



Routes 1&9

Ivan Robertson

Part of a series of short stories “Routes 1&9” by Ivan Robertson. Produced by Tommy Weir of Janey Pictures.

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A Christmas Story

Gentlemen. Gentlemen, please.

Thank you.

In the winter of nineteen fifty-six, two weeks before Christmas Day, the city of Louisville, Kentucky, hired a parachutist to sky-dive his way down onto the parking lot of a newly built shopping center, in the West End - the West End - dressed as Santa Claus. And the people of the city were made aware.

Christmas was in the air. Huge silver snowflakes were hung from the street lamps along Chestnut and Main. At Kaufmanns department store children waited hours in line to have their pictures taken, sobbing in Santa's lap. Santa was everywhere in the winter of nineteen fifty-six.

A full-page ad in Sunday's Courier-Journal announced the time of the jump, of the descent, and the radio announced it again, repeatedly. Next Saturday. A week, five days, then three. Then one. Across Jefferson County, parents struggled to get their children ready. Mittens and hats. Keep their bellies warm and their britches dry, get them to the show on time.

It was a blisteringly cold day, blistering and gray, and from across the county families began to arrive. Fathers hung-over, mothers impatient and upset, children in the back seats of cars scared and excited. Santa out of the sky? A huge space

was cleared in the parking lot, a parking lot so new the cement was still damp to the touch. A space was cleared so that Santa could land.

It was cold, so cold. What wouldn't a family do for its children?

The day - the very moment - had arrived. All the good people of Jefferson County stood shivering in a circle a mile around. There were police. There were firemen. Everyone was waiting, looking up.

"GOOD MORNING, BOYS AND GIRLS! GOOD MORNING, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN! AND MERRY CHRISTMAS! SANTA'S SKY PLANE IS ON ITS WAY AND IT SHOULD JUST ABOUT BE HERE! TELL ME, IS EVERYBODY READY FOR SANTA? I SAID, IS EVERYBODY READY FOR SANTA?"

The crowd roared.

"WELL, ALL RIGHT THEN!"

And everybody was ready. The St. Anselm Parochial High School Marching Band began a flute, trumpet, triangle and drum rendition of "Jingle Bells" as the solid citizens of the county waited patiently in the cold. And then... and then...

"HOLY SMOKES BUT THERE IT IS! SANTA'S SKY PLANE! OVERHEAD!"

People strained to see, squinting through the winter glare.

"IN ONE MINUTE, FOLKS... AND THERE HE IS! IT'S SANTA CLAUS!"

A small figure, a dot really, rolled away from the droning twin-engine plane overhead and began its slow, graceful drift towards earth. The children hopped up and down in excitement, the mothers held their hands to their mouths, even the fathers were impressed. Now that they saw, they were impressed. The fathers all whistled. And the figure, the dot... slowly... slowly... the dot grew bigger.

The twin-engine plane began to circle the shopping center lot, as the dot grew bigger still. It became a reddish dot before finding a shape - a little too long for a dot, now. Perhaps more of a red cigar. Falling. Slowly. And then, Gentlemen... The dot became a man.

“IT’S SANTA CLAUS! IT’S SANTA! DO YOU SEE HIM, BOYS AND GIRLS? HE’S WAVING TO YOU! SANTA’S WAVING!”

And he was. He was waving. The children waved back and called out to him. The men stood together and pointed in admiration. Only the women kept their hands in place, at their mouths. They knew, Gentlemen. Somehow, they knew.

And Santa fell closer still. Still waving, still falling. Other colors began to fade into focus, black boots, black gloves. Bits of green. A brown bag of gifts for the children down below. A pack strapped to his back. A long white beard. Waving with both arms now, holding tightly to his bag of gifts.

“IT’S SANTA CLAUS!”

And as he came closer yet, with the twin-engine still circling above, the man began to kick out now with his feet

and wave faster with his hands...My God. My God. The Marching Band begins a reprise of “Jingle Bells,” the only song taught to them for the occasion.

“AND IN JUST A FEW MORE SECONDS...”

But clearly it’s already too late. The man had fallen too far, too quickly, kicking and clutching at the air. The children stopped waving, sensing that something was wrong. They stood frozen, this crowd of good people was unable to move or even gasp. Unable, even, to grab their own children and turn them away from what they knew they would see.

We simply aren’t capable, Sirs. We simply cannot turn away.

The man in the sky, nearing treetop level now, began clawing at his beard, and as he tore it off it floated up above him. He let go of his bag of gifts and that, too, floated up above him. The marching band came to a stop, the announcer fell silent... and in the still, frozen morning silence the man landed, face down, in the center of his designated landing area. He landed, and in doing so he broke every bone in his body. He landed not with the dull thud that you might expect but with a CRACK. A crack loud enough to echo off the newly built shopping center walls, to throw back the heads of every person watching. A crack like a strong tree snapping. And once he landed he did not move.

Only then, Gentlemen, although they saw it coming, only then did the children scream and the mothers cry and the fathers look away. Only then! Only then did they turn away

en masse. A drummer in the band vomited, Sirs! The announcer began babbling with tears in his eyes! Tears! There are pictures! This is recorded!

Nobody noticed when the dead man's bag of gifts landed - with a thud that shattered everything it held. His long white beard was never found. Someone, no doubt, took it home as a grim souvenir. No doubt people are capable of that. No doubt.

This is recorded, though others tell it differently. Some have it in the South End - The South End! Some even say that the falling man was Black! But no, no. This is recorded. This is the truth.

Gentlemen, thank you. Goodnight.

A Christmas Story from ***Routes 1&9*** collection of short stories

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