

Jingles the Yule Dog

By Liam Shae

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Santa walked through the toy shop complimenting every Elf's craftsmanship, but when he came to Stubby, he skipped him and went to the next Elf in the line. The entire experience enlightened Stubby to how even Santa thought the short-eared Elf didn't fit in at the North Pole. He jumped up and ran out into the snowstorm, and kept running. By late afternoon, the storm had intensified into a full-fledged blizzard. Stubby trudged on through until he couldn't take another step. Cold overtook him and he finally collapsed in exhaustion.

He awoke to the soft murmurings of a dog licking his face and shaking its tail. He sat at the mouth of a cave. Stubby pulled the fluffy dog close, scratched its ear, and checked the tag for a name. It read: Jingles the Yule Dog.

"Who was it, Jingles? Who saved me?"

The dog whined and added another coating of slobbers to the previous one.

"It was Jingles who rescued you," a deep voice echoed in the cave.

He turned and there he stood, face to face, with Santa.

Stubby reached up and covered his smooth, rounded ears. "Don't look at me. I'm hideous."

"Who told you that? Who said you are hideous?" Santa asked.

"No one has to tell me. I can see it for myself."

"So, because you think of yourself as hideous you believe I see you that way too."

"Yes!" Stubby ducked his head and tried to pull his hat down over his ears.

"I think you are misjudging me." Santa gave a belly laugh. "I like things that are different. I call them unique blessings."

"I'm not a blessing. I'm hideous."

Santa lifted Jingles into his lap and started petting his scraggly fur.

"Take Jingles here. What do you see when you look at him?"

Stubby focused on the hound, trying to see the facts before him. The Dog had patchy places where long and short hair mingled together. With one brown and one blue eye, the dog looked wacky.

"He's so ugly he's cute," Stubby said.

Author: Liam Shea
Title: Jingles the Yule Dog

Novelist.Liam.Shea@gmail.com
Word Count = 497 words

“Now you see what I see. He is a brave-hearted rescue dog who is extremely cute and resourceful. He’s the one who found this cave.”

“But you bypassed me during the inspection.”

“Yes. I did.” Santa reached into his coat and pulled out a beautiful snow globe inscribed with the words: *Stubby, Best Toy Maker in Santa Land*. “I intended to give it to you in front of your coworkers. According to the Distribution Department, you are the most important player on my team.”

Stubby beamed with pride and self-confidence. “Santa, you came out in this blizzard to look for me, but now we’re trapped here.”

Santa whistled loudly and a soft red glow illuminated from behind the blowing snow. “I would introduce you to another of my unique friends, but everyone knows Rudolf.” He gave another Belly laugh. “I like the unusual—just like you, Stubby. Just like you.”