



**MICHAEL  
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# A Frankenstein Christmas

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**MIKE FINLEY**



It was the night before Christmas, and there was no busier person in all the world than jolly Saint Nick. The long months of preparation for tonight were over. His bag was loaded, the sleigh was idling outside, the reindeer were champing at their bits, eager to get going.

"You know my dear," Nick said to the lovely Mrs. Nick, who sat in her rocker, working on her needlepoint, "tonight I think the deer and I will break our personal best time -- 10 hours, 18 minutes, 57 seconds, set in 1947."

"Yes, dear," Mrs. Nick said, and bit the thread with her teeth.

"The sled has been rebuilt, the deer are in terrific shape with that new high-protein chow we got in Sweden, and with this great new quartz watch, I can tell the time in twenty different zones around the world."

"Yes dear," said Mrs. Nick.

"And look at me," Nick said, patting his immense round belly.

"Why, I'm fit as a fiddle and ready for love. Oh, ho ho ho ho ho --"

Suddenly Nick pitched forward, his face as red as a berry, and his eyes grimacing with pain. "My pills -- on the mantle!"

"Oh, Nick," said Mrs. Nick as she shook a pair of nitroglycerine tablets out of the little brown bottle, "I've told you you had to lose some of that flab. You're not a young elf anymore, you know. But oh, no, not you. Honestly!"

Nick knew it was true. He was not 300 any more -- 500 was long behind him. He should be slowing down, or taking better care of himself. All that fruitcake, pfefferneuse, and plum pudding had taken its toll of his waistline. Cholesterol? Nick shuddered.

Then he grew very sad, as he thought about the children around the world, expecting his visit tonight. All those stockings hung, all the letters written, all the dreams and hopes of toys. It would be the first Christmas he missed!

Nick called his elves together. They stood around in the Nick living room -- where they were seldom allowed -- and looked at one another apprehensively. "I'm afraid I have some very grave news for you," he said.

"You're -- you're letting us go?" one asked. "On Christmas Eve you're letting us go?"

A lot of ugly things were said before St. Nick hooshed them quite. "No, no, no, nothing like that. The problem is that I can't deliver the presents tonight. Doctor's orders." Nick eyed his wife sheepishly.

Most of the elves shrugged and made for the door. Morale had not been good at the Pole for several seasons -- things had gotten so commercial, and what with the lousy economy, Nick had had to outsource a lot of toymaking to sweatshops in Pacific Rim countries. So a lot of the elves took this bad news in stride.

But not one elf, whose name was Clark. Clark had worked hard making destroyer rayguns all summer and fall, and the idea that no kids would ever get pleasure from these toys really burned his cookies. The other elves gathered around the stove to talk shop, but Clark wasn't in the mood. He bundled himself up and went for a walk down by the bay.

A gentle snow was falling on the glistening waters, and the stars overhead twinkled like Christmas lights that now, only he would see. Suddenly, he saw a plume of spray out in the water, and as he watched, an immense killer whale surfaced, its black flanks and white stripe gleaming in the moonlight. The whale was nudging a huge chunk of ice, pushing it toward the shore.

As the whale pushed the ice onto dry land, Clark gasped. Inside the ice he could make out the features of some deformed, dead, two-legged creature!

"Help! Help!" Clark called, and when the other elves came running they hoisted the chunk of ice onto a sled and hauled it back into the elfhouse, propping it next to the fire. All the elves clustered about in awe as the ice melted around the hideous face and figure underneath.

The elves shook their heads at the creature's clothes. He wore torn green pants, a purple sport jacket that was about three sizes too small, and a dirty black shirt. The elves, who bought their clothes by mail order, and prided themselves on their tailoring, were appalled.

And they all gasped when one eyebrow twitched, the gray nose wrinkled itself, and the monster's eyes opened wide!

Frankenstein looked down at all the little men. A sudden feeling of confused, barbaric rage overtook him. He remembered being chased over the ice floes by hostile villagers with torches. The ice cracking under his feet. His plunge into the icy blue waters. his frozen body carried northward by the frigid currents. And now -- elves.

"Rrrr!" Frankenstein flailed his limbs and them and sneered. All the elves took about ten tiny steps backward.

"I think we have to tell Nick about this," Clark said.

"I'm not telling him," said one Elf, whose name was Stinky, who was not very popular. "You tell him."

"Very well," Clark said, "I will."

Mrs. Nick let Clark in, but cautioned him not to get Nick excited.

"Uh, Boss, we have a certain, uh, problem here," Clark said.

"Can't it wait, Clark?" Nick was beside himself. "Can't you see how miserable I am."

"But ... but ... but ..."

"If only there were someone who could take my place," Nick said. Mrs. Nick wouldn't have any part of it -- the truth is, she hated Christmas, and she wasn't nuts about kids, either. The elves? Little people could be so -- irresponsible. "I've been wracking my brains," Nick said. "Who? Who? WHO!?"

Clark swallowed hard, then spoke up. "Nick, you may think this is a crazy idea, but -- "

Suddenly, Frankenstein barged through the doorway, but tripped over the lower half of the Dutch door, and did a stiff-legged double somersault before landing, wide-eyed, in Nick's lap.

"Ahh!" said Nick.

"Ahh!" said Frankenstein.

They came from different worlds, and yet, the jolly old elf with the can-do attitude took one look at the misbegotten, hitherto evil monster. And he thought he saw something -- a spark, perhaps, that, if nurtured and cared for, could be fanned into a raging storm of goodness. Call it intuition, call it a crazy hunch, but Santa saw in Frankenstein someone he could do business with.

"Hello, my friend," Nick said kindly. "And a very, very merry Christmas to you."

When Frankenstein saw the love and sympathy in the sweet old elf's eyes, something snapped in him. His restless, violent soul sagged. A new feeling, of belonging, and trust, overtook him. In his mind he made himself a promise -- to do anything this wheezing old man wanted.

"Martha," Nick called over to his wife, "I think I've found my man."

"Yes, dear," Mrs. Nick said, and bit her thread.

Nick told Frankenstein what he needed done, and handed him the long computer printout of every child, his/her address, what he/she wanted for Christmas, and whether he/she had been naughty/nice.

"Here's my watch," Nick said. "You have all night, but you must be done before dawn." Then he handed Frankenstein something very, very special -- his magic sleigh lash. "Use this to get the deer up," he said. "This was given me 700 years ago by the Bishop of Wroclaw, in a game of poker. It has never failed me."

He stole a glance to where Clark and Mrs. Nick were sitting. "I'd appreciate it if you keep the bit about the lash to yourself."

"Eh," Frankenstein nodded.

Full of holiday resolve, Frankenstein shook Nick's hand stiffly, and walked out into the blustery night air, toward the deer pen. Frankenstein knew that, if he was to succeed at Nick's challenge, he needed to get the

reindeer solidly behind him. One look at him, though, and that's exactly where they went, high-tailing it onto the snowy tundra. Comet, Cupid, Dasher, Dancer -- the whole lot of them. Rudolph was the worst, racing around in frantic circles, bug-eyed and making this horrible skronking sound. That was the last straw. Now he would never be able to deliver the presents for St. Nick. Frankenstein knelt in the snow and began to howl.

Ow-ooo! Ow-oooo!

Frankenstein looked up after a moment of howling and saw a dozen pair of eyes looking at him -- white wolves, lean and hungry, licking their lips. Frankenstein got an idea. He rose, motioned to the wolves to stay right where they were, and went into the barn for a bag of dog chow.

The wolves hadn't had a decent meal in days, and quickly snarfed up the crunchy morsels. Several of the animals sidled up to Frankenstein, bushy tails wagging gently, sniffing his formaldehyde-smelling hand. "Now," he said, "you -- help Frankenstein!"

Hitched together to Nick's dog sled, the ten wolves began to scamper across the snow. "Mush!" Frankenstein shouted, and cracked his long musher's whip. With a jolt the ten wolves lifted up off the ground and began pulling. Within a half hour, Frankenstein and his team had crossed the DEW Line and found the first few huts where the nomadic Indians lived. Frankenstein had the team land while he dropped the appropriate toys by the doors of the huts.

"Hmm -- this easy," he thought.

By ten o'clock, they had serviced all of northern Canada. It was not until they came to the large cities that he began experiencing problems. Chimneys, he found, were an impossibility for a man of his dimensions.

Archways and doorways posed similar problems.

Frankenstein frightened the dogs. In turn, he was frightened by the cats.

For an individual created by electricity, he had a remarkable amount of trouble negotiating the Christmas light cords.

In about every hundredth home, a little child had stayed up late to catch a glance of the beloved Mr. Nick. Frankenstein left that child extra toys, but probably not enough to make up for the cost of the therapy the child would need.

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Frankenstein staggered as never before, through New England, the Mid-Atlantic states, the southern seaboard. He was like a monster possessed as he methodically read off Nick's list and left the right toys at the right house.

All that work created a powerful appetite in him. Many households left a saucer with two cookies and a glass of milk for him. But he figured out early that nearly everyone had a raw turkey somewhere in the kitchen. You just had to look until you found it.

The Midwest, the Great Plains -- on and on he went. And yet, his watch told him that he still had hours of travel to do before dawn, the deadline Nick had set. The wolves were going strong, but they were no match for the pace set by the more experienced reindeer. A few seemed tired already.

Just as Frankenstein was polishing off the last street of houses on Bainbridge Island, in the state of Washington, the pack collapsed in the sand, whimpering, their tongues flagging, their tails drooping.

"Ehh!" Frankenstein cried, flapping the magic lash over their heads. But it was no use -- they were tuckered out.

Frankenstein scratched his head. What could he do to keep Nick's promise to the kids of the world? He frowned, and looked out over the waters of Puget Sound.

Suddenly, a trumpeting sound, and the signal spout of the same killer whale that had brought Frankenstein to safety just hours before.

It was uncanny, but there it was.

The whale headed straight toward Frankenstein and ploughed headfirst onto the sandy beach. Frankenstein, not knowing what else to do, struggled onto the top of the huge animal's head, cracked the magic lash in the air, and --

ZOOM!!

The killer whale streaked through the mountain air like a jumbo jet. Toys flew out of Frankenstein's bag and fell mysteriously down, down through the sky, breaking into parcels and heading for the chimneys of individual children.

"Whoopee!" Frankenstein shouted, grinning from ear to ear. But he clapped so hard that his right hand came loose, and hung from his wrist by a thread. Frankenstein's smile vanished.

"Must finish job before sun come up," Frankenstein said, clenching his jaw.

And so he did.

Frankenstein visited the home of every boy and girl in the world that night, led through the wee hours by the careening, cometing killer whale.

And when he made his way back to the North Pole early that morning, Nick and Mrs. Nick looked up, astonished to see him back so soon.

"What in blazes?" Nick wanted to know. "Don't tell me you forgot Texas!"

But Frankenstein had not forgotten Texas, or anywhere. His mission was accomplished, and he handed the bag, printout, and magic lash back to the old elf.

"My stars," Nick said. "Look what time it is. You finished in 10 hours, 18 minutes, and 56 1/2 seconds. You -- you beat my record by half a second."

Nick grew suddenly very quiet, and looked away.

Frankenstein started to pat Nick on the shoulder to comfort him, but remembered his hand had fallen off.

"Nick forget -- Frankenstein have lots of help."

Nick brightened. "Yes, of course. You had help. Mine was a solo act. They are completely different things. Come here, my boy, and let me give you a Christmas kiss!"

Nick and Frankenstein hugged, and the elves, who had gathered outside the window, let up a big cheer.

"Hooray for Frankenstein!"

"Oh, my," Mrs. Nick, said, noticing that Frankenstein's hand was hanging by a thread. "Let me get my needle."

"You know what, dear," Nick was saying. "Next year, perhaps I can share some of the work with Frankenstein again. I'm not getting any younger, and we have no one else to carry on after me. Hey, I know. I'll go on one of those liquid diet and lose some of this jelly from my belly. Maybe get one of those stair-climbing machines and set it up out in my workroom. I'll get back into my old fighting form, and we'll have the best Christmas time ever"

"Yes, dear," Mrs. Nick said, and bit her thread.

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**Michael Finley** writes about topics relating to culture and change. His book with Harvey Robbins, *The New Why Teams Don't Work*, won a Booz-Allen & Hamilton Global Business Book Award. Mike has also been named one of a handful of "Masters of the Wired World" by Financial Times Press. BH SmartDocs™ are published by BrownHerron Publishing and are sold exclusively on Amazon.com ([www.amazon.com/brownherron](http://www.amazon.com/brownherron)).

