

*The Day the Twins Stole Jesus*

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My name is Balthazar. I'm one of the Three Wise Men, the gentleman with the green robes and the black skin who carries a goblet of myrrh. I was sleeping in my Nativity set, dreaming of snow-in-a-can, when Donkey bit me on the toe.

“Donkey,” I said. “It is the morning before Christmas. Why didst thou bite me?”

“A thousand apologies, Balthazar,” she said. “The Twins just stole Jesus, Mary, and Joseph.”

“Figurines,” I whispered. “Wake thyself up.”

Melchior pulled his robe tighter around him. “I can't get up, Balthazar, I just can't.” I understood Melchior's melancholy: a few weeks ago, Michael, the boy Twin, had tried to jam a coin into Melchior's box of gold and had broken it off.

Donkey hobbled across the dining room table on four bare wires attached to tiny, ceramic hooves. Molly, the girl Twin, had broken the ceramic from Donkey's legs whilst feeding her spaghetti.

Donkey nudged Gaspar. “Wake up. We have to retrieve the Holy Family.”

Fifty-three years ago, on our very first Christmas out of the box, young Grandma and young Grandpa had posed next to our Nativity set for a photograph. This had become our people-family's Christmas tradition, which would be ruined – by the Twins - if we didn't rescue the Holy Family by tomorrow.

I heard Mom come down the stairs. “Figurines, fall over.”

She saw us lying on our sides like captured chess pieces. “How did you guys get knocked over?” As she ran her finger over the jagged stubs where Gaspar's feet used to be, she bit her lip. When Mom was a little girl, she had given Gaspar a ride on a toy train, and his feet had broken off when the train had crashed.

She harkened to the Twins. “Do you have the Holy Family?”

“We're playing with them,” said Molly.

After Mom departed, Molly whispered to Michael, “Mommy doesn't know what we did to them.”

Just before dark on Christmas Eve, Grandma and Grandpa arrived.

Grandma walked over to us. “Hello, old friends. Everything okay with you?”

How I wanted to tell her that the Twins were mistreating us!

“Alice, the Holy Family is missing,” said Grandma to Mom.

“The Twins have them.” Mom picked me up and showed me to Grandma. “Look at poor Balthazar. Molly likes to bath him, and his robes have faded so much that you can’t tell they’re green. I’m going to take the Holy Family from them.”

“I’m sure the Twins won’t harm them,” said Grandma as she looked at her watch. “Isn’t it time for dinner?”

We spent the night before Christmas without baby Jesus, Mary, and Joseph for the first time in our lives. None of us slept a wink.

Christmas morning arrived, and our people-family gathered around us.

“Merry Christmas, kids,” Mom said to the Twins. “Do you have the Holy Family?”

Molly opened the lid of the blue tackle-box she held.

Grandpa read from the Bible. “*And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea...*”

Michael took Joseph from the tackle-box and placed him in our Nativity set. The Twins had jammed a top hat upon his head and had replaced his missing staff with a curly straw.

“*...to be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child...*”

Molly set Mary amongst us. Her hands were covered with tiny mittens made from red construction paper. Her cloak had been painted hot-pink, and it smelled of permanent-marker.

“*...and she wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn...*”

Molly put baby Jesus in the manger. He was swaddled in a blanket of tissue and tape. A blue baby-bonnet covered his head.

The Twins turned to their grandmother and smiled.

Grandma burst into tears.

“Molly, Michael,” said Mom. “You’ve not been careful with Grandma’s Nativity set.”

Michael’s lower lip trembled. Molly let out a yelp.

“I’ll clean them up right away,” Mom said as she reached for baby Jesus.

Grandma stopped her. “They’re...so...beautiful,” she whispered. She picked up baby Jesus and held him to her heart. “They’re perfect in every way.”

“Mary’s cloak is permanently hot-pink,” said Mom.

“The Twins were trying to repair the Holy Family,” said Grandma. “Isn’t that right, Molly?”

“We love the little people,” said Molly. “That’s why we play with them so much.”

Grandma picked up Gaspar. “Alice, every time I look at Gaspar’s broken feet, I see you as a little girl, giving him a ride on that toy train. For the rest of your life, Joseph’s curly-straw will remind

you of the way that Molly and Michael looked this very morning. These figurines are more beautiful now than they were the day we took them out of the box.”

“I’m sorry, kids,” said Mom. Molly and Michael hugged their mother, and our people-family had a goodly cry.

Grandpa blew his nose on a handkerchief. “Let’s get some coffee before Grandma’s picture.” Our people-family went to the kitchen.

As I peered at baby Jesus, my marble eyes almost popped out. His tissue-paper blanket and baby-bonnet disappeared, and his original, hand-painted colors returned.

Melchior clutched a shimmering, new, box of gold.

Mary’s hot-pink cloak faded, replaced by a cloak of cobalt-blue.

Gaspar lifted up the hem of his robe: his feet were back.

Joseph’s top hat vanished, and a new wooden staff appeared in his hand.

Donkey now stood on legs of sturdy ceramic.

My robes were once again dark-green. We all looked brand-new!

“Balthazar,” whispered Gaspar. “It’s a miracle.”

“Or maybe a gift,” I said. “From Grandma. Somehow we see ourselves the way that she does.” I heard our people-family put their mugs in the kitchen sink. “Places, figurines.”

As our people-family gathered around us their expressions did not change, which told me that, to a stranger’s eye, we were still old and broken. But to those who loved us – and now to ourselves - we were beautiful.

Grandpa stood behind the camera. “Everybody, look this way and smile.”

If thou ever visits Grandma, ask to see her Nativity photograph from the day the Twins stole Jesus. The other figurines in my beautiful, beloved Nativity set will be gazing at baby Jesus and will be making holy faces, the way they’re supposed to. But I took Grandpa’s advise. I’ll be looking straight at the camera, and I’ll be smiling.