



A TALE OF TWO KIDNEYS

AN IGGY YUGO AND SAM ADVENTURE

THERE'S A STORY SANTA CLAUS LIKES TO TELL about Iggy, Yugo and Sam. It is kind of a sentimental story, so that when he tells it, sometimes his voice cracks a bit and sometimes there is a tear or two. If he tells the story after he has finished a couple of tumblers of egg-nog and brandy, there are always plenty of tears. Egg-nog can do that to him.

The story that Santa likes to tell goes like this: One Christmas, not too many Christmases ago, Santa found himself faced with the problem of little Lisa Munroe and her kidneys. Lisa Munroe was eleven years old and lived in a big house where she kept two dogs, a lizard, a parrot and a mom and a dad. She was small for her age, with a long thin face surrounded by a tangle of blond hair she hardly ever brushed. She had big green eyes, which seemed even bigger when she smiled. Unfortunately, for the two dogs, the lizard, and the parrot, not to mention the mom and the dad, little Lisa did not smile that often.

Lisa had two kidneys. Most everyone does. They come in pairs, like pants and scissors do. Like everyone else's kidneys, they looked like a pair of big beans buried deep down in the back of her belly. These big 'beans' might look sort of silly, but they do important work down there, cleaning

the blood, maintaining blood pressure and keeping the bladder nice and full.

Little Lisa's kidneys did not work quite like that. In fact, they did not really work very much at all and what work they did do, well, it just was not very good. They did not clean her blood very well. They barely cleaned any of it. Things had become so bad, that if she cut her finger, instead of a bright red drop appearing, a blob of gooey brown stuff came out instead. Her blood pressure was high when it should be low, and low when it should be high. Sometimes this made her dizzy, or feel like she might faint. Other times, her heart beat so loud in her head that she thought her whole body might explode. And her bladder was, well, it is probably best not to talk about that at all. Santa never does when he tells this story.

Because of this, little Lisa was always sick. Her belly hurt, her back hurt and her head hurt. Even her teeth hurt sometimes. She was weak and frail and her bones poked out of her skin, which was as white as Christmas snow. She spent most of her days in bed. Since she spent all of her nights there as well, she hardly ever played with the two dogs, or the lizard or the parrot. She did not even play with the mom or the dad, but then, moms and dads are never much fun for playing with anyway.

So, when Santa received a letter a few weeks after Christmas from Little Lisa asking him to please, please, please bring her some new kidneys, so that she could feel happy again, and smile, and play with the two dogs and the lizard and the parrot (and even the mom and the dad), he did not know what to do. Santa was no doctor, he knew nothing at all about kidneys. And, there are some things that even Yugo cannot build.

For a long time, little Lisa's letter lay on the far left corner of Santa's big wooden desk. That was where he tended to pile the work that he found too difficult or too troubling. Just far enough away that he did not have to look at it, but close enough to remind him that he was going to have to deal with it eventually.

Sometimes letters and files stay on the far left corner of Santa Claus' desk for a long time. Near the bottom of that dusty stack of papers, there is an old yellowed letter from a young boy in Germany, who wanted his own army for Christmas. That letter has lain there for over a hundred years and Santa has never really known how to answer it. Perhaps he should have done something about it a long time ago.

It looked like little Lisa's letter might slowly work itself to the bottom of Santa's too-hard-to-deal-with-today-maybe-I-will-look-at-it-tomorrow-pile where he might never even look at it all. And, so it might have been, if it was not for Iggy.

Iggy is the kind of elf who always likes to help out. He is not happy unless he is doing something for someone. Most of the time he is in

Santa's workshop making toys, which is doing something for a whole lot of people. But, on this cold December Thursday, he was in Santa Claus' office, searching through his papers.

Now, do not suppose for even a moment, or a tenth of a moment or even less than that, that Iggy was snooping or spying or doing anything else that he was not supposed to do. Iggy is not that kind of an elf.

Iggy was looking for a coupon for a free movie rental that Santa had asked him to find. Santa had given up after looking for it himself for nearly an hour. He had looked everywhere for it, though he had, of course, avoided getting anywhere near the too-hard-to-deal-with-today-maybe-I-will-look-at-it-tomorrow-pile, which was where Iggy found the coupon, right on top of Little Lisa's letter.

Santa was very pleased to see the coupon again, but was less pleased to see the letter. He had not quite forgotten about it, even though he might have tried to, just a little bit. He did mean to get back to it, one day soon, maybe even tomorrow, when it would not seem quite so difficult.

"What's this?" asked Iggy, reading little Lisa's loopy handwriting.

"Just a letter," answered Santa, slowly. Normally, when Santa spoke there was a twinkle in his eye. Sometimes there was even a sparkle. But there was none of that on this cold December Thursday. Not even a glimmer. "Give it here," he commanded. He reached for the letter, but Iggy twisted away from him.

He took a step back from the big man as he finished reading. "How long have you had this?" he asked, lowering the letter.

Santa grabbed the page from Iggy's hand. "Not long," he answered. "A few days. Maybe a week."

Iggy glared at Santa Claus and snatched the letter back. There was no twinkling or sparkling of any kind at all to be found in that room. Even the tinsel decorations by the windows had stopped gleaming.

"How many weeks?" asked Iggy.

Santa crossed his thick arms and pouted. "I don't know," he said. "37, I think."

"Thirty seven weeks!" gasped Iggy.

"Maybe 38," corrected Santa.

Iggy glared at him. The tinsel on the opposite window turned black.

"Santa, you've made this poor girl wait almost nine months! That's much too long!" Santa slowly shuffled between Iggy and the far left corner of the desk. There were other letters there that had sat on the corner of that desk for much longer than 38 weeks that he did not want Iggy to see. Some of those ones were written on parchment.

Iggy read the letter again. “We have to do something,” he said.

Santa snorted. “Well, of course we have to do something, but what can we do?” He swept an arm across the vast room. “We are toymakers, not doctors. This is a workshop, not a hospital. I want to help that little girl more than anything. But I don’t know where to begin.” He turned and looked again at the too-hard-to-deal-with-today-maybe-I-will-look-at-it-tomorrow-pile. “So I never even start.”

“Well it’s time we started,” said Iggy. “We’ll deal with this now. And we’ll deal with those,” he pointed at the too-hard-to-deal-with-today-maybe-I-will-look-at-it-tomorrow-pile, “ ... we’ll deal with those ... tomorrow.”

IGGY TOOK THE LETTER BACK TO ELVES BARRACKS B. Elves Barracks B is the long low building, just south¹ of the North Pole where Iggy shared a small apartment with his two friends, Yugo and Sam. Yugo was the crafty one, always inventing something new, or rebuilding something old into something better. Sam was the hungry one, always eating something, whether it be new or old.

When Iggy reached the little apartment, he found Yugo working on a small toy that looked a little bit like a spinning top.

“What’s that?” he asked, “a top?”

Yugo looked up at Iggy and shook his head. “No, it’s a bottom.”

“A what?”

“Look at this,” said Yugo. He took the device and wound a length of string around it. Then he held it under a table and pulled the string. The toy flew out of his hand and began spinning along the bottom of the table top. “It spins on the bottom of things. So I call it a bottom.”

“Sounds rude,” interrupted Sam. He walked out of the kitchen with a large slice of pie in his hand. He set the dish down on top of the table top; which, depending on your point of view, was also the bottom of the table bottom. It was not however, the surface on which the bottom was

¹ Since every direction from the North Pole is south, Elves Barracks A, C, D, E, F and G are likewise also located ‘just south of the North Pole’, though Elves Barracks A is quite a ways from Elves Barracks G. It makes it a little tricky to deliver mail there, at least until you find your way around.

spinning, which was the bottom of the table top or the top of the table bottom, they are the same thing. He dropped a large lump of what looked vaguely like whipped cream onto his snack. It landed with a loud plop and oozed over the edge of the plate and onto the bottom of the table bottom. “Now that’s a topping,” he exclaimed proudly. He raised a forkful to his mouth. “Bottoms up,” he said.

Iggy wiped a blob of the imitation whipped cream topping from the top of the table top and set the letter down on the bottom of the table bottom. At that moment, the bottom on the bottom of the table top wound down and fell from the top of the table bottom to the ground.

“I need your help,” said Iggy. He read the letter aloud to Sam and Yugo. Yugo nodded thoughtfully while Sam chewed noisily. “Little Lisa has two bad kidneys. In fact, her kidneys are no good at all,” he finished. “We need to find some new ones. And we need them in a hurry.”

Yugo walked over to a book shelf and pulled down a thick volume. He set it the book down on top of the table top and flipped through the pages until he found a large coloured picture of a kidney. He idly picked the bottom off the floor, wound the string about it and spun it onto the bottom of the table top. It skittered across the top of the table bottom with a whirring noise.

“This looks pretty complicated,” Yugo muttered aloud. He ran his finger along the tiny type in the text as he explained; “kidneys are made up of something called nephrons, and there are more than a million of them in each kidney. And each one has something called a glomerulus² inside it all tangled up with these little tubules. Look at all the loops and things, and they are all different.”

Yugo slammed the book shut. The bottom fell from the top of the table bottom and onto the floor. “I can’t make one of these. It’s way too complicated.”

Iggy lowered his head, sadly. He was sure that Yugo would be able to make something that could help. What were they going to do now?

Yugo tapped his finger on the bottom of the table bottom. He spoke again, more slowly this time. “I don’t think I can make one, but, I think I could hook one up.” He opened the book again and read for a few moments. “If I had a couple of good, healthy kidneys, I’m pretty sure I could put them in there. We could replace her unhealthy kidneys with some good ones.”

² The word ‘glomerulus’ is a Latin word which means ‘little ball of yarn’. All the millions of glomeruli in your kidneys look just like little balls of yarn. Do not be fooled by this. Although they look like little balls of yarn, glomeruli are delicate organic tissues and are not actually little balls of yarn at all. So, you should not let your cat play with them

“Of course, Lisa is just a little girl,” said Yugo, as he flipped quickly through a few more pages. “So, adult kidneys are much too big for her. I’d need to get my hands on a pair of little ones.”

Sam scooped a second lump of topping onto what remained of his pie. “Where in the world are you going to find a pair of little kidneys that would fit inside an eleven year old girl?” he asked.

Iggy lifted his head and smiled. Yugo smiled back.

They both looked over at Sam, who was sweeping the last crumbs from his plate into his mouth. He stopped, mid-crumbsweep and looked back at Iggy and Yugo. Without a word being spoken, the idea which Iggy and Yugo shared gradually flickered into Sam’s consciousness.

“You can’t mean that we ... ” he whispered.

Iggy and Yugo nodded.

Sam pressed his fleshy fingers into his fleshy wrinkled forehead. “No no no no.” He said. “No.”

“Oh yes,” said Iggy.

“Oh no,” repeated Sam.

“Oh yes, oh yes” said Yugo.

“Oh no, oh no, oh no,” said Sam. But he knew it was hopeless. He might argue and complain or stomp his feet and wave his fists, but it would be of no use in the end. In the end, he knew, he was going to be climbing into Yugo’s snowmobile and heading out to see little Lisa Munroe and he was going to be coming back one kidney lighter. It did not matter what he said or where he hid, he knew in his heart, and in his kidneys, how it was all going to turn out in the end.

He stood up and looked down at his belly. It was a prodigious belly. A belly built on pizza, donuts and Twinkies.™ Grown on cake, cheeseburgers and chips. And finished with gallons upon gallons of cola. A belly without equal at the North Pole, and there is at least one other belly there of some considerable renown. Sam’s belly was truly the work of a lifetime. He did not want to part with any of it.

He placed his hands on either side and whispered quietly, “I’m really going to miss you ... ”

AND, IN THE END, THINGS TURNED OUT pretty much as Sam knew that they would. This is the part of the story where Santa sometimes has to wipe away a tear, particularly if his egg-nog and brandy glass is almost empty.

Iggy, Yugo and Sam left that afternoon in the snowmobile. Sam cried a little himself as the snowmobile rose up into the dark December night and a little more when it softly landed in little Lisa Munroe's backyard. Yugo retrieved a giant medical bag from the back of the snowmobile and together they knocked on the front door.

The two dogs barked a bit and the parrot squawked loudly, but the lizard did not make a sound. Sam mixed himself a banana and bacon milkshake while Iggy explained to the mom and the dad who they were and why they were there. They were sceptical at first, and at second, but by at third or at fourth, Iggy was able to bring them around. He can be pretty persuasive when he puts his mind to something.

Yugo laid out his tools and instruments on the top of the kitchen table top. There were gerrywinders, particularizers and a number of sillendroobles – Yugo does not do ordinary work, so cannot work with ordinary tools.

And the work that Yugo did that December night was extraordinary indeed. He had two bad kidneys out on the bottom of the kitchen table bottom and two good kidneys back in their place quicker than a lamb can shake his tail thrice.

Iggy and Sam were pretty groggy and sore afterwards, but even before Yugo put away his last scrutiminge, little Lisa Munroe had a smile in her eyes and a glow on her cheeks that the mom and the dad had not seen for years and years. By the time he had packed up the snowmobile with his big bag and his friends, little Lisa was playing with the two dogs and the parrot and the lizard and she had never done that before.

Sam still has a scar on his lower back where his left kidney once was and Iggy has one just like it where his right kidney used to be. Sometimes when it is cold outside (which is pretty much all of the time) they hurt a little bit, but not even Sam minds that too much. It reminds him that Christmas is about giving, and that one Christmas, he gave the biggest gift he had to give. And that is a pretty good feeling to have.

The End