

The Jingle Shaker

Grades 11-12

Once upon a time that was not to terribly long ago in a land that isn't that far away, there lived a little somebody. I call him a somebody because no one knew exactly what he was. At first glance, he may have appeared to be an elf or a little gnome, but this was not the case. I can understand how this misconception came to be when I consider his apparel and height (for he was only a mere two feet tall.) His garb consisted of a bright green jerkin, blue pointed slippers, red and white striped socks and a stocking cap with a pom pom that fell almost to his knees. The most important part of his ensemble, however, was the faded leather bag he wore at his side. For, you see, this little creature had a very special job and the unusually large salt shaker in this bag had a great deal to do with it. In the shaker, was not salt, but Jingle as most people called it. Jingle is a very special mixture consisting of a cup of good cheer, a happy new year and tidings of comfort and joy. If sprinkled in just the right place at just the right time, Jingle dust can cause great happiness and that special feeling that everyone assumes the Christmas season brings. Jingle shaking is a long and glorious tradition which is passed down from shaker to shaker. No one is quite sure how it works because no one is exactly sure where these little people come from. Don't ask me, because I simply couldn't tell you because I simply don't know. Some people believe that they appear as a result of the chemical reactions that take place in gingerbread when it is left out too long and that when they die they become snowflakes, but no one really knows for sure. All we do know is simply that Dobb was the current Jingle Shaker and he was very good at it. Homes all over the country were filled with laughter and gaiety because of him.

One night two little girls snuck out of bed and stole down the stairs to peek one time at their Christmas tree which they had just decorated that evening. I don't want to encourage children who may be reading this story to sneak out of their beds in the middle of the night, but there is no sight quite like a just decorated tree all lit up in the darkness. These two tiny girls were standing with their little eyes all aglow when suddenly they saw a flash of bright green and red out of the corner of their eyes. Dobb was rarely ever seen because he was such a clever Jingle Shaker but every so often some very fortunate person got just a glimpse of this little man as he retreated out a window. Dobb could break into any house in the world with the little tools he carried around in

his bag (which is not as disturbing as it sounds, dear reader, because we all know he meant no harm whatsoever.) Some children would look out their windows at night and see a dark spot move across the face of the moon and they would wonder what kind of strange bird flies with a stocking cap flying out behind it. Not many people know that the Jingle Shakers love to fly by the light of the moon when making their rounds throughout the world to the houses that need cheer. In the morning people will wake up with that special Christmas feeling but no one will notice the slight trace of a sparkly substance around their Christmas trees which is the only sign that Dobb had been there and completed his task. Yes, my dear reader, Dobb had a very satisfying job providing cheer around the world. For, with him around, the world would always have that extraordinary Christmas feeling.

Or so he thought.

One day in the course of history changed Dobb's life forever. It was one cold winter's night with a full moon shining in the sky as was always the case on the night Dobb returned to the earth from wherever he had been to start the season of Jingle Shaking. He flew through the cold night air swiftly, leaving nothing but a whisper behind him. But the minute Dobb's little slippered feet touched the snowy ground in front of one of his regularly visited houses; he knew something was terribly wrong. For you see, the house was no longer there. All that remained on the spot was the dark skeleton of charred beams and blackened bricks scattered about in the snow. The horrible sight rose up in the night like some disfigured monster and Dobb fell back in dismay. His mind was racing with the possibilities as he lifted into the air and flew across the countryside. What could have caused such a tragedy? As he gazed down he could see miles of wreckage and debris spreading farther than the eye could see in all directions. Dobb's heart began to beat wildly. He was so confused. This was town that should have been brilliantly lit up with green and red lights and filled with the laughter of children. But all that rose up through the night from this little village was curls of stifling smoke from smoldering buildings below. Dobb flew down to the nearest house that still stood and quickly cracked a window. He had to find out what was wrong and he had to do something about it. Once inside, Dobb tiptoed across the floor over to the fireplace where the tree should have been. He was shocked to find none but pulled out his shaker anyway. With a flick of his wrist in a motion he had done thousands of times, Dobb watched the Jingle fall silently to the floor. It glistened there, without a noise and Dobb stood nearby. In the

corner, a quiet sound reached him and he looked up just in time to see a small child raise her head from a nest of blankets. At this moment she should have been at once affected by the shimmering mixture on the floor and she should have been filled with happiness and cheer. But Dobb had never seen a face more filled with sorrow in his life. The little girl looked at him with hurting eyes sunken into her skull framed by dirty, knot filled hair. She looked at Dobb as though he was a phantasm from a dream and to tell you the truth, dear reader, Dobb gazed the same way at her. He nimbly turned and hopped to the windowsill and disappeared from the house as the girl lay her tired head back down. Dobb caught his breath outside the window, leaning against the side of the house. He could feel panic seeping into his mind. Who had done this?

All that night Dobb flew. And the next nights he flew. He flew round the world and back again. Everywhere it was the same. Hurt. Hunger. Death. Everywhere he saw no trees lit up in the night. He saw no children with smiles. He saw no happiness or cheer. He went from house to house frantically shaking his mixture, but to no avail. It simply didn't work now. He fell down in exhaustion in one cottage on the coast of France shaking his poor little tired arms off. In the next room he could hear a young woman crying and the Jingle on the ground was doing nothing. He used up the very last bit of his special mix in Germany in a particular house and he had the same results as he had gotten for the past two weeks. Nothing. Dobb flew, exhausted through the cloudy sky, not sure what to do next. Suddenly to his right he heard a loud whirring and soon several planes came into view through the clouds. Dobb saw through the window on the sides dark cruel faces, filled with hate. The cargo doors on the belly of the planes opened as they dropped their deadly load on the city below. The sky was instantly lit up with huge searchlights, sweeping back and forth over the night sky. Dobb, blinded by the brightness, was suddenly caught in a strong wind and fell behind the planes and turned round and round into a stormy cloud. Snowflakes whirled around him and the wind wailed in his ears as he fought to gain control. Eventually he fell violently to the ground and was left lying in the wake of the powerful storm. Dobb turned over with great difficulty as pain tore through his little body. He just didn't understand. Two tiny tears fell softly from his eyes and froze quickly on his cheeks. The strong wind remained but the sky had cleared of the dark clouds. Above, a blanket of stars painted the sky and shed a cold light on the new snow. On the horizon, he could see an orange glow of flames licking at the sky and the horrible whining of bombs could be faintly heard. Dobb tried to swallow a little sob unsuccessfully. It was Christmas Eve and the world was supposed to be

filled with cheerfulness and joy. And it was filled with hate and cruelty. And poor little Dobb felt like it was all his fault. He was supposed to be the Jingle Shaker. And his Jingle mixture was supposed to make people happy. But it couldn't anymore. Not in a world like this. Off in the distance, a lone church bell began clanging out *Hark the Herald Angels Sing* into the cold night air. "*Hark the herald angels sing, glory to the new born king. Peace on earth and mercy mild, God and sinners reconciled.*" Dobb shook his head as more tears fell from his eyes. "There is no peace on earth," he whispered into the howling wind. His heavy heart felt as though it might break in two. Suddenly, as the church bell ended its chorus, a new song reached Dobb's ears. He lifted his head and saw in the distance, a little cottage all aglow with candle light. The sight filled him with hope and he rose to his feet and began trudging through the snow across the field. When he reached the house, he rose to his tiptoes and peeked through the window. A small family was gathered around a rather scrawny evergreen tree singing one last carol before bed. Dobb gazed in amazement at the joyful looks on the people's faces. He had witnessed happy people before, but this was nothing like anything he had ever seen. The family finished and they made their way, one by one, over to the narrow stairs to turn in for the night. One small boy lingered at a little display on the floor before the tree and his mother smiled down at him before taking his hand and leading him to the loft. When all was still in the house, Dobb pulled his little tools out and made quick work of the lock on the cottage door. The floor creaked as he tiptoed inside and he made his way over to the tree. There were no presents beneath it, only a rough wood carved scene. A mother, a father and a little baby in a feeding trough. Dobb bent down and touched the child softly. A thought suddenly hit him. *Perhaps happiness is not something that I can give. Perhaps you can be still be happy even if you have no presents at all and you have no tree or lights. Perhaps you can be happy in a world like this.* Perhaps there is something more to Christmas.

-THE END-