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The Night Before Food Stamps

A Homeless Christmas Story



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Twas the night before food stamps, and all through the house,
Not a creature was stirring; no scraps for that mouse.
The Green bags were hung by the front door with care,
In hopes that the Co-op had samples to spare.

My rescue dog shuddered, all snug in her bed,
While visions of Frisbee-toss played in her head.
She's lucky she's fed; her tummy don't groan,
I'm wrackin' my brain to pay for the phone.

When outside my place, there arose such a clatter,
I reached for my club to see what was the matter.
Across the small space I flew like no mortal,
Tripped over the dog and fell out the portal.

The gleam of new snow on the trailer park grounds
Could still not give luster to Mike's garbage mounds.
But, what to my wandering right eye should appear
But an old shopping cart, with empties of beer.

A grizzled old geezer hung on for dear life
Along with his drum, a bugle and fife.
"It's all I have left," Nick said without shame,
"But I found this old cart, and learned a new game."

He was dressed all in rags, from his head to his feet,
Covered in filth from life on the street.
An old duffle bag was flung in the cart.
He searched for a shelter, or maybe a park.

What sort of a game, I asked with real interest,
Staring at ribbons pinned on to his chest.
His face was all weathered, nose red from the cold,

But his eyes brightened up like he found coins of gold.

"It's a game I can play every day, and it's free.
I just have to open my two eyes to see.
I'm looking for someone, down on their luck,
Who's worse off than me; someone who's stuck.

"That not hard to find, in this day and age,"
He pulled out a notebook and soon turned a page.
"My mem'ry's not good, so I write down each deed,
Along with the name of the person in need.

"Here's my friend, Larry, more hungry than me,
And Mary, my old mug along with hot tea.
The wool blanket went to the couple last night,
Whose children were shivering, from cold and from fright."

I listened in awe as he read out each name,
Ashamed that I'd ever had nerve to complain.
"Now's the magical part, which still isn't clear:
At the end of good-deed days, a lager appears."

I looked at the empties; it made sense not a lick,
But I wanted to believe in my own Old St. Nick.
Into chapped hands I pressed some warm gloves
To replace his own, which he'd given with love.

"Why thank you, Ma'am, that's mighty kind.
It's folks like you give peace of mind."
Nick opened his bag and out dropped a feather.
"I heard you collect them, in all kinds of weather."

I stared at the beauty upon the fresh snow,
"I help Santa now, if you really must know."
As Nick walked away, he turned at the post,
"Happy Holidays, my dear," was his parting toast.