



## 'Twas the Night Before Christmas

'Twas the night before Christmas and the kennels were still,  
with most dogs now asleep having eaten their fill.  
The Labradors sprawled out, quite snug in their beds,  
while visions of ANYTHING edible danced in their heads.

And the Golden Retrievers and Shepherds curled up on the floor,  
some twitched in their sleep and some even did snore.  
The dog food was stacked in the feed room with care,  
in hopes that a trainer soon would be there.

On the window ledge, one of the kennel cats lay,  
surveying the lawn at the end of this day.  
Something was different, that little cat knew.  
Tonight something would happen, it had to be true.

For that day as the workers had left to go home,  
they'd wished Merry Christmas! before starting to roam.  
The dogs had noticed it too during this past week's walks;  
the trainers seemed just that much happier and eager to talk.

In the mall where they worked through the maze of people and stores,  
there were decoration and music and distractions galore!  
Most dogs pranced along without worry or fear,  
but some balked at the man on the sleigh and those fake looking  
deer.

The cat was almost asleep too when he first heard the sound,  
a whoosh through the air and a jingle around.  
It reminded him of a dog's collar when the animal shook,  
but this sound kept on growing. He'd better go look.

From the ceiling there came a faint sort of thunk,  
as the kennel cat climbed to the highest pile of junk.  
Once before people had worked on the roof  
and come down through the trap door to a chorus of "Woooof!"

But the dogs still were quiet, all sleeping so sound,  
as this man dressed in red made his way right on down.  
He patted the cat as he climbed past his spot,  
and then made his way right to the trainers' coffee pot.

A shepherd sat up, not fully awake,  
then a Golden followed her with a mighty loud shake.  
That did it! All the dogs sprang to life with loud noise.  
In spite of the din, the old man kept his poise.

He filled the pot full and it started to brew,  
then he pulled up a chair and took in the view.  
Dogs all around him, so carefully bred,  
he knew well their jobs, the blind people they led.

Some had stopped barking and looked at him now,  
while others delighted in their own deafening howl.  
Laying a finger in front of his lips,  
the jolly old man silenced the excitable yips.

"You all may not know me, but I'm Santa Claus,"  
the old man smiled and took a short pause,  
While he filled up his mug with hot liquid and cream,  
"I've always wanted to stop here. It's been one of my dreams."

The cat had climbed down and was exploring Santa's sack.  
"Yes, little kitty, that's an empty pack."  
Santa smiled as he drank and looked at those eyes,  
deep brown ones and gold ones held wide in surprise.

Some of these dogs, he'd seen just last year,  
in their puppy homes, cute and full of holiday cheer.  
He'd seen the effects of a pup on the tree,  
but now they were here at the school, just waiting to be.

"I didn't bring you presents or bones just to chew.  
I'll tell you something better, what you are going to do."  
"You all will work hard and the trainers will share,  
both praise and correction, gentle and fair."

"You'll go lots of places and face big scary things.  
You'll ride buses and subways and hear fire sirens ring."  
"Cars will drive at you but you will stand strong,  
not moving into danger, not moving toward wrong."

"And then just when you think that this trainer's the best,  
the kindest, and funniest person, toss away all the rest,"  
"That trainer will begin to ignore you and give you away,  
handing your leash over despite your dismay."

"Now the person who pets you and feeds you will be  
a blind person. That's a person who can't see."  
" This man or this woman may see just a tad,  
but their view's missing parts or the focus is bad."

"So you, well trained dogs, will act as their eyes.  
You will work as a team and discover the size  
Of this great world we live in, because you will go  
a million new places with this person, you know."

Santa sipped at his coffee and looked over the brood,  
knowing what he had to say next might sound kind of rude.  
"Not all of you will make it and become canine guides.  
Your time here isn't wasted though. You won't be cast aside."

"Some of you will be drug dogs and some will find bombs.  
Some will become pets in a home with a dad and a mom."  
"All these things are important. People wait on long lists,  
to receive such good dogs as you, the school folks insist."

The last drop of coffee had gone into his cup  
as Santa turned, smiling at each wide eyed pup.  
"The best gift of all is to give something back.  
That's why there's nothing for you all inside of my pack."

Draining his mug, Santa went to each pen,  
and petted and scratched each dog again and again.  
"Now next year and many more years after that,  
you all will give gifts wherever you're at."

"You might lick a hand that's had a bad day,  
Or notice a car and step out of the way."  
"You might help catch a crook or discover some loot,  
Or just bring some joy to a tired old man in a funny red suit."

"Your master will love you and treat you with care.  
In return, your training and trust will always be there."  
After the last dog had been petted and soothed,  
Santa put away the coffee pot and made ready to move.

Up the ladder he rose to the door high above,  
with a smile and a wave as he slipped on his gloves.  
And all the dog ears were pricked as he disappeared out of sight.  
"Merry Christmas to all, and to all a Good Night!"

Author Unknown