

“A Christmas Visit to the Dearly Farm”

Sweeping over the DeVil mansion, down across the swamp and hiccup hole, the camera pans over the Dearly Farm at sunset. The harvested fields and grounds are covered with a thick blanket of snow. Suddenly the chow tower lights up with multi-colored lights which race up the silo from the bottom to the top where a blazing white star illuminates the barnyard below. A chorus of cheers erupts from a sea of spots, a score of farm animals and three humans, and unknown to them a single red fox.

The fox chuckles, “It’s Christmas Eve and the Dearly Farm is in a state of anxiety. The dalmatian family has worked long and hard over the weeks since I came to visit and take their list of Christmas wishes to Santa Fox.”

“Santa Fox?” you ask. “Why he’s the jolly old arctic fox who lives with Santa Claus at the North Pole.” The red fox explains, “You see, while Santa Claus takes care of the many human children of the world, Santa Fox brings gifts, goodies and blessings upon the animal kingdom.”

“A tall pine tree stands decorated in the middle of the yard near the water pump and evergreen bunting is draped over the doors and windows of the barn and farmhouse. With the traditional lighting of the chow tower all is ready. Now ninety-nine puppies are excitedly awaiting the annual visit from Santa Fox and the many gifts that he’ll bring this night.” The fox observes.

The fox slinks around the shadows thrown off by the brilliant star but stops and shrinks down as his sensitive ears pick up the roar of an engine racing down the road. Growing louder by the second. A hush falls over the barnyard as the dalmatians and then the humans also hear the sound. Over the hill a pair of headlights shine in the night, moving like specters across the countryside. Those headlights can only be attached to one car in all of Gruetly; the car of Cruella DeVil.

Speak her name and she appears in a screech of brakes and a cloud of dust. The door opens quickly and then slams shut. The dust clears revealing the lithe, pale visage of Cruella Devil, dressed in her favorite arctic fox furred coat.

“RUPERT!!” she bellows, waving her cigarette around in insane gesticulations, “What is the meaning of blinding me with that, that, that...” She points to the star atop the chow tower, “spot light!?”

“Cruella, “ Anita tries to reply, “We’ve decorated for...”

“Yes, yes, I know, Christmas!” Cruella interrupts, “Well that’s all well and good but you see I don’t share your views of this holiday. And your raucous holiday decorations are clearly un-ignorable and oppressive to my rights.”

“You can’t be serious Cruella!?” Roger inquires.

“I’ve never been more serious!” Cruella bellowed and pushed past Roger and towards the heavy electrical switch on the side of the silo.

But Pongo and Perdy were there instantly blocking her way and growling menacingly.

Cruella backed off and then turned and poked a boney finger into Roger’s chest and stated slowly and clearly, “Turn...it...off.”

But Roger would not budge.

"NOW!!!" She screamed at the top of her raspy lungs.

Roger remained steadfast, staring past Cruella's enraged visage.

"Fine!" She blasted, turning on her heel and marching back to her car. Reaching the door she opens it violently and turns to issue her ultimatum, "Expect a phone call from my lawyers tomorrow!" She dives into her car, slams the door and the car into reverse and speeds away showering the assembly with pebbles and dirt.

Almost in stereo, Anita and Perdy boil, "Oooo! That Cruella always ruins everything!"

Their rant was followed by a round of growls and grumbles as all the dogs, animals and humans spirits of Christmas were soured by Cruella's appearance. Then a lone voice began to ring out over the din and sing, "Silent night. Holy night. All is calm. All is bright..." The song was magical and soon everyone was singing in his or her own way the carols of the season.

They sang well into the evening and the pall of Cruellas' visit was lifted from everyone's heart and the anxiety of Christmas crept in yet again. It was a good anxiety and one born of anticipation of good things to come. It was with the Christmas spirit that they all broke company and retreated to their beds with dreams of a brighter Christmas Day tomorrow.

As peaceful as it seemed nigh midnight, my sixth sense told me that all was not going to be well tonight. So I stood sentry while the farm slept.

The stars tracked their never-ending flight across the sky when I first spied movement in the shadows. I sniffed the air for a scent and perked my ears for any sound. I was rewarded.

"Ooof." moaned a pudgy male voice.

"Orace you nit, watch where you're goin'" whispered a lanky voice.

"Sorry Jaspa" The pudgy voice apologized, "Eets so dark I can barely see me 'and in front o' me face."

"Shut it." Rasped the other, "Do ya wanna wake up the whole ruddy place?"

Horace and Jasper. The two bunglers who do Cruella DeVil's dirty work and right now up to no good on the Dearly Farm.

"Brrrr. Me feet are cold Jaspa." Horace complained.

"Well shut your gob an' ya won't let so much 'ot air out yerself." Jasper jeered.

"Oh. Thanks Jaspa'. Yer a real pal." Horace praised dinwittedly.

"You're a ruddy git." Jasper said under his breath then quickly added, "Come on 'Orace. The sooner we turn that light out, the sooner we'll find ourselves back in our warm beds."

They emerged into the light and moved slowly, hunched over, towards the chow tower.

I skulked across the barnyard and to chow tower myself, far quicker, quieter and far less visible.

"There it is 'Orace." Jasper pointed out, "That be the switch."

"Girrrrrr." A high-pitched, small growl drew their attention downward to where I was standing in their way.

"G'on ya mangy thing." Jasper waved his arm, "Git outa the way."

I stood my ground and worked up lather around my muzzle, looking rabid.

Both men stood and stared for a moment then Jasper said, "Er, 'Orace. Take care o'im."

"What? Me?" Horace asked, "Why don't you do it?"

"Because the job suits your level of talent and professionalism." Jasper replied, playing on Horace's dim wits.

"Oh, right." Horace agrees, smiling up at his partner then he takes a quick few steps forward and cocks his foot back to kick me out of the way.

But I stood fast and growled menacingly. I watched his foot swing down in an arc. I closed my eyes in anticipation of the blow. Then I heard ringing in my ears. Sure I expected that, but not until after feeling the pain of being kicked. The ringing became jingling, and the jingling became louder and louder. I cautioned a peek and there was Horace, frozen in mid kick, his toe bare inches from my head. Jasper stood behind him, frozen still as well.

There was a streak of red and brown and a barely audible, swish, as the runners on the sleigh came to a stop.

"Hello Brother!" laughed a white furred fox from the seat of the small red sleigh.

"Shh!" I shushed, "You'll wake everyone."

He chuckled, "Nonsense! Not while I'm here." He pointed at the humans, "They'll not move again until I leave. No man or animal will unless I wish them to."

"Is that how you do it?" I asked him, "You stop time."

Santa Fox nodded and smiled, "It works well on dens of five or six, but when you're stop involves one hundred plus, I need to enlist a little help. Come on over Swift. I'd like you to help me."

"What about them?" I asked, pointing at Horace and Jasper.

A glint of mischief flickered in Santa Fox's eye for just a moment, but he said calmly, "We'll take care of them before we leave, I promise. Now come on and lend me a paw or two. We haven't much time."

I ran over eagerly. The closer I came the warmer I felt inside with what must be the magic of Christmas. I felt light as a feather and as young as a new born kit. All the blessings of the world filled my very core. I yerfed like a giddy child, "Ready Santa!"

He smiled the truest, most loving smile any creature could bestow upon another and handed me an empty bag. Then we both set off to the barn to spread the love and joy of the holiday.

Christmas morning dawned bright and sunny over the hills and fields blanketed white with Christmas snow. One by one the dalmatian puppies stirred awake and began yapping in anticipation waking still others up. In a matter of minutes ninety-nine black and white spotted puppies were raising a cacophony of yips and barks begging to be let out.

As Roger, Anita, Nanny, Pongo and Perdy stepped out from the back door of their quaint farmhouse their attention was drawn to the sound of sirens racing down the road toward their home.

"Gracious me, would you look at that?" Nanny stammers, pointing at two frozen forms standing by the chow tower, the smaller pudgier one, reaching for the electric switch.

"Horace and Jasper." Roger spat, "I should have known she'd try something sneaky and underhanded on Christmas Eve."

Roger, Anita, Nanny and adult dogs began to move toward the two unsavory men, but then the three police cars followed by Cruella scream over the last hill and into the driveway turned them back around to face this new dilemma.

"Arrest them all and take their dogs straight to the pound!!" Cruella screamed at the officers, pointing at Roger and Anita as she lept out of her car, "I'm pressing charges for disturbance of the peace and whatever else I can think of!!"

"Before you get started Cruella," Roger said calmly as the first of the police officers reached him, "Perhaps you'd like to explain why your "grounds keepers" are standing frozen on my property?"

The Dearly's parted to give the police and Cruella a clear view of Horace reaching for the switch while Jasper stood behind him watching on. Both of them had stood frozen in place since very early this morning and were coated with a light dusting of snow.

Cruella threw up her hands and screamed, "Horace! Jasper! You idiots!"

"Miss DeVil." The police captain said to her in a thick Irish accent, "I'm thinking you'll be coming downtown with me. There be a few questions to answer for I would think." He turned to a nearby officer and commanded, "Put 'er in the car." Directing the other policemen from his unit he directs, "Gather those two and put them in the back of the wagon."

The officer spring into action and the Captain stepped forward to offer his apologies, "I'm sincerely sorry 'bout all this and on Christmas Day to boot. I'll be sure to keep Ms. DeVil downtown for a goodly bit o' time today. She has a lot to answer for." He tipped his hat to them and turned to leave with a hearty, "Sounds as if there be a few puppies anxious for their presents. I'll leave you to your festivities. You have a Merry Christmas."

The police captain returned to his car and in short order they drove back to Gruetly.

Roger reached the doors to the barn, unlatched the catch and the doors swing wide revealing a pile of brightly wrapped presents that have been left under the decorated pine tree.

"Yay!!!" A chorus of puppy voices yaps and cries out as they race to the tree to find their special gifts.

"Hey look!" Shouts Dipstick, "I got a metal fire truck with an extending ladder!" He tested the wheels and then began to push it around making siren sounds. His tail wagging happily as he drove the truck somewhere where he could use the ladder and pretend he was a great fire dog.

Patch Plus found the box with his name on it. He tore open the wrapping, lifted up the lid and found, "A plush ferret! I got a plush ferret!" He snuggled him closely, feeling the soft plush faux fur against his whiskers and muzzle. "Mmmmm." He sighed, eyes opening slightly and noting that there was something else in his box. "Huh?" He murmured reaching into the box to pull out a book, "The Silver Star Story" by Captain Underpants and a starter deck of Yu-Gi-O cards. "Oh Yes!!" Patch barked happily.

Freckles found his gift, left unwrapped aside from a wide red ribbon and bow. He nuzzled the ribbon up a little and crawled under it enough to lie down in his new sheepskin covered doggie bed. "Very nice." The dalmatian yawned, "Soft and cozy..." He fell back to sleep in minutes.

Tic-Tac hung back, not wanting to seem anxious or too eager. He felt he was more mature than his other siblings. So he sat and watched as the other puppies shouted or called out in joy at the gifts that were left for them. Squeaky toys, bones, balls, toys and other things they carried off alone or in small groups to enjoy their Christmas gifts.

In minutes the area under the tree was littered with papers and empty boxes. Tic-Tac stood up and strolled down to the tree and sniffed around. "If Santa left me something," He thought, "Then it'll still be here."

His nose parted the paper shreds then stopped and his head lifted out of the wrappings nose to nose with Freckles.

"Wha?" Freckles asked sleepily.

But Tic-Tac was more embarrassed and he just stammered "S, s, sorry Freckles." He leaped over the other dalmatian and inadvertently kicked up a piece of wrapping which floated down and covered Freckles again.

Almost completely around the tree, a despondent Tic-Tac was ready to give up when he bumped into another box. He moved the papers off of it and found the tag. "To Tic-Tac, from Santa Fox." It read. It was nearly twice his size and a smile broke out across his muzzle despite of himself.

Pongo, Perdy and several other pups had quietly walked back over, impressed with the size of the gift and its box.

Tic-Tac didn't realize he had an audience. He was absorbed by the gift in front of him. Tic was having trouble holding back his exuberance as he suddenly began to rip away the wrappings and the box to reveal a stainless steel table, with shelves and built in holders for test tubes and beakers. As if this wasn't impressive enough, a smaller box was lying on the tabletop. "College Level Chemistry Set" was written on the side.

"Oh yes!!" Tic-Tac leapt into the air in his joy, "Thank you Santa Fox!"

A light voice over his shoulder startled him. "It's very nice. But your father and I want you to be very careful with it." Perdita said.

"I, I will Mom." Tic-Tac stammered, realizing he wasn't alone and feeling a little ashamed as his burst of emotions. "Um...I could use some help getting this up to my lab." He barked meekly.

"We'll help you Tic-Tac!" Barked several of the assembled pups and they each took a corner and helped push the table up and into the barn.

I smiled as I watched the scene unfold before me. The joy from my time with Santa Fox this morning was still fresh in my heart. I whispered a heart felt wish down at the family of dogs and humans below,

"Merry Christmas to all. And to all a good night."

Swift Fox
(Glen Rockhill)
Christmas 2002