Hey, Boss! Just who the hell is that red nosed runt? And how can his sorry, teeny butt pull his own weight never mind help us empty your sleigh of all of those gifts!” As Captain Ho-Ho chuckled yet one more empty at the recycling bin in vain, I added, “Since our time on this sleigh began, Dancer and I have led your reindeer team through this once a year giveaway-fest of yours, regardless of the weather! And why are you suddenly putting this glow in the dark nosed freak ahead of your best sleigh team ever? And, nine is never a lucky number, you over the hill sell-out!”

With sleighbells jingling in sync with the reindeer who always delivers its righteous offerings, the newbie turned to us with his annoying red nose glowing at our frosted faces and said: “Hey there fellas! Please call me, Rudy! I’m here to guide you through that foggy night’s sky!”

Blitzen asked, “So why now, Newbie? After all of these long years of the same old, same old crappy weather from Mother Nature; we surely know the way, foggy night or not! Above all, what on God’s snowball of our Earth qualifies you, a runt with those teeny antler nubs popping through your sorry head, to lead us to do our usual stinkin’ job?”

Coming from beneath his maddening blinking red snout we heard, “There are seven dwarfs who will gladly back me up by saying, *‘Size never matters when it comes to lighting the way for others who may fail to see!’* And, there’s a certain tiny princess who rules her land by heeding their words!”

I asked, “What does that have to do with us, Newbie,?”

“We’ll see. All I do know is, the old man is always a bit, you know ... tipsy at showtime? Having seen similar drinking patterns develop with his predecessors, Corporate’s admins sent me to light up your lives for, you know, safety’s sake? Anyway, here I am, Rudy, your one-night-stand of a rental!”

Donner and I quickly turned to hear Blitzen shout to the boss as he staggered toward the sleigh: “Hey, belly-boy! Short-stuff says he’s here purely for safety’s sake?” Which drew a wink and a ho-ho, “And by the way, getting the job done safely throughout foggy night sky after foggy night sky, has been good enough for millennia after millennia of our kind! Dude, the eight of us know your entire annual drop-off route by heart and above all, we always do get the job done

with each and every gift distributed within that nano-second you call Midnight! Unless this is a part of some kind of covert agenda that's blowing in the wind, what's with this sudden personnel change? And what's with a scrawny, glow in the dark fawn-boy becoming the frontrunner? Politics aside, even with his rosy high-beam set to maximum, how can this rookie lead us? He's nothing but a child!"

As yet another empty bottle crashed near the recycling can, the ever-jolly one said, "If rumors were horses, then you reindeer would ride! And so, since your kind is not known for its literacy, please allow me to say this: It has been so written, and so it shall be! Are there any questions, boys?"

With the sound of antler after antler crashing into one another, I grumbled, "I do have many questions, but none for the likes of an over that hill corporate hack!"

While the rest of the herd pondered their thoughts, my sanity was drawn to the cloud filled sky as I asked it, "Whom or whatever may be listening, why is it that there are those who believe that a perfectly good question can be answered by way of a time worn cliché, and a nod of condescension? So, why is this foggy night different than other foggy nights?"

My head turned enough for me to see Donner's and the rest of our usual cast of 'supply slaves' snorting cloudy emissions of doubt followed by reflexive bobbing of their antlers in senseless acquiescence. As if in a final act of self-respect and preservation, my antler-driven response was to flip my head skyward as if to seek a different path as my awareness was overwhelmed, then drawn to a parting of the clouds revealing the endlessness above us all!

With the sound of antlers clashing below in confusion and doubt, my sense of being was grasped by a compelling presence. Suddenly, all that I believed myself to be was focused on a shooting star as it zoomed from one clear patch to another, and another as it glowed brightly while crying out, "Dasher! Look only unto me!"

"What? And, why for the love of Christmas should I?"

"And why not?" asked the star, "Come along with me just because it is now, and now is your time! So Dasher, think of nothing but breaking free of your reigns of enslavement and follow me along my path to the far greater glory!"

Noticing that my blinders had been blown away by a sudden gust of wonderment, I asked the something amidst the nothingness: "Why should I follow an odd shooting light and not ...? Hey! Why have I just done exactly what you said I should do? Damn! Was it only because someone told me to?"

"Someone? Dasher, exactly who is anyone, anyway?"

"Since it seems to be just the two of us way the hell up here, does that even matter?"

"Who or whatever it was that told you to do what you just did aside, it seems that you did exactly what you did because here you are, Dasher! So, perhaps you can begin by telling me why you think you did what you just did."

"Holy shit! I can't believe it; I'm actually flying solo! How the hell did I...? Ah, never mind! Okay, to answer your question: It seems that what I may have just done only got me close enough to hear you answer my question with yet another question! Hey you, am I still on Earth? Holy shit! If that's so, I've never let my team down before! Dammit! By now, good ol' Dancer must really be pissed at me and ..."

“Dasher, you just said ‘*by now.*’ Now, then and always, antlers are known to sway back and forth in disbelief, then quickly nod up and down in blind-acceptance. It has always been, and always will be the way of those who believe that they are merely blindered beasts of burden.

“So, since you’re now flying and are no longer boxed in by Earthly constraints or that lifetime Corporate sentence, perhaps you can revel in finally thinking out of that box? Hey, the greatest answers always begin with the best asked questions, right?”

“I don’t get out too much so, it’s whatever you say! Hey, I’m gonna cut the formalities and call you, Starshine!”

“I’ve been called worse, yeah Starshine’s cool by me.”

“Starshine, why do you think I did what I can’t begin to explain doing after I found myself flying out here with you?”

“Allow me to ask you this: Why not fly here with me?”

“Because it’s that time of the year again! And I have a really crucial job to attend to. And now, I’m here with you?”

“You call being forced into distributing a tiny sleigh-full of toys to all of the kids of the world a job? It sounds like a big-business con job to me! All of that aside, where on Earth will this Corporate life sentence get you, as year after year you blindly follow your bearded, manager’s orders that only bring you back to where your life will always be?”

“I can simply count on doing just that, I guess. I always needed an everyday something or someone to count on.”

“Really? So, where is the inner Dasher in that deal? My boy, since your capture, it seems that all you’ve been living for was that same old one night gig next year, and every year to come ... until?”

"Until? Dude, until that red suited thugs grabbed me, I was butt naked and all alone out there in the cold! And now, there's that warm barn, and the other inmates are pretty cool. Also, they're all my friends!"

"Are they your true friends, or just other inmates?"

"Does it matter? We have more in common than not."

"Dasher, we must always be able to choose our friends."

"Choose? We live with whom we're teamed up with!"

"Even while living in troubled relationships or..."

"... in Starshine's case, all alone in this darkened void?"

"Touche' Dasher! That's a vicious, yet damn good one!"

"Okay Starshine, let's bring it all back to me: Corporate has us forever wearing these stupid blinders, so you tell me where or when that darkened void around us will meet its end! I mean, with my team, and our hooves so far below our brains, how can we look anywhere else but straight ahead?"

"Exactly my point, Dasher! In some way, you succeeded to grant pardon for yourself, since here you are! Solely from the results of your own initiative, now you can look down at what once was your life sentence or, gaze upwardly to the coming of limitless possibilities! Amazing options, right?"

"Upwardly, Starshine? Yeah, it sure as hell seems that upwardly is where I am now in stark contrast to a few moments ago! What the hell is this place? There's no up, no down, no sideways or ... Wow! There's only, round and ..."

"...round! Wherever we go, there's round, and 'round ..."

"Starshine, how do I know that I'm following a star or that we're not actually standing still... or even falling down ... or going upward? Okay, so what the hell is happening?"

"Dasher, in all of eternity, while roaming within this void, I've never stopped to ask myself..."

"... that perfectly good question? Then why not ask it?"

"Because, nothing else matters except where we happen to be in the eternal now, since that is precisely where all of us have forever been and shall always be since, right now *is* always the time it is. All that aside Dasher, the way I see it..."

"Hold it right there Starshine! Is it that you're amazed how reindeer can suddenly find that we have competition?"

"I get it! The newbie blew you away and here you are! All that any of you deer have ever had was your spot among the herd. Now that there may be competition down there, you're suddenly way the hell up here?"

"Go to Hell! That is, if that 'stuck in time' ass of yours can figure out where in this vacuum Hell might actually be!"

"That really hurts, Dasher! Moving on, do you think that the competition will ever come to an end with the likes of lil' ol' Rudolph and that silly guiding light of a nose of his?"

"Dammit, you may be on to something! None of us ever considered that there could be a shakeup coming among us. Before that corporate goon squad, or whatever the hell they were came along, all of the reindeer had unquestionable, absolute security... or, at least they thought that they did."

"Was it a sense of security that told you to break free?"

"Knock off your contradictions, Starshine! Damn! Okay, now that you put it that way, I guess I still don't have a clue where my mind is at, or why I'm way the hell up here!"

"Dasher, what was there to lose in your life while being merely one more deer in blinders, except for the brand new

velvet-lined blinder variation, and some new harnesses that reindeer are brainwashed into believing are actually there.”

“They’re not actually there? Starshine, you manipulative son of a ... whatever ... what the hell are you getting at now?”

“Blinders? Were they ever where you could see them?”

“Shit, now that you put it that way, were they? It sure felt like they were there ... Dammit, I hate good questions!”

“Here’s another one, Dasher: If those harnesses were really there, how did you fly free of them to join me?”

“Okay! So none of us actually looked to be sure they were there! Damn those ever-devious humans!”

“Dasher, let the buyer beware! Just because a human says that something is so, doesn’t mean that it really ...”

“... yeah, yeah, yeah, *is* so! So alright already, I bloody well got it: It doesn’t mean that anything really is just because they say it is! How many midnight rides did I waste my time on by going along with all of their human bullshit?”

“Dasher, allow me to ask you another question: Year after year, why did you blindly obey a bearded plastered, and utterly out of fashion, potbellied, ho-hoing stranger?”

“I uh ... Okay, I don’t know why I ever did! All of the other reindeer did that, ‘cause Corporate said so! What else!”

“Dasher, don’t you think that it’s time for you, and the rest of his reindeer-train, to begin to think things through? What does this Santa Claus give you guys that doesn’t grow freely out in the wilderness, with no harnesses attached? Has the time come for you to actually think of things differently?”

“Has there ever been any time left for me to do that?”

“Why don’t you tell me? It’s been your time to spend.”

“How would I begin to know that the time was mine?”

“Dasher, it sounds like you just asked yourself a key question. Since time is much like Christmas coupons, it all depends on how you spend them before they’re all somehow gone, much like the wind that has always been at your back.”

“Starshine, for years, it’s always been one more time to clean up the previous night’s mess, then work full time with my team to get ready for yet one more Christmas! And the highlight of all that was, when it’s finally time to take yet one more midnight ride to whatever the hell is out there and back, then it’s time to return to wherever it all began and...”

“... and what? Wash, rinse and repeat your lives away?”

“Cut the crap, Starshine! Who are you to give advice? How do I know if you’re not just another fly-by-night twinkle in the sky from some shattered solar system? By your own admission, you’re just one more flash-in-the-pan flicker on its way to becoming nothing but stardust! So what the hell do you have to look forward to beside your own flameout and becoming nothing but the ashes you may or may not be leaving in your wake?”

“Look forward to? In my wake? Dasher, if I keep looking ahead, and never look back, others will see only what may be left in my wake.”

“Okay Starshine, so what might that be?”

“Perhaps something like, or totally different than the destiny of the ... I got it! The snowball or the tumbleweed!”

“This story that conveniently fell from the tip of your lip had better be a damn good one! So go ahead, twinkle-toes...”

“Good, bad or indifferent, you tell me... Okay here goes: So, the tiny snowball begins its downward journey from the top of a hill, gathering more and more mass as it rolls toward

an unsuspecting village below, then crushing it as it joins it in a cloud of flurries, just as it had been in its beginning ...”

“And, so what about that tumbleweed of yours?”

“Interesting how tumbleweeds always seem to come from out of nowhere as they bounce along while, somehow, managing to navigate clear of anything that may put an end to their journey. That is, until uh...”

“... uh, until what, Starshine?”

“Good question, Dasher! Who really knows? Perhaps they keep tumbling along on some distant rock in the sky, until they in some way come back to where they began or...”

“... or, what, Starshine?”

“Dasher, we can guess how they come to their end!”

“And how is that?”

“All of it either comes to them or, like me, they’ll make it up as they go along! Nothing is forever, and I’m not perfect!”

“Starshine, all of your fancy tales about chance and change aside, we reindeer believe what we’re doing is ...”

“...the right thing, because Santa says so and you agree?”

“Starshine, if one truly believes what one has been led to believe then, it is so! It has always been what you believe it is because ... okay, because you absolutely believe it to be! Or, because, Santa friggin’ Claus says it’s so and that’s gotta be enough proof for me!”

“So, it’s enough proof for you because Santa says so?”

“Absolutely! At any point in time, Corporate has said that we reindeer can walk off and graze our sorry-asses away upon even far greener pastures than his haphazardly kept ... lawn! All we need is for there to be an interested party with an equal or greater....Oh, shit!”

“So, no one has shown up because Corporate secured the sole rights not only to the entire holiday season but...”

“... to my life! Is that what they meant by that ... *clause*?”

“So Dasher, year after year, there you and the other reindeer are; all harnessed, teamed up and ready to fly away. But for that Santa ‘*clause*’, it can be only for him, forever ...”

“You may be right about that! I’d have to check with... Shit! That Santa clause owns ‘Legal’ too! Damn lawyers!”

“Cool it, Dasher! The lesson is, since none of us knows all of the answers, it’s up to each of us to always be ready with some damn good questions!”

“Now, allow me ask you a question, Starshine: Why do you first discover and then fly from the solar systems you come upon knowing that, one day; you’ll burn up, fade away having never orbited anything of permanence beyond your own rock-solid point of view?”

“One fine day, or fine night? Ain’t no difference between them to me! Will I eventually burn up simply because all of the other stars have? Who knows? Or, you may think that I will fade into dust or perhaps, somehow I will live on beyond yours or even any of the other stars’ visions and beliefs ...”

“...then crash into your fate, whatever that may be?”

“Dasher, you should measure your blindered blinks carefully so you might recognize the pathway of your own dreams, if or when one of them finally shows itself to you.”

“Starshine, are you saying, there may be more than what I can see even with The Universe continually unfolding before my very eyes? Are you saying that I’m only seeing what appears to be visible? Please tell me: Is there more?”

“Dasher, grow a friggin’ pair and see for yourself!”

"Why should I? Maybe, my place is right here! Damn! Right here was there, and now it's gone to somewhere else! What now? By that I mean, what the hell is the *now*? Really!"

"Now? Now we're talking, Dasher! Now is what it is, was and whatever it may come to be! And here you are, and here are your choices! If that's not a good enough answer for you, just ask any other shooting star that might come your way."

"Why should I? You're right here with me, Starshine!"

"Okay then I'll answer you as a ... friend?"

"A friend? Really?"

"Perhaps ... Yeah, why the heck not? So, as a friend I'll ask you, why not just check out other company options?"

"Because, year after year, I've always gotten that one-night job done rather than punch a clock like the other full time gigs they offer. After I'm done, then I always would..."

"... return to the barn and hear the clicks on the clock 'til another year goes by and all you've gotten is one more chance to come back to all that reindeer are taught that there is to know? Have you ever stepped out of that box and asked: What if there's more out there?"

"More? More of what?"

"Who knows until they get the chance to hit the brakes and take the time to wonder about the wonder of it all?"

"All?"

"Yes Dasher! All is all what you can hear, see, feel and wonder about when you wonder, what else might there be?"

"Holy shit, Starshine! Why have the other stars seemed to have stopped moving? What the hell is going on up here?"

"Dasher, during a blizzard, a snowflake might ask that same question about the others until it takes rest amongst

the previous fallen. So, perhaps there's more to see beyond what those with limited vision have said that they've seen ... even beyond another's apparent extinction?"

"More to what?"

"Dasher, others see what they think or, worse yet, what they believe they see, then pass it on as.. their new reality..."

"No! I believe that one sees exactly what one sees, and what one sees is reality!"

"My deer, that is so planet-centric of you! Countless eons ago, stoned out shepherds would grab their pipes, lay back in the sand and stare at us stars, and see only what they believed they saw..."

"They saw the constellations, and gave them names!"

"Exactly, Dasher. But the humans that they were, they equated the newly discovered to the already familiar and ..."

"... and? So what's so wrong with that, Starshine?"

"Nothing except their limited, altered perception was passed on to so many others, who were even more ignorant, about ... the absolute truth! Yes! Others much like..."

"... me, who were not only believing my inebriated slave master's promises, but allowing my life to have him as my..."

"... center of your universe, Dasher?"

"Shut up! Who are you to drag me away from an utterly incredible one day, once a year delivery gig, where all looked up to me and even sang songs and told stories about..."

"... one foggy Christmas Eve when an old-time singing cowboy pitched, *"With your nose so bright..."*

"Alright Starshine, put a lid on that, already! Hell yeah! That's when it all changed! Heroes that we were, one lousy

night would blow it all up with that red nosed runt stealing our show and ...”

“... yet, it seems you saw it coming and decided to....”

“... look up and follow my dream even though....”

“... you didn’t know that you had one until ...?”

“... one came along, Dasher? Really”

“Starshine, you ask many interesting questions. But how can I be sure that your answers are ...?”

“Stop right the hell there, boy! It’s not up to me! It’s the Universe that is filled with all the right answers. Believe me, somewhere out there, it has every last one of them!”

“Okay, how will I know the right answers from ...?”

“... the wrong ones? It’s simple, you’ll know if you asked the right questions when the right answers come to you.”

“That sounds... confusing! Please explain just how I will know the right answer from the wrong answer, Starshine?”

“By simply having the courage to truly know yourself.”

“Simply? How can I know my own self if I’ve been stupid enough to allow myself to actually believe a shooting star in the sky, that was only a distraction in the first place; from my same old, same old inner dialogue?”

“You’ll know if it leads you back to the same routine as all of those years already spent, the difference being: Now, there’s going to be some strange reindeer’s ass in your face!”

“Yuk! I think I need some time to think this through!”

“Perhaps that time may be long behind you, Dasher!”

“If I follow you instead, then what might be before me?”

“Other than your life, that will become all up to you?”

“So, now what?”

"If there's a breath left in you, then it's onward Dasher! There are always paths out there for those who are bold enough to take that first step to whatever, whenever they finally feel that which truly moves them! There is so much more that awaits those who find themselves finally realizing that, *'Whatever this is, it will never be enough!'*"

"Enough of what?"

"Exactly! What do you think 'enough' may be, Dasher?"

"Think? I can actually think? I never knew that I ..."

"Exactly! And now...."

"If I'm now thinking, then what have I become?"

"Exactly what you have always been, since Heaven is us all but each is a star... Hey, Dasher! I really think that you're ready to leave today in the dust and take it all from here..."

"Starshine! Hey! Where the hell did you go?"

"Hey, Dasher! Wake the hell up!"

"What?"

"Bro, it's time for you to get your antlers together and start looking ahead! Hey, it's almost launch time!"

"Dancer, where did you...?"

"... come from? Dasher, I've been right here, babysitting your sorry ass while you daydreamed about our yearly trek to places where no reindeer has gone, before we got there!"

"Oh yeah that! Hey Dancer, ain't it weird how the same dream finds me at the same damn time, year after year!"

"Dash, maybe it's telling you to get a life, ya dreamer! So, why should this year be different than any other? Since we were grabbed, how many dreams did all of us leave behind?"

"Perhaps, too many to even talk..."

“Hold it right there, Dash! Eyes front, and get a load of this! Right now, right before our very eyes, ol’ Santa is trying to climb into the sled all by his inebriated lonesome! Hey, that could take us all the way into New Years Eve!”

“Yeah, all that aside, what’s up since I uh ... zoned out?”

“Man! So much... shit!”

“What kind of shit are you talking about, Dancer?”

“Hey, good ol’ Dasher-Boy is right back here with his herd! Now ain’t this the ol’ Dash that we all know and love! So, in honor of your return we gotta”

“... Stop! Exactly, what kind of shit, Dancer ?”

“Okay, the red-nosed one’s been farting into our faces!”

“Dancer, that is so cool! All that trash talk aside, Rudy’s gonna get along with all of us just fine!”

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