



Happy

Holly Day!

Holly's Christmas Adventure

by Denysé M. Bridger

It was snowing again at the North Pole, making an already magical place even more beautiful. Christmas Eve was less than a day away, and that day was one of the busiest of the year in the remote little hideaway all children dreamed about and longed to see. The Holiday season had arrived, and all were happy and in the mood for a wonderful celebration.

Santa Claus was smiling merrily as he made his way to the stables to check on his team of reindeer. At his heels was his wife's favourite pet, an exceptionally pretty Siberian Husky they had named Holly almost a year earlier. (Holly is short for Holiday, because that's when she was born!) The little dog romped cheerfully along at Santa's side, chattering away in her own fashion. The other canine members of the household had decided to stay in the kitchen, hoping to mooch a freshly baked cookie from Mrs. Claus, who was making delectable treats for all to enjoy.

The stable was warm and cozy, and Santa stopped at each stall to speak with his trusty reindeer and offer them a special treat. They had a big journey ahead of them the next night, and all were eager to get underway. Holly tagged along and barked a playful hello to each of her friends, Dasher, Dancer, Prancer, Vixen, Comet, Cupid, and Donner and Blitzen. All the reindeer knew Santa's huskies, and all were welcome in the reindeer's home.

"Well, Holly," Santa said as they crossed the snowy yard to head back to the toy workshop, "Another Christmas is almost here, and there's still so much to do. I swear," he went on as he bent to pat her soft, thick fur and receive a delighted kiss on the nose, "it gets busier every season. Now you run along to the house and get a treat."

He opened the door to the pretty workshop and Holly ran off to the back door of the house, barking to announce her return.

"Well, now, Holly-pop," Mrs. Claus said, using her special nickname for the dog, "I was beginning to wonder what had happened to you. It isn't like you at all to miss out on a treat. Come on," she continued as she followed the eager husky into the toasty warm kitchen.

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Nooknuk watched the merry old man and the husky part company at the door to the Toy Shoppe, and he stomped his foot in angry annoyance.

"About time," he muttered. "I hope that stupid dog doesn't come back, either!"

With that said, he made a dash for the big stable that Santa and the husky had just visited. When he opened the huge door and went inside his heart felt like it was going to explode with joy. After all these years, he was finally seeing them, the amazing reindeer team who traveled the world every year in a single night. He was awed and excited. Each stall had a brightly painted plaque on its door, telling him the name of the reindeer inside. When he came to the last in the row, he had to cover his mouth to prevent a squeal of joy from bursting forth. Rudolph! He peeked inside, and sure enough, there was the soft glow of red from the snoozing reindeer's nose.

Quickly, he woke each reindeer and slipped a special lead rope over each of their heads. He talked away to them as he worked, and they thought him a nice boy, so they made no fuss when he finally led them from the barn. It had started to snow and the ground was glittering like a carpet of diamonds. When they walked, the freshly packed snow crunched pleasantly beneath their hooves.

Nooknuk tried very hard not to giggle as he led the reindeer away from the cozy compound at the North Pole and off to where he lived, a few miles to the west.

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"Why don't you come to bed, dear?" Mrs. Claus suggested when she came into the study and found Santa asleep over his cluttered desk. The fire had burned low and he was snoring softly, one of his many lists still held loosely in his hand.

Santa roused himself with a start and looked around, blinking rapidly to clear his vision. Holly was at his wife's heels, and beyond the open doorway he could see the other huskies cavorting and playing happily. They'd put in a long day, too, running back and forth, helping in any way they could with the final preparations for the big ride tomorrow night. Now, they were enjoying a play period before they'd be tucked in for a long winter's night sleep.

"I'll be along soon, my dear," Santa told his plump and pleasant wife. She

smiled, and her rosy cheeks glowed in the soft light of his lamp. She looked at him for several moments as she considered whether or not she would object to his continued work, then she merely sighed and went to prod the fire back to life.

"I've left a snack for you in the ice box," she told him, then added with a bright smile. "And don't you go sharing it with that little dog, she's had more than enough for one day," she admonished when Holly stayed at his side. The dog barked once and went to kiss her good-night before running back to Santa and settling at his feet.

The Night Before Christmas. . .

Nooknuk watched from a safe distance as panic broke out at the North Pole. Santa had just gone to check on the reindeer and discovered they were gone without a trace.

"I bet this puts an end to Christmas this year," Nooknuk said to himself. "And about time, too. Santa's a fraud, he never really gives people what they want anyhow. I've been asking for years, and all I ever got was a dog that died!"

A tiny tear slipped from the corner of his eye and he wiped it away quickly. He'd loved "Moonbeam", the soft snowy Samoyed puppy he'd been given on his fifth Christmas. Then, after only a year, she'd died. His parents had tried to console him, had offered to buy a new dog, but he'd refused. He wasn't going to be that stupid again. And he certainly wasn't going to believe Santa ever again!

Irritated, and cold, Nooknuk decided to get back to his hide-out and see that the reindeer had enough to eat and were warm in their new home. So far, they didn't seem to mind being with him at all. He was thrilled. He'd always wanted reindeer, and had never been given one.

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"Well, now, my dear, you simply must find a way to deliver all the presents," Mrs. Claus said softly. "The children are counting on you."

Santa's face was a study in misery. How was he supposed to fly around the world in a single night and see that everyone got their presents if he didn't have a team of reindeer to pull the sleigh? It was impossible.

"There, there, now dear," Mrs. Claus soothed when Santa shook his head and turned to look out the window. Christmas snow was falling softly, and his

heart was filled with sadness for the first time. Even the elves were sad.

Sitting in the doorway, Holly the husky watched and fretted. There just had to be a way to help Santa, she thought. He was the nicest master a little husky could ever hope for, and Mrs. Claus made the bestest treats. She heard one of her playmates calling and ran off to see what she was missing.

'What is it, Shortbread?' Holly asked when she found the other huskies all together in a huddle outside the kitchen.

'We want to help Santa,' Garland explained patiently. He was the oldest of the crowd and he frequently had to keep the younger pups in line.

'So do I!' Holly snapped, annoyed a little bit by his tone.

'Well, then, what are we going to do?' Tinsel questioned, looking around at her friends.

'We could always pull the sleigh,' Holly suggested, her attention diverted by a rather enticing sugar cookie that was lying on the table, just waiting to be snatched.

Holly became aware of the silence and turned to face her friends, the cookie forgotten for the moment.

'That's a good idea,' Ivy ventured quietly. 'Why don't we go and make our offer?'

'Shouldn't we think about this a little more?' Frostie asked. He was one of the newest puppies and the idea of pulling a sleigh laden down with presents was a little bit frightening to the little husky.

'It'll be fine, Frostums,' Holly laughed and ran off ahead of them, stopping just long enough to grab the cookie off the table.

They met Mrs. Claus in the hallway and quickly surrounded her.

"My, my," she murmured as the dogs all started talking at once.

Swallowing the last of her stolen cookie, Holly tugged on Mrs. Claus's apron and tried to get her to go with her. After a few tugs, Mrs. Claus laughed and patted Holly's head.

"All right, Holly-pop," she smiled, "what are you and your friends trying to tell me?"

Holly trotted along, glancing back to make sure Mrs. Claus was still following. They stopped long enough for her to put on a lovely warm coat, then led her to the stables. Winter, one of the bigger dogs, ran ahead and pulled a bit of harness from a wall. The tinkle of silvery bells jingling accompanied him back to Mrs. Claus. Each of the other huskies went and got a piece of harness and arranged themselves in a team formation, jingling bells excitedly.

"My word, what a wonderful idea you have," Mrs. Claus said, clapping her hands with delight. "I think you've solved our problem, little ones," she beamed and rushed forward to hug them one by one.

"Let's go and see what Santa has to say about this," she added.

The huskies barked and romped as they crossed the snow-blanketed yard and rushed back into the house.

"My dear, Holly and her friends have come up with the answer to your dilemma," Mrs. Claus announced when she rejoined Santa in the study.

"Really?" Santa asked, hope shining in his twinkling eyes. "And what is your answer, little one," he asked when Holly bounded over to him and was scooped into his lap.

"The huskies will pull the sleigh in place of the reindeer," Mrs. Claus stated. "I've told the elves to load the presents. And, while you're gone, they're going to search for any trace of the reindeer."

"A dog team?" Santa mused thoughtfully. He looked down into Holly's face and chuckled merrily when she licked his nose.

"Of course," Mrs. Claus smiled, her hands folded together over her apron. "And where Rudolph's nose guided the sleigh, Holly's special eyes will see the way. She'll be your lead dog, won't you, Holly-pops?"

Holly nodded happily and barked her agreement.

Santa laughed heartily and rose, still carrying the squirming husky.

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Within the hour, all was ready for the round-the-world flight. Eight restless huskies waited, their harness tinkling and jingling with the bright little silver bells that adorned the leather. Behind them, the big, brightly trimmed sleigh loomed, huge sacks filled with toys and gifts for children all over the world.

Santa and Mrs. Claus came out of the house, with Holly trotting along beside them. Mrs. Claus kissed Santa and hugged her little Holly dog.

"Now, you behave yourself, Holiday," Mrs. Claus said sternly. "And don't try to eat at every stop."

"I hope this works, my dear," Santa said with a smile.

"I'm sure it will," she replied sweetly. "I'll have your slippers warmed and waiting for when you get home." She stood back and watched as Santa led Holly to the head of the waiting team.

"Now, Holly," Santa said as he attached her harness, "this is a lot easier than

you might think.” He looked down into her glowing eyes, one blue, and the other soft brown, with just a hint of blue showing at the upper edge. “Are you a little bit afraid?”

Holly glanced back at the big sleigh, and the uncertain looks being given to her by her friends, and she nodded when she turned back to Santa.

“Well, I have a secret to tell you that will make all this a whole lot easier for you,” he laughed and patted her soft, grey-tinted coat. “The magic that powers Santa’s sleigh is not in the reindeer. It’s in the hearts of every boy and girl all over the world who believe in the magic of Christmas. All you and your friends have to do is believe in it, too.”

Holly considered it for a minute, then looked back at her friends and playmates. They were all there, eight huskies, and her, the lead dog. Her sweetheart, Snowy, winked at her and she barked a happy bark at him. The others quickly sent up a howl of cheerful excitement.

Santa looked them over, pleased at their generous, loving hearts, and their desire to help out in the most difficult time he’d faced in years. His wife’s treasures, these nine happy huskies; as he scanned their wolf-like faces, he mentally called them off as he would his own precious reindeer: Ivy, Shortbread, Christmas, Snowy, Garland, Frostie, Winter, Tinsel, and pretty little Holly. A husky for every missing reindeer.

“Well, off we go,” he said and climbed aboard his bright red sleigh.

After one bad start, the huskies launched the sleigh into the twinkling, star-dotted sky and they were off in a flurry of jingling bells and happy howls and cheerful barks. . .

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The night passed by in a blur of stops and fly-bys, and the tired dog team was headed back north when Holly caught a familiar scent on the wind. She barked a signal to her friends and they, too, soon discovered what she was telling them was true. The reindeer were close by!

Santa felt them pull away in the wrong direction, and he tried to steer them back toward home. But, they were determined, so he finally allowed them to go where they would. A little while later, the huskies glided to a smooth landing a short distance from a small house, with a huge barn behind it.

“What is it, girl?” he asked when Holly began barking sharply.

She tried to run and was held up by the constricting harness. Santa

unclipped her and she ran straight for the barn and launched herself at the door. In a few seconds, the rest of the freed team had joined her.

Above the cacophony of barking and howls, Santa was certain he heard the well-loved voices of his reindeer. He had almost reached the stables when a young boy came around the corner of the house and saw him. Fright dominated the young Eskimo boy's face and Santa smiled.

"It's all right, son," he called out. They're just excited to have found their friends.

"So you made the trip after all," Nooknuk said bitterly. "Figures those stupid dogs would make you look good."

Santa was shocked.

"Holly and her friends are not stupid dogs," he said with some anger.

Nooknuk didn't answer, he merely went to the door of the big barn and opened it. The dogs rushed past him and went inside. A moment later, Holly came rushing out, barking and jumping to get Santa's attention.

Santa was still watching the boy, who was looking sadder by the minute.

"You're Nooknuk," he said, finally recognizing the almost grown-up boy.

"Yeah," the boy answered. "You remember me?"

"I gave you a puppy, one of Mrs. Claus's favorites. She knew how much you'd love her. And how much you needed a friend to love you."

"Moonbeam died," Nooknuk told Santa. "A long time ago. That's why I stole the reindeer. I always wanted one, y'know."

Santa nodded, thoughtful and regretful.

"I see you've taken very good care of my reindeer," he noted when he went into the barn and had greeted each of his friends.

"I love them," Nooknuk assured Santa.

"And they seem to love you, too, Nooknuk," Santa observed when the animals nuzzled the tall boy as they left their confinement and went out into the emerging dawn. The huskies were running around them, barking, asking questions and telling the reindeer of their own adventures that night.

"I'm sorry, Santa," Nooknuk said when they had closed up the stables and were standing by the sleigh.

"Where are your parents?" Santa asked.

"They left about a year ago," Nooknuk replied. "I didn't want to leave, so I ran away and came back here."

Santa nodded.

"Well, I have an idea," he said to the boy. "I'm taking you home with me, and

once we've had a long talk with your parents, if you'd like to stay, I could use a good stable-master to care for the reindeer all year 'round. Would you be interested in the job?" Santa asked with a twinkle in his eyes.

"Oh, wow!!" Nooknuk was astonished, but very, very happy. It was a dream come true. He finally had reindeer of his own. Sort of. "I'll take really good care of them, Santa, I promise!" he vowed, and climbed aboard the sleigh. The tired husky team clamored up into the now empty back and frolicked happily as the harnessed reindeer took them the final part of the way home.

Holly jumped up and leaned over to lick Nooknuk's face, her pink tongue leaving a warm tingle on the boy's skin, and an even warmer tingle in his happy heart. Nooknuk reached around and picked her up, hugging her close as they flew back to the North Pole.

Spring

'Nooknuk!' Holly barked to get the stable-master's attention and ran around his feet when he continued to ignore her.

Finally, Nooknuk took notice of her and followed her back to the main house. Santa and Mrs. Claus were waiting for him, smiling broadly.

"Well, it took you long enough to pay attention to her," Mrs. Claus noted tartly. "Holly has a gift for you, Nooknuk. A very special gift."

Nooknuk gave the husky an affectionate hug, then followed her into the study. Before the fireplace was a basket; Snowy and Holly's puppies. With Snowy watching her, Holly went to the basket and picked up one of the fluffy pups. She nudged the little fur ball in his direction, and the puppy spotted him. She ran for Nooknuk instantly and jumped for him when he bent to scoop her up.

Soft fur tickled his nose as he brushed his cheek against the small, warm puppy. He held her away so he could look closer at her, and saw she had her mother's odd eyes, and sharp markings.

"Holly wants you to have this one," Mrs. Claus said.

"She heard what you said, about Moonbeam," Santa added quietly. "I think it's her way of making you feel better."

Nooknuk, still holding the puppy, bent to kiss Holly and thanked her for the beautiful gift.

"What are you going to call her?" Mrs. Claus asked.

Nooknuk looked up and saw the beautiful Northern Lights far above them

in the darkening sky. He smiled and looked at Holly, who'd gone back to Snowy and their little ones.

"Do you think Aurora is a nice name, Holls?" he asked, grinning.

Holly considered it a moment, then barked her agreement. It was a fine name for a bright new puppy and a very happy new master.

"I think she agrees it will do nicely," Mrs. Claus said, then pointed toward the door. "Now, supper is ready, so let's go eat."

Holly, of course, beat them to the kitchen and was waiting at the table when they arrived and began laughing at her. . . .

THE END