

ELLORA'S CAVE PRESENTS

The Twelve Quickies of Christmas



Book 6

The Toymaker
R. Casteel

THE TOYMAKER

An Ellora's Cave Publication, DECEMBER 2003

Ellora's Cave Publishing, Inc.

PO Box 787

Hudson, OH 44236-0787

ISBN MS Reader (LIT) ISBN # 1-84360-731-X

Other available formats (no ISBNs are assigned):

Adobe (PDF), Rocketbook (RB), Mobipocket (PRC) & HTML

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Edited by Martha Punches

Cover art by Darrell King.

THE TOYMAKER

R. Casteel

Chapter 1

1875, Coatsville, Missouri.

The wind howled through the trees, sending the snow swirling around the corner of the house and across the porch. A sudden gust ate its way under the windowsill stirring the curtains. Samantha turned away from the scene and went back to the fireplace.

She looked down at the still, sleeping bundles of her two children and sank her heavy girth wearily beside them. Christmas was only a few days away and despair weighed heavy on her shoulders.

"I've been a fool to stay on here." She smoothed a wisp of hair from her daughter's face. "But it was the only thing your pa left us, and now, it looks like even what little we have will be taken away."

Bitter resentment welled up inside her breast at the thought of the worthless bastard. He had only done two things right in his life and both of those were sleeping within arms reach.

There were days when she could have killed the man for leaving them with nothing and running off with his lover. The fact that she was ten years younger and a hundred pounds lighter didn't help her self-esteem. His cleaning out their meager savings and riding off on their only horse had sunk her emotions even lower.

Samantha had thought things couldn't get any worse. Time had proved her wrong with the whisperings and sly looks of the other women in town. No matter what *they* thought, it wasn't her fault he left.

"I always hoped your pa would come to his senses and come home." She pulled the blankets closer around her son and stared with longing into the crackling flames.

A man from Coatsville had ridden three miles to deliver the news. She could still

remember the words of the telegram ending those feeble hopes.

Sorry to inform you your husband has been shot and killed-stop Personal possessions will be sent to you along with any monies after funeral expense paid-stop

Nothing had been sent, and she doubted it ever would.

Coatsville wasn't much of a town. A clapboard building housed the dry goods store, post office, and telegraph. A saloon, livery, hotel and scattered houses made up the rest of the small Missouri settlement. Everything centered on and around the coal mine, even the need for the coloreds who stripped the black ore from the ground.

Samantha lifted her head. "What the...?" She was hearing things. There was no way anyone would be out on a night like this. Hearing the muffled tinkle of bells again, she climbed to her feet and hurried to the window.

In the dim glow of light shining out through the window, she saw a horse standing in the shadows. On its back, a man's head appeared out of a large wrap of some sort.

Throwing a blanket around her worn flannel nightgown, Samantha hurried to the door. Bracing herself, she stepped out onto the porch and into the face of the battering wind. The cold bit through the blanket and swirled underneath her gown, sending their icy fingers up her leg.

"Ma'am, can I trouble you for shelter?" He moved closer to the porch.

What she had thought was a horse was in fact a large pony. "Put your horse in the barn, there's not much hay but you're welcome to what you need." She motioned to the dark shadow of the small barn. "Come into the house when you finish, sir. You must be nearly frozen."

"Thank you kindly, ma'am." The stranger turned the horse and headed for the barn.

"My word, what can the man be thinking of, riding out on such a horrible night." Samantha opened the door and ducked back inside. She was so cold, she was afraid she wouldn't be able to pee without first thawing out her pus.

Samantha added more wood from her dwindling supply to the fire. Things had been difficult enough with a husband. She had done the best she could by herself but was forced to realize it hadn't been enough.

Dropping the blanket, she looked down at her worn, threadbare gown. It hung off her like a feed sack. All her clothes did. How much weight she had lost, she had no way of knowing, but she had dropped at least two dress sizes. Ensuring the children had food had been paramount, even to the giving up of her own.

She wished she had a robe but that had gone to make warm pajamas for the children. Samantha grabbed a dress as the door opened and the stranger stepped in. Clutching the material to her breast, she tried to hide her near nakedness from him. By the amused and somewhat embarrassed expression, she knew she had failed.

"Ah, thank you for your hospitality. I hope it's not a burden on you," he glanced down at the floor, "or your family."

She had to look down at him. Her nearly six-foot frame towered over him by at least two feet. Back east, she had seen midgets at the circus, but having one in her house gave her a moment of pause.

"Is your husband home?" He pulled off a heavy fur coat and unwrapped a long scarf from his head.

"I have no husband. He died sometime back."

She tried not to stare at the man, but found it near impossible. He had a full head of long flowing white hair, his matching beard nearly obscured his face, and his black-as-coal eyes twinkled back at her.

"Allow me to introduce myself, good lady." He bowed at the waist. "I'm Claudius Elfenstine. I was on my way to the North Country when I became lost. Sadly, I will not make my destination by Christmas."

"I'm Samantha Woodall, and these," she swept her hand towards the fireplace, "are my two children, Rachel and Jake Jr."

"I must say," Claudius stepped closer to the fire and held out his hands to the warmth, "your lighted window was a pleasant and welcome surprise. Even more so is this marvelous fire."

"You are welcome to stay until the storm breaks." For some reason that she couldn't quite fathom, she felt relaxed with this stranger so near. Slowly, Samantha lowered her arms and placed her wrinkled dress back on the shelf.

"We don't have much, but we'll be glad to share with you. Provided you aren't too picky on the fare."

"I am forever in your debt, Mrs. Woodall. It would be an honor, and please, call me Claudius."

"Only if you drop the Mrs. and call me Samantha. If you will excuse me I will get some bedding and place it here near the fire." She hurried to her cedar hope chest and dug out the last remaining blankets.

Claudius backed away from the fire as she knelt beside her son. As she made his bed, she looked up at him. His eyes were riveted on her and she suddenly remembered the fire behind her and the thinness of her gown.

Embarrassed all over again, she felt the heat rising from her breasts and up her neck. She started to turn her face away when she noticed the bulge of his groin. That he was becoming sexually turned on was obvious, and given the situation, understandably normal. It was the size of his erection that kept her eyes on his crotch.

He made no move to turn away or shield himself from her and she watched as his swelling cock reached to mid-thigh. "I'll...ah, be just a minute."

"Take your time, Samantha, I find I'm in no hurry to lie down."

It was getting hot in the room and it had nothing to do with the fire. Averting her eyes, she tried to shake out a second blanket but found her fingers unwilling to cooperate.

"What is your business that takes you out so close to Christmas?" It was really none

of her business, but she needed some time to regain her composure.

"I'm a toymaker by trade. I delivered some toys for Christmas and was on my way home."

"That's a shame, I'm sure your family will be disappointed." Samantha finally got his bed made and stepped back. "I hope this will be sufficient, Claudius."

"I...have no real family." He pulled off his black knee-high boots. "And it will more than do. Thank you."

Samantha crossed to the other side of her sleeping daughter and lay beside her. Partially closing her eyes, she felt a pang of guilt at watching Claudius prepare for bed. He looked at her for a moment, turned his back to her, and removed his red plaid shirt and homespun trousers. His shoulders were surprisingly broad for such a small man and his muscles rippled with each movement.

He wore farmer johns like every other man in the territory, but the similarities ended there. As he sat down and stretched out on the blanket the front of his underwear stuck out like a tent. Even in the dim light of the fire, the large head of his cock was plainly outlined against the material. Claudius pulled the other blanket over him.

Her mouth went dry and for the first time in more months than she wanted to count, she felt the wetness of desire between her legs.

"Good night, Samantha."

His voice seemed strained, almost painful. Licking her lips and taking a deep breath, she replied, "Night, Claudius."

Turning on her side, she pulled the blanket back over her daughter. He turned towards her, watching her every move with eyes that seemed to penetrate her soul and discern her most secret thoughts.

Are you still hard? The question charged through her mind with the swiftness of a stampede. She lowered her gaze to hide the need she felt.

"She has her mother's beauty." His soft words drifted across the short distance.

"Claudius, I fear the cold has affected your eyesight," she whispered. "This body is tired, worn, and any beauty I may have had, soon fled under the harshness of the land."

"Ahh, my dear lady. That is where you are wrong. I see beauty in the touch of your hand as you protect your children from the cold. It's in your eyes as you look upon their faces and are fearful for their plight. I am a stranger and you took me in, offered food for my horse, and provided a bed beside your fire."

"Please, Claudius," she begged. "Enough of your blarney. I did what was right and decent."

"No, Sam," he said the word almost reverently. "Only a woman of great beauty and courage would do what you have done. I will not soon forget your kindness."

He smiled at her, closed his eyes, and was just as quickly asleep. His words, simple as they were, warmed her heart and lifted her spirits. It had been a long time since anyone had called her beautiful.

The sound of running water roused her. Peeping through sleep-encrusted lashes, she noticed the fire had been freshly tended. Lifting her head from the pillow of her arm, she looked to find the source of the noise that had awakened her.

A startled gasp escaped her lips. Claudius was using the chamber pot and his exposed cock was even larger than she could have imagined. He turned away from her, but even that couldn't hide the length hanging between his legs.

It was the first adult cock she had seen in many a moon. Samantha knew she should avert her eyes, but was unable to do so. Her heart began to race beneath her breast at the thought of taking his full length inside her. If she even could.

"My apologies, Samantha. The need was so great, I never thought about you waking up."

"Understandable, Claudius." The words sounded like mush to her ears, and she wondered what he must think.

For the second time tonight, she was wet. Only this time, she could smell the strong musky scent of her own need seeping out from under the covers. Can he smell it too? What am I going to do?

He shook himself off and stuffed his cock back inside his farmer johns. Claudius lay on the bed facing her, and his eyes gave her a slow, searching, questioning gaze as they traveled over the length of her blanket-clad body. She felt naked before him. Her breasts ached as the rise and fall of her chest rubbed her nipples against the fabric of her gown.

He knows! I can see it in his eyes.

With one last, hot penetrating look, he turned over and faced away from her.

The return to sleep wasn't that easy for her. Samantha tossed and turned upon her bed with visions of his cock, dancing in her head.

"Mommy! Mommy! There's a strange little man outside splitting our firewood."

The excited voice of her five-year-old daughter pulled her out of a sensual dream. The steady ring of an axe disrupted the stillness of the small cabin. A fire blazed fresh in the hearth and the aroma of fresh coffee filled the air.

Coffee was one item she considered a luxury and had refused to buy any more when so many other things were needed worse. She breathed in the strong fragrance with relish.

Steam rose from the heating tank of the kitchen stove. With Claudius chopping wood, it gave her time to clean herself up and try to make herself a little more presentable.

Ten-year-old Jake stood at the window, raptly watching the scene outside. "Children, that is Mr. Elfenstine. He got lost in the storm last night and will be spending a day or two with us. Jake, finish getting dressed and help him stack the wood please."

Jake hurriedly put on his coat and ran out the door. It was only then that she realized the extra weight on her. Claudius's heavy fur wrap lay over her. Running her

fingers through the thick white fur, she wondered about it. Pictures from her childhood flashed through her mind of huge polar bears.

Samantha got up, and with excitement welling up inside her, went to the stove. Taking a quick peek outside, she debated taking a hurried sponge bath. Privacy in a small cabin was almost non-existent, but it wasn't her son she was anxious about.

Pouring a cup of strong black coffee, she took a sip and sighed. "Mmm, that's good." Drawing water from the tank, Samantha took her last bar of lye soap and stripped off her gown.

In her haste to rinse, she took her eyes off of Claudius for a moment. As she reached for a somewhat wrinkled but clean dress, the door swung open. The small piece of cloth she used to dry with did nothing to hide her nakedness from his eyes. Time seemed to stand still.

"Excuse me," he stammered.

As quickly as the door had opened, it swung shut. Embarrassed, flustered and with her hands shaking, Samantha pulled the material over her head.

Chapter 2

Claudius picked up the axe, swung it in a wide arc over his shoulder, and sent wood chips flying several feet away. No matter how hard or how fast he drove the blade into the wood, he couldn't shake the image of Samantha standing naked only a few feet from him.

He felt the unmistakable tightening of his trousers as his cock hardened. There was only one problem. Unlike other men, he couldn't shift it to a more comfortable position. There just wasn't room.

The frontier required sturdy women and Sam was defiantly that. At least six feet tall, with wide shoulders and a supple amount of flesh, she heated his blood far more effectively than any physical labor ever had. What would it be like to lay his head on the pillow of her breast?

Last night, the silhouette of her against the light of the fire had done little to prepare him for seeing her in the flesh. Her breasts were large, full, and had very little sag. The dark pink nubs of her nipples were easily the size around of his little finger and stuck out invitingly, as if pleading to be touched and suckled.

He looked at the stack of cut wood and quickly realized that although it would look impressive to some, it would in fact last only a short time with the long, dark-days of winter still remaining. And there was no more to be split.

With a sudden insight born from years of service, he knew getting lost in the storm had not been an accident. He had been carefully manipulated and guided every step of the way. Thinking of Samantha and how she heated his blood, this was one time, he didn't mind a bit.

"Run along to the house, Jake. I can smell breakfast cooking." He patted the boy on the shoulder. "Thanks for your help."

"You're welcome." With his nose glowing like Rudolf, Jake looked up with a big, wide-toothed grin. "Mom's a good cook."

Claudius walked to the house with his arm around Jake. "I'm sure she is good at everything she does." Setting the axe back behind the woodpile, he entered the cabin behind Jake.

"Claude done split all the wood, Ma." Jake's eager young voice filled the room.

"Wasn't that nice of him to do?"

Her eyes bored into his with such a fierce intensity that his heart started to race within his chest. The tension within the cabin elevated with each passing second. Even though she wore a long blue flower print dress, he pictured her in all her natural womanly beauty.

Claudius held eye contact with her longer than propriety allowed. A soft pink began to flush her skin and creep up her neck.

Samantha dropped her gaze. Her blush deepened. The tip of her tongue wetted her lips, and she began to fidget nervously. Ever the protective mother, her eyes darted from the children to him, pleading for patience and understanding. Her mouth silently formed the word, "Tonight."

Even with the shortened winter days, nightfall and the children's bedtime seemed like a lifetime away.

"Thank you, Claudius." His name oozed like honey from her lips. "I haven't had any coffee grounds in the house since their Pa left us." She poured him a cup.

He was quick to notice the subtle change of the word died to left.

"Sit down, children, breakfast is ready." Sam took a ladle, put a portion of grits on the plates, and added a small egg to three of them.

Claudius edged around the table to pick up his cup. Giving a quick glance into the pot, he noticed it was empty and there was barely any food on her plate. The situation here was worse than he first imagined.

Thank God I arrived when I did.

The children sat with their backs to the stove. Sam stepped between him, and the table. Her eyes went blatantly to his trousers and the hard shaft of his cock now jutting firmly down his leg. She lifted her face to his, and he saw the hunger in her eyes. With a nervous glance over her shoulder, she reached for him.

Her hand shook like the coiled tail of a rattler.

Samantha touched his crotch and lightly trailed her fingers down his ridged length. His hand tightened around the battered tin cup. Claudius clamped his jaw shut to keep from groaning out loud.

"Mommy, we're done."

He saw the regret in her eyes as she snatched her hand back and whirled around to her children. "Jake, you have chores to do. Make sure you look real good this morning. You know how Red likes to hide her eggs."

"Maybe Rachel would like to go too and help feed my horse?"

"Could I? Please!" She flung her arms up and down in excitement.

"It's may I, and yes, you may. Just don't get too close," she warned.

"Don't worry, Samantha, Rachel will be perfectly safe. Penelope is as docile as a lamb around children." Claude reached into his pocket, pulled out a sugar cube, and handed it to her. "Give her this, and she will follow you around like a little puppy."

Sam's eyes wistfully followed the sugar cube, and she licked her lips.

Within minutes, both children had donned their jackets, scarves, and mittens and were headed out the door. As it closed behind them, she turned and sat on the thick wooden bench they had just vacated.

Her hand lifted, reaching out to him. Claude held up another sugar cube, and she stopped with her arm suspended in mid-air. Her eyes narrowed as he brought the sweet confection closer to her mouth. He placed the small white square between her parted lips.

Sam's eyes drifted shut in delight as the sweetness bathed her tongue. A soft moan of sheer pleasure floated from her lips as she savored what he suspected was now a rare and all-but-forgotten treat.

She captured his fingers and brought them back to her mouth. "It's been a long time." With long slow strokes of her tongue, she licked his thumb and forefinger for any lingering grains of sweetness.

"Long time for what...sugar or sex?" His cock throbbed with anticipation as she sucked on his finger.

The heat of passion lit up her face. "Both." Lifting her other arm from her lap, her fingers closed around his swollen cock. She took the fingers she had been sucking on and placed them over a breast.

"I want you, Claude," her voice shook. "Tell me, is there a wife waiting for you at home?"

"No, not anymore." A shudder racked his body as her fingers toyed with the head of his shaft.

Placing a hand behind her head, he leaned closer and placed a soft kiss on her lips. Claude broke contact but didn't pull away. "I want you too, but I'm afraid we haven't time this morning."

"I know." Her voice echoed his regret.

With his second kiss, he allowed more of his desire to be known, just in case his erection wasn't proof enough. Her lips parted with only the slightest pressure of his tongue, and he tasted the sweetness of her mouth.

Samantha's free hand moved up his side and curled around his neck. Her fingers threaded their way through his hair and tightened on his long white locks. Claude captured her tongue and sucked on it, drawing it fully into his mouth. Her breasts pressed against his chest, and he longed to touch and fondle them.

She used the pause to loosen a button. "Touch me. Please."

Slipping his right hand in the opening of her dress, he found her flesh hot to the touch. At the center of her generous breast he found her nipple already swollen and he rubbed it between his thumb and forefinger.

"Oh! Claudius." She swayed towards him.

He moved his left hand along her leg, gripped the hem of her dress, and pulled it up over her knee. His fingers glided across her bare leg, dipped under the material, and up along the soft tender flesh of her inner thigh.

Muscles quivered beneath his fingers and she spread her legs farther apart. He reached the apex of her thighs and the thick mound of hair between them. The hunger in her eyes flared, and she whimpered. She was damp with need.

Claudius dragged a finger down the long cleft in her flesh. Her head fell back on her shoulders, and her breath came in short, open-mouthed gasps. Samantha rocked her hips against his hand, sending first one finger, and then a second one into her hot wetness.

Her eyes grew large and her breasts heaved as he inserted yet another finger into her. "I have small hands, Samantha. I'll be gentle."

The sound of children's laughter stopped him just short of having his whole hand inside her pussy. With deep regret, Claude stepped back and watched a flustered Samantha arrange her dress.

"Mommy! Mommy!" The door flew open with a bang. "Penelope ate the sugar and let me sit on her and gave me a ride inside the barn."

"That's great, Rachel."

Neither child seemed to notice Samantha's flushed skin and heavy breathing, or the fact that she wasn't looking at them but stared in awe at his hand. Claudius lifted his wet fingers to his mouth and slowly licked away her musk.

She made an effort to regain her composure and turned to her son. "Jake, did you collect all the eggs, feed the chickens, and the geese?"

"Yes, Mother."

"I don't see the milk pail. You know how important it is to keep ole Betsy milked twice a day. Last night you barely brought enough back for supper."

Jake looked nervous and glanced around the room. "I tried to milk her, honest. She didn't have any to give."

"Maybe she sprung a leak," Rachel suggested.

In spite of the seriousness of the news, Samantha smiled and gave her daughter a hug. "Cows don't leak, hon." She closed her eyes but not before he saw the pain and sorrow flash across them. "They go dry."

"But she might have."

"Rachel, why don't you take me out to see Betsy? Maybe she's sick or something." Claudius held out his hand.

"Could I give Betsy a sugar cube?" She latched onto his fingers and pulled him towards the door. "I know it would make her feel better."

"I'm sure it would. Now, why didn't I think of that?" Claude paused for his jacket and followed Rachel out the door.

Out in the barn, Claudius produced another sugar cube from his pocket and watched as Rachel eagerly fed it to the family milk cow. From the back corner of the building, he heard the squawking of the geese.

With the young girl holding his hand and skipping along beside him, Claudius went to investigate. In a pen, he found seven snow-white geese. He propped his foot on the lower board of the pen and stared at them.

"Do you eat them?" he questioned out loud.

"Sometimes." Her little face saddened. "But I don't like to." Then in child-like wisdom she added, "It's okay to eat their babies, but not these. They're pets!"

"Oh!"

“Yes! We raise the baby goosies during the summer and barter them off in the fall for winter supplies. Only this year a bad fox got in and killed all the babies.”

“I see.” With a plan forming in his mind, he took Rachel’s hand, and led her back to the house.

Chapter 3

Samantha sat trembling from the encounter with Claude. Her response to him frightened her, while at the same time she wanted more.

"Ma, are you feeling okay?" Jake asked with worry written across his face.

"Yes, son. I'm fine." Standing, she patted him on the shoulder. "I guess I got overheated standing so close to the stove."

He glanced at the empty frying pan on the stove. "You really need to eat more, Ma."

"I will, Jake." Samantha pulled him into her arms and gave him a hug. "I promise." *Just as soon as one of those geese lays a golden egg.*

Gathering up the dishes, she carried them to the washtub and added hot water from the stove. The door opened and Claudius and Rachel shook the snow off their boots and entered.

"Rider coming, Sam." Claudius glanced out the window. "Doesn't look like a drifter."

Wiping her hands dry, she went to the door, wrapped her shawl around her and stepped out on the porch.

He was a tall man, with a waxed handlebar mustache, black topcoat, and hat. The white silk scarf wrapped around his neck seemed out of place on a cold winter day. His horse halted in front of the porch.

"Mrs. Woodall." He doffed his hat and then stepped out of the saddle. "I'm William James, I own the coal mine near here. Sorry to hear about your husband. The Missus sent this over." He lifted a large string-tied sack from the pommel and handed it to her. "She thought you might could use a few things."

"The children and I appreciate your kindness, Mr. James. Please, tell your wife thank you for me. Won't you come in?"

"Thank you for your offer, but I need to be going." Mr. James stepped into the saddle, briefly touched the brim of his hat, and rode back the way he came.

Reentering the cabin, the children clamored around her.

"What's in the bag, Mommy?"

"Ma, who was that man?" Jake asked in a grown-up attitude.

"The owner of the mine. His wife sent these over." Untying the string, she pulled out a five-pound sack of flour, one of salt, and a slab of home cured bacon. In the bottom of the bag there was a jar of apple jelly, blackberry preserves, and a package of horehound stick candy.

Samantha took one stick, broke it in half, and gave a piece to each child. Their eyes lit up and big smiles spread across their faces. She wiped futilely at her tears and looked up at Claude. With a twinkle in his eye, he leaned against the stone fireplace.

"Do *you* know anything about this?"

"Me?" He shrugged his shoulders. "Never seen the *man* before today."

Thinking of the candy for the children, Samantha remembered the sugar cube that Claude had promised for Betsy. She could have sworn the pocket was empty when she had brushed her hand across it earlier. But then, her mind *had* been on something else inside his trousers.

"May we go outside and play, Ma?" Jake asked.

"Bundle up first and watch your sister...and stay away from the river bank. You know the ice on the Chariton isn't to be trusted." Samantha sat on the bench-seat near the stove.

"Yes, Mother," Jake frowned. "I know that. I'm not a baby like Rachel."

"I am not a baby!" Little Rachel huffed and put her hands on her hips. "Am I Claude?"

"No, Rachel." He laughed at her antics. "But you're too little to be playing near the river without an adult."

The door closed behind the children and she turned to Claudius. "I swore I'd never stoop to begging again, but you've reduced me to it." She started unbuttoning the top of her dress. "I don't want to wait until the children go to bed. Please, Claude." She knew she must sound pathetic, but she didn't care.

The distance between them closed until he stood in front of her and stepped between her spread legs. Samantha pulled the top of her dress open, raised the hem up to her waist, and offered herself to him.

He lifted his hands to her nipples. Strong work-calloused fingers stroked and twisted them to her exquisite delight. He lifted her heavy breasts, pulled and squeezed them, and then lowered his mouth to suckle at her throbbing flesh.

Samantha's fingers fumbled with the buttons of his trousers. Unhooking the last button, she pulled his pants down to his knees.

Claudius's teeth raked her nipple and she lowered her face into his hair as the sensation sent a hot flush over her skin.

Reaching inside his farmer johns, her fingers wrapped around the massive shaft of his cock and wrestled it from the confining cloth. "Oh! My!" Her thumb and forefinger barely touched.

Claude's heated breath bathed her breast as he chuckled.

She slid her hand up his long shaft and her fingers flowed over the bulbous wet tip. His hips jerked, and his teeth closed hard on a nipple. Claudius instantly laved it with his tongue and kissed her marked flesh.

Guiding him with her hand, Samantha rocked her hips to receive him. She jerked her head back as he slid past the outer-lips of her pussy.

"Oh! Oh, Claude!" She was suffocating, being ripped apart, and falling all at the same time. Her body stiffened in climax and she leaned on him, trembling with release.

"I'm...sorry." Samantha whimpered into his hair.

Claude lifted his head and kissed her. "For what, being a woman who needs passion in her life?" With a twinkle in his eye and a funny little twitching of his eyebrows, he continued sliding deeper inside her. He paused, allowing her body a chance to adjust to the massive size of his cock.

He started moving inside her, slowly pulling out and then easing his throbbing cock back inside her. Samantha floated on a sensuous cloud of contentment. It was nothing like she had ever experienced in her life.

Hot, hungry lips captured hers. His tongue delved into her mouth to touch and tease hers. Samantha captured his tongue, sucking on it, and swallowing his soft animal-like groans.

Claude's hands roamed over her breasts and tweaked her nipples, sending sensuous jolts of pleasure to the fleshly wall surrounding his cock.

Her fingers curled around long tendrils of his hair, holding him in place as she ravaged his mouth. Through the sensuous haze building around her, Samantha sensed something...different. His hips drove hard against her thighs, and she pushed it aside. Whatever it was, she would deal with it later. For now, all she cared about, all that mattered, was the feeling of Claude inside her.

Leaning her back against the table, she rocked her hips, meeting his every thrust. His wild eyes bore into hers. Low guttural moans and harsh breathing filled the air.

She climbed with him up passion's spiraling staircase. Reaching the top, she grasped the table as her hips lifted from the bench in a wrenching climax.

Claude's hands grasped the cheeks of her ass and with one last, hard driving thrust of his cock, she felt him explode inside her. His heat filled her, washed over her, and left her shaking in the aftermath of contented desire.

He sagged against her breasts, resting his snowy head on their fullness. Claude placed a tender kiss on a nipple.

"The children are coming." His eyes held regret as he pulled out of her, stuffed his wet cock back inside his farmer johns, and pulled up his pants.

Samantha gathered the material of her dress together, buttoned it, and tugged the hem down over her knees.

He leaned close, kissed her cheek, and whispered in her ear. "Tonight, after they are asleep?"

"Yes!" She answered almost breathlessly. Even with the proof of his climax slowly running down her leg, anticipation of their next time bubbled up inside her.

The door opened and she pulled herself out of her fantasy world as reality came bolting through the door, scattering snow across the floor. With a sigh, Samantha got up and began preparations for their noon meal.

"I noticed this morning that you need more wood." Claude took his coat from the rack by the door. "I'll take Penelope down to the river and see if I can find some to drag back."

She saw the 'no argument, you can't talk me out of it,' look in his eyes and in the set of his jaw. "Thanks, Claudius. I...*we*, appreciate your help."

He left, and she watched him trudge through the snow towards the barn. A few minutes later, mounted on his small but sturdy pony, Claudius rode towards the nearby line of trees marking the bank of the Chariton River.

Samantha busied herself around the kitchen. The soreness between her legs was welcome after the many months of forced abstinence. Her one and only regret, Claudius would soon be leaving.

Sleigh bells attached to Penelope's bridle announced his return. She stared in amazement at the two large logs being pulled behind the animal. Its muscles bulged and strained against the load. Snow flew from its hoofs with every step.

With an axe across his shoulder and his other hand resting gently on Penelope's neck, Claude whistled as he walked beside the animal.

A heavy sigh escaped her lips. Fresh bread baked in the oven and a small pot of beans sat cooking on the stove. *I suppose I should be thankful. If it weren't for Mr. James's visit...* She let the painful thought trail off unfinished.

The door opened and Claudius walked in carrying three fat rabbits. "I hope you don't mind, but I invited these to come for dinner."

She felt like crying. She wanted to run, throw her arms around him, and give him a big kiss. Samantha took them from his hand. "Thank, you, Claude. There's always room at the table for guests who hop in. Course, they will have to change and get washed up first.

"Jake, you know what to do with these." She handed them to her son.

In the afternoon, she stood across from Claudius as they pulled and pushed the large two-man bucksaw through the logs. He never seemed to tire but always conscious of her needs, he called several welcome breaks during the long, hard grueling work.

That evening, after supper, Claudius picked up his heavy fur wrap. "I'll be in the barn if you need me."

With the children fast asleep in their beds, Samantha wrapped her shawl around her and headed for the barn. Curious as to what he had been doing, she slipped silently inside.

The soft glow of the lantern cast a halo of light around him. Woodchips flew from the knife in his hand. On a wooden plank in front of him, sat a beautiful wooden flute and the block of wood he whittled on had the beginning shape of a doll.

Samantha bit her upper lip to keep from making a sound as his thoughtfulness brought tears to her eyes. As she watched his strong skillful fingers bring the doll to life, he laid the knife down and ran his hand through his hair. Her startled gasp sounded loud in the quiet stillness of the barn.

“Oh! There you are.” He turned his head towards her and a broad smile spread across his face. “I’m making these for Jake and Rachel. Christmas is only a couple days away.”

“I know.” On shaky, unstable legs, she crossed the hard-packed floor to stand beside him. “They’re beautiful. The children will love them.”

Her fingers trembled as she reached down, brushed aside his hair, and uncovered his ears. “You’re an...” She couldn’t bring herself to say the word. It was impossible. *They don’t exist.*

“Elf,” Claudius finished for her. He looked up at her with a twinkle in his eye. “I suppose you don’t believe in the *Magic of Christmas* either.”

Chapter 4 “*Magic*, I’m not even sure I believe in Christmas anymore.” Samantha shivered, backed up several paces, and crossed her arms over her breasts.

“You’re freezing.” He held his large bearskin wrap open and saw the hesitancy in her eyes as they shifted to the door and back again. “Please.”

Her feet seemed to move her closer against her will. She glanced from his ears to the woodcarvings lying in front of him. Claudius gave her a reassuring smile.

“You’re a real *Elf*.”

“Yes, Samantha. I’m a real, live Elf. Now, would you *please* sit down before we both catch our death.” He patted the space beside him.

A new wave of shaking sent her teeth to chattering and she sat beside him. Claudius gently wrapped the fur around them. Samantha picked up the wooden flute, turned it over and around in her fingers, and set it down. She did the same with the doll, lightly skimming the tip of her index finger over the small delicate features of the face.

“Thank you, Claude.” She handed the doll to him.

Their fingers briefly touched and he ached to hold her. “It’s my pleasure. They’re great kids, and I think their mother is pretty wonderful, too.”

She sat there for several minutes while the doubts and fear mounted inside him. Samantha turned her head, slowly lifted her hand, and once again brushed the hair from over his ears.

“Sam.” Her eyes shifted to meet hers. “They’re real, I’m real, and our making love this morning was most assuredly real.”

Her hand lowered, brushed the side of his coat, and lingered for a moment before moving away.

Reaching into the same pocket, he pulled out a sugar cube and held it to her lips. "Is this what you were looking for, Sam?"

Her lips parted, her tongue crept out to wet her lips, and then as quick disappeared. "Take it."

Trance-like, Sam opened her mouth, and he placed the cube between her lips. "It's as real as this is, Sam." He took her hand and placed it over the hard shaft of his cock.

Her eyes brightened with passion. "Is that part of the magic?"

It was like she was asking if he was real, or just an illusion. He could sense her need, as great or greater than his own, struggling with her new discovery.

"It was magic this morning, at least it was for me." Although her lips were close, Claudius held back.

"For me, too," she whispered. Her warm breath caressed his cheek.

With the light squeeze of her fingers around his cock, his willpower evaporated like the white vapor of their mingled breath. He wasn't sure who moved first, but it didn't matter. Her warm luscious lips covered his and the coldness of the night withdrew, driven away by her heat.

Her fingers pulled and tugged, undoing the buttons of his trousers and farmer johns as they moved to the nearby hay. Claudius lay back on the soft fragrant bed of clover and lifted his hips. Hungry hands pulled at his clothes, and he was soon naked beside her.

Samantha lifted her dress, pulled it over her head, and knelt beside him. Her hand went to his crotch, and her fingers fluttered over the swollen head of his cock. His body stiffened in response and a low groan of pleasure rumbled in his chest.

She lowered her head, her tongue replaced her fingers as she licked and covered his aching shaft with wet kisses.

Claudius ran his hands over her generous full figure, cupped her breasts, and rolled her nipples between his thumb and forefinger. The expelled breath of her sigh bathed his balls in heat.

He grasped her hair and pulled her face up to his. His lips sealed over hers, and his tongue delved into the warm recesses of her mouth. With reluctance, he let her break the kiss.

"I've been wet all afternoon with thinking about you," she whispered against his ear. Samantha brushed his hair away from his ear, her fingers traced the flared slightly pointed tip, and then she placed a lingering kiss on it.

She moved away, got on her knees, and rested her head on the hay. "I need you inside me."

Claudius rose up, scooted between her legs, and slid the head of his cock between the wet lips of her pussy. Her ass wiggled as he slid slowly deeper into her, giving her time to stretch and adjust to his size.

"I like the way you fill me, Claude," she moaned.

"It's pretty amazing for me, too." He ran his hands over her wide hips and down across the cheeks of her ass. He eased out of her, testing her readiness, and then drove his hard shaft into her with more force. Her body shuddered, she gasped, and the muscles surrounding his cock tightened.

Sam's wetness surrounded his cock like a warm silk glove. With each thrust of his hips, she grew wilder and ground her flesh against him.

"Mmmm...Ohhh!" Her low moans filled his ears, driving him on, even as the pounding beat of his heart threatened to overcome and silence them in his mind. Through the obscuring, sensuous fog, he heard her wanton begging.

"Harder...Claude! Fuck me...harder!" She emphasized each word with a backward push of her hips forcing him to comply with her desire. He grabbed her waist and held on as she bucked and ground against him.

His body stiffened, and in one last plunge into her depths, the night exploded around him in rolling waves of molten heat. Her responding climax tightened around him, coaxing another heated flush of release.

Claudius collapsed beside her and pulled the fur back over them. She snuggled close as he gave her a kiss.

"I've decided it doesn't matter who, or what you are." She whispered in a contented sigh. "You could be Santa Claus and right now, I could not care less."

Claudius chuckled. "Mrs. Claus might object rather forcefully if I were. This time of year, he's so busy that even she complains about the lack of sex."

Samantha rose up on one elbow. "There really is a Santa Claus?"

"Yes," he kissed her nose, "if, you believe in the magic of Christmas." In the dim light of the lantern, he saw her smile.

"I'm beginning to believe." She kissed him and gave him a hug.

Her breast pressed against him and he thought how wonderful it would be to wake up as the sun came peeking through the cracks in the siding and have her beside him.

She sat up and reached for her dress. "I need to check on the children."

"Will you come back?"

"When must you leave?" She looked at him with longing.

"Soon," he sighed. "I can stay tomorrow but then, I must go."

"That doesn't leave much time, does it?" Sadness filled her eyes.

"No, it doesn't." He lifted his hand and stroked her cheek. "I wish I could promise more, but I can't."

Samantha pulled the dress over her head and wrapped her shawl around her shoulders. "If I can...I'll be back." She stood to leave, paused, and picked up the long, slim flute. "I'll miss you when you're gone. Could you make something for me to remember you by in the long, lonely nights?"

"Name it, and it's yours."

Claudius saw the heated flush of her skin and she turned her face away. "Make me a carving of...your cock."

He was momentarily taken back by her request. "I've never made anything like that...but for you, Samantha, I will."

"Thank you." She hurried from the barn.

She couldn't believe she had actually made the request and further surprised that he had agreed. Samantha rushed through the snow, her feet already freezing in her thin worn-out boots. Knocking the snow off her feet, she eased the door open and entered the relative warmth of the cabin. Thinking the children were asleep, she crouched in front of the fire and added more wood, banking it to burn slow through the night.

"Ma," Jake's voice startled her, "does he make you happy?"

His mature question didn't really surprise her. Children grew up quick out here. Too quick really, they didn't have much opportunity for childhood happiness. She had found it pretty elusive as an adult.

"Yes," she smoothed his hair, "Claude makes me very happy."

Jake smiled up at her. "Good, I'm glad." He rolled over and closed his eyes. "Ma, Claude will be leaving soon, won't he?"

"Yes, son, he will."

"Why don't we have Christmas Dinner early while he is still here?"

"Jake, that would be nice...but what could we fix?"

She saw his face scrunch up and a tear escape from behind his tightly closed eyelids. "A goose," he whispered.

"We'll see, son. Go to sleep."

Samantha stalled for time, checked on the children and the fire one more time. She placed her hand on the door latch.

"If you're going back to the barn, Ma, you might want to take a blanket." She thought he had gone to sleep. "I'll watch over Rachel."

"When did you get to be so grown up?"

"When Pa ran off with that floozy, and I had to be the man of the house."

Samantha stepped through the door, and her tears froze on her cheeks. She entered the barn and Claudius looked up. His smile disappeared, replaced instantly with concern as he jumped to his feet, and hurried to her.

"What's wrong, Samantha?" He wrapped his arms around her. "Is something wrong with the children?"

"No, they're fine." She held his head against her breast. "I could use a little magic right now."

Claudius led her over to the hay, and she sat beside him and told him of Jake's comments. He held her in his arms without speaking, letting her empty her burdens on his broad shoulders. After all, there was nothing he could do, and it wasn't his responsibility.

Samantha looked over at the crude table. "You've finished the doll. It's lovely. I know Rachel will love it. Thank you."

Claude stuck the carvings under the hay. "Come, Samantha." Taking the blanket from her hands, he spread it over the hay. "It's getting late."

They undressed, crawled under Claude's fur, and cuddled up close. Samantha ran her hand along his face and her fingers softly combed his beard. Leaning closer, she kissed him.

"Goodnight, Claudius," she whispered.

"Goodnight, Samantha."

An inner contentment crept over her. The feeling, strange as it might be, brought mixed emotions. She knew he was leaving, and she didn't want him to go, but he was an Elf.

With his head pillowed on her breast and his hot breath bathing her nipple, Samantha sighed and drifted off to sleep.

Chapter 5

Predawn light showed through the cracks in the barn turning the floor into a shifting mosaic of light and dark stripes. Samantha placed a tender kiss on Claudius's lips, crawled from under the covers, and quickly dressed.

Fresh wood chips lay on the wooden plank.

He opened his eyes, stretched, and gave her a big, wide smile.

"Morning, Claude. I didn't mean to wake you, but the children will be needing breakfast soon."

"Morning, Sam. I'm glad we had last night together. I'll cherish the memory always in my heart."

"You sound like you are leaving."

"My dear, Samantha. I don't want to go. Nothing would please me more than to wake up every morning with you beside me, but..."

"I know." She turned away. It had been only a matter of time, but her heart ached that it was so soon. "Will you stay for dinner?"

"Yes."

She hurried from the barn before she gave way to tears.

Back at the house, Samantha stomped the snow off of her feet and opened the door. Jake was tending the fire and had water heating in the stove. He took one look at her, walked over, and put his arms around her.

"He's leaving."

"Yes, son." She patted his head.

"Can't you make him stay?" he asked.

"No! Claudius has things that he has to do." She leaned over and placed a kiss on the top of his head.

Jake dropped his arms, and Samantha stepped to the cabinet, removed the small hatchet, and laid it on the table.

"I'll do it, Ma."

"Are you sure?" She watched her young son pull on his coat and boots, and pick up the hatchet.

"Yes! After all, it was my idea."

With a resolve that she was sure he was far from feeling, Jake opened the door and headed for the barn.

"Mommy, is Jake going to kill a goosie?" Rachel sat staring at the door.

"Yes, honey. It's for Claude's Christmas dinner."

Rachel jumped up and ran to her, barreling into her legs. Samantha scooped her up and sat on the bench.

"I don't want him to leave." She whimpered against her neck.

"I know, dear. I wish he didn't have to leave either." Samantha rocked her daughter.

Somehow, Claude had woven his way into the hearts of her little family. At least, she would have company in her misery when he left.

"There is a lot to do this morning. Let's get dressed and you can help in the kitchen."

* * * * *

Samantha headed for the door to call Jake and Claude for breakfast when they walked in. Claude carried the freshly plucked goose and by the frown on his face, he wasn't too happy about it.

"Breakfast is ready." She smiled in spite of the frosty stare from Claude and the, "I'm sorry, Ma," lowered eye glance from Jake.

"You want to tell me why? I appreciate the gesture, but if you think that I require this," he held up the bird, "then you are sadly mistaken."

With her lips trembling and hurt shining through misty eyes, Rachel walked over and took his hand. "It's our Christmas present to you. Don't you like it?"

Samantha watched his scowl soften at her daughter's question. He looked up at her with a pleading cry of forgiveness, sank to his knees, and wrapped his arms around Rachel.

"Yes, dear. It's a lovely present." Claude wiped at his eyes. "Thank you. It's about the nicest present...I ever received."

Rachel gave him a bear hug around the neck and Samantha knew it was going to be just that much more difficult when he left.

"Breakfast..." her voice caught on the lump in her throat, "is ready."

Samantha tried to keep the conversation light throughout the meal, but taut emotions kept the mood somber. All she could think about was how this was the last breakfast they would share, and how empty her bed would be without Claude.

"Jake, after breakfast you need to do your chores."

"Yes, Ma."

"Might want to check on Bessie," Claude suggested. "She might have changed her mind about giving milk."

Jake got down from the table, picked up the milk bucket and egg basket. "I will, but I don't see much use in it." With slow, weighted steps, he headed for the barn.

Samantha started clearing the table.

"Here," Claude took a plate from her hand, "let me do this. You have enough to do today."

She felt the contact of his fingers against hers and turned away, lest he see her desire and the hurt his leaving caused. "Thanks."

A few minutes later, the door burst open and Jake thundered into the house. "Look, Ma! A whole pale of milk." He lifted the nearly full pale to the table. "And...and there's more eggs than I could carry in the basket."

"Maybe it's *magic*." Rachel stared at the eggs.

Samantha gave Claudius a thoughtful glance. "It just might be that there is a little magic in the air. After all, it is almost Christmas."

Claudius gave her a wink and turned back to the dishes he had been washing.

Throughout the long morning, she worked around him. It seemed as if the house had shrunk in size. Time and again, Claude found excuses to be in the kitchen and each time, they just happened to touch.

She dropped the large basting spoon and sat on the bench. "I'm all thumbs today," she complained. "We'll be lucky if anything is fit to eat."

Claudius stepped between her legs, lifted her chin, and right in front of the children, gave her a long embrace. "I have no doubt that it will be fit for a king."

The children giggled.

He stepped away, and she was reminded just how lonely she had been, before Claude arrived, and how much worse it would be once he was gone.

Claude went and sat in front of the fireplace. Rachel climbed into his lap and laid her head on his shoulder.

"Do you love my mommy?"

Samantha's heart fluttered as she waited for his answer, one she had secretly wanted to know, but unlike Rachel, been afraid to ask.

He paused and Rachel took must have taken it as a no. "Why did you kiss, mommy?"

"People kiss for several reasons, Rachel." He turned his head and sought her face. "I kissed your mommy, because...I love her."

Her heart burst with joy over his words and just as quickly filled with sadness. Claude was still leaving.

"If you love her, why are you leaving? I don't want you to leave."

Samantha found herself standing beside them. She knelt and placed her arms around Claude and Rachel. "Honey, Claudius has to go."

"I'll be back, if I can." He wiped a tear from Rachel's cheek.

"Promise?" she sniffed.

"Don't make promises you can't keep, Claude." Samantha warned. "Dinner is ready. Get washed up." She stood and went back to the kitchen.

Dinner, what there was of it, turned out to be every bit as good as Claude predicted it would be. However, the golden bird and the few trimmings she had managed did little to lighten the somber mood around the table.

Claudius pushed his plate back. "Thank you, Samantha. It was the best Christmas dinner I've had in a long time."

He looked around the table and she saw him blink away a tear.

"If you will excuse me," he stood. "I need to get my things from the barn."

If she knew what to say to make him stay, she would beg Claude not to leave. She wanted to run after him and throw herself at his feet. *He's leaving, and there's not a damn thing I can do about it.* Samantha sat at the table, waiting for the inevitable to happen.

A few minutes later, she heard Penelope's bells and his footsteps on the porch. With a heavy heart, she stood to greet him one last time.

"You have made this a most wonderful Christmas." Claudius gathered her children to him. "I made these for you."

He pulled the doll from under the heavy fur rug draped across his shoulders.

Rachel squealed with delight, and threw her arms around his neck. "Thank you, Claude. It's beautiful."

Next came the flute and he handed it to Jake. "Merry Christmas, kids."

The flute shook as Jake put it to his mouth and blew a shaky note. Tears came to his eyes and he flung his arms around Claude. "Please! Don't leave."

Claude gave each child a kiss on the cheek and stood. Samantha felt drawn towards him and dropped to her knees as his arms went around her. "I shall miss you, Samantha."

His lips sought out hers, and she responded with wild abandon as her children clung to them both.

"Your present is in the barn," he whispered in her ear, "under the hay where we slept."

Claudius gave them one last hug, picked up his gloves, and opened the door. She followed him outside and watched as he mounted Penelope. With a sad little wave, he rode off towards the north.

She stood there in the cold watching him ride away until he was swallowed up in the trees. This was worse than when her husband had left. Claudius's "I love her," trampled on the pieces of her broken heart.

"Go in the house, children." She stepped off the porch and started running through the snow towards the barn.

Inside, she knelt on the hay and remembered the passion that they had shared. Her hands dug impatiently through the hay. Her fingers came in contact with a smooth hard object and curled around it. Even without seeing what it was, she would know the shape anywhere.

Samantha pulled the wooden cock from the hay and held it to her breast. "Thank you, Claude." Lowering her head she kissed the smooth rounded head and ran her fingers over its length.

She was wet with need, and slipped it under her dress. A whimper escaped her lips as she rubbed the wooden cock against her pussy. "Claude!" She cried out loud as she slid it deep inside her.

* * * * *

Christmas morning after breakfast, Jake came running back into the house. "Ma! Ma, come quick, you have to see this."

Jake almost dragged her to the barn where she stared in amazement at her six geese, sitting protectively on nests full of eggs.

Epilogue

Claudius stood before the man and looked down at his soot-blackened boots.

"I know you haven't been happy here since your wife died, Claudius. Since your return Christmas Eve, I've noticed you seem to be even more despondent. Isn't there an elf here to take as a new wife and make you happy?"

"No, sir."

"You willing to give up your elfin powers for this other woman and her children?"

"As long as I can still make toys for the children, yes, I am." Claudius held out against hope that he could still do the one thing that had meant so much to him.

"You presume to set stipulations on leaving?" There was a twinkle in his eye and his large belly shook. "That's what I love about you, Claudius. You know how to get to my soft spot. Go, my friend. Claim your woman with whom you have found happiness. Let your toys continue to bring laughter to children, and may you both find the joy of Christmas forever in your hearts." The End

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