

# The fairy tale power of 35 pennies

*They sold me a dream of Christmas.*

*They sold me a Silent Night.*

*I believed in the fairy story.*

*I believed in the Israeli.*

—From "I Believed in Father Christmas"

by Lake and Sinfield

It cost 35 cents to buy this newspaper. I imagine not having enough pennies. I've been there. Somehow, I muddled through. What of others not so fortunate? How can I write something to keep hope alive when the richest country in the world seemingly cannot? If I can't, then you've wasted your 35 cents and I've wasted my time. We must try.

Before you send Jacob Marley to my house, please reflect on how we achieved our current nuclear winter of despair. Do the ghosts of the millions killed with our help cry for remembrance? Does power lie in an unspoken curse that an unspeakable wrong must be balanced? The blood of the 100,000+ killed in our foray in Iraq provided only a ghastly icing to a crimson cake. We have done such an excellent job selling weapons to the world's tribes that the holy lands of the east are holy no more, merely pockmarked with bomb craters. George Bernard Shaw would be proud that we have lived to the armorer's trust: to sell to whomever can meet the price. Selling is what we're all about, isn't it?

But prices have been going up. War is the single worst thing you can do to your own economy, let alone anyone else's. The Riviera Hotel in Las Vegas cites the Gulf War as a principal factor sending it into bankruptcy.



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Things were already pretty soft over here when we tried to tape over the weak spots by sending soldiers over there. Now the piper must be paid. Failing that, the piper will gladly take our principal asset: kids.

Whatever went wrong? Chalk it up to the money supply. Your value is determined by the weight of your pockets, not the content of your character. We dwell in a world wherein a person's worth is measured by wealth.

Forget the frankincense and myrrh. The Emir of Kuwait once again sits on his solid gold toilet seat and Gen. Norman Schwarzkopf sits on his big, fat speaking fees. Meanwhile, the Oil War fighters The Bear said he cared for are not becoming soldiers of fortune. Many Desert Storm vets have instead joined our growing army of homeless wayfarers. Now we see what all the parades became: sources of confetti and ticker tape to turn the streets into mattresses. But people cannot eat yellow ribbons.

The last burp of a dying communist dragon could not unseat Mikhail Gorbachev. It took him almost seven years to succeed in unseating himself. Like George Bush, he commands legions of homeless soldiers

populating a country in search of itself.

With our help, the world's tyrants still live in luxury. The Saudi Royals have resumed the sport of public beheadings, and OPEC is conducting business as usual. So is Saddam Hussein. Likewise, Indonesia's Suharto rapes and pillages East Timor with his usual fervor. Genocide Today is becoming a popular show on U.S. cable access channels. Croatia made it a direct hit, the blood and guts of its people providing a fruitcake of visceral video.

In the east where a star once rose, the old wise men of China still make the rest of the world's oppressors look like amateurs. George Bush will lead a post-Christmas delegation to the orient looking for crumbs of free trade as a token return for all the loaves and fishes we've sent over there in the past 50 years. I think he'll get the usual un-Christian reception.

Most of the world's religions, in conjunction with most of the world's political systems, offer the same promise: a better existence later if you just suffer gracefully today. I thought Judas goats and Jesus Christs were sent here to take care of sin and suffering. A whole passel of demigods have died so that we, the great unwashed, might transpire to some higher spiritual plane, unfettered by the guilt trips of the past or hunger pangs of the present. Jesus multiplied loaves and fishes, but we all got caught in the sandwich. The spiritual plane is in a permanent holding pattern because of inadequate air traffic control.

What's sky pilot decreed that holy messiahs get murdered while the unholy likes of Richard and Pol Pot merit a comeback tour every few years? Who said it's OK to send people to their deaths in order that the Bush family's Persian Gulf drilling options might be preserved? Since they stand poised to become the next Rockefeller because of the Oil War, they could at least exhibit the decency of buying Rockefeller Center back from the Japanese. Just before the election next year, they could make it an early Christmas gift to the nation.

As for me, I got my Christmas present a few days early. I beheld a sad 3-year-old who had taken to wrapping odd objects in towels, trying to conjure up Christmas in her cheerless home. I was among the fortunate few to witness a magical transformation when a brightly wrapped gift arrived at the door. It wasn't much, but it was for her. I never thought real kids actually showed the wonder and joy so carefully created in ooey-goey TV commercials for Coke and Kodak. I wish I had a snapshot of that tiny transfigured face. My reverte was short-lived. Toys for Tots ran out of toys. Our leaders lost their collective poise. Wendy and Pan lost the lost boys. Psychologists forecast more incidents of the newly jobless firing on those who fired them. Desperation evokes desperate acts. A few years back, I beheld grandmothers taking home tidbits of food from senior citizens lunches. They did this not for themselves, but out of crying need to feed younger family members swept by hard times back to a

friendlier port. Will you or I one day become like the young man recently arrested here for breaking into a house to make a peanut butter sandwich? He was caught because he fell asleep. Perhaps the safety of a roof was something he had not known for awhile.

Roofs are getting cheaper. Interest rates are low, low, low. People just won't buy, buy, buy. Not even George Bush-endorsed sweat socks. Desperation, however, is available in all sizes, shapes and colors. Should the charges against the sandwich thief be dropped? What would you do if you were starving on a cold yuletide night? Has someone come to your door asking for food yet? Be prepared.

Like the Sparks house fire that re-ignited itself, even symbols of hope can present danger. This has been a year of fire, simulating fear and awe, a harbinger of both hope and hell for the warring tribes of mankind. Kians still so primitive they hang wires on sticks for illumination. For these latter day druids, this represents progress past mistletoe while maintaining links with a misty past. Stringing wires with lights onto sagging branches, they worship trees and wooden crosses burning in the night.

To most, God is still an old white man with a billowy beard who occasionally wears a red suit bought with credit cards. A god with the power to make all things dark, or to light up a baby's face. You and I possess that power, too.

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