

THE SANTALAND DIARIES (David Sedaris)

Mr. DAVID SEDARIS (Writer): (As Crumpet the Elf) I wear green, velvet knickers, a forest green velvet smock and a perky little hat decorated with spangles. This is my work uniform.

I've spent the last several days sitting in a crowded, windowless Macy's classroom undergoing the first phase of elf training. You can be an entrance elf, a water cooler elf, a bridge elf, train elf, maze elf, island elf, magic window elf, usher elf, cash register elf or exit elf.

We were given a demonstration of various positions and action, acted out by returning elves who were so onstage and goofy, that it made me a little sick to my stomach. I don't know if I can look anyone in the eye and exclaim, *Oh, my goodness, I think I see Santa. Or can you close your eyes and make a very special Christmas wish?* Everything these elves say seems to have an exclamation point on the end of it.

It makes one's mouth hurt to speak with such forced merriment. It embarrasses me to hear people talk this way. I think I'll be a low-key sort of elf. Twenty-two thousand people came to see Santa today, and not all of them are well-behaved.

Today, I witnessed fistfights and vomiting and magnificent tantrums. The back hallway was jammed with people. There was a line for Santa and a line for the women's bathroom, and one woman, after asking me a thousand questions already, asked, *which is the line for the women's bathroom?* And I shouted that I thought it was the line with all the women in it. And she said, *I'm going to have you fired.* I had two people say that to me today: *I'm going to have you fired.* Go ahead, be my guest.

I'm wearing a green velvet costume. It doesn't get any worse than this. Who do these people think they are? *I'm going to have you fired*, and I want to lean over, and say *I'm going to have you killed.*

(Soundbite of music)

Mr. SEDARIS: (As Crumpet the Elf) The overall cutest elf is a fellow from Queens named Richie(ph). His elf name is Snowball and claims to ham it up with the children, sometimes tumbling down the path to Santa's house. I generally gag when the elves get that cute, but Snowball is hands-down adorable. You want to put him in your pocket.

Yesterday, Snowball and I worked as Santa elves and I got excited when he started saying things like, *I'd follow you to Santa's house any day, Crumpet.* It made me dizzy - this flirtation. By mid-afternoon, I was running into walls. By late afternoon, Snowball had cooled down. By the end of our shift, we were in the bathroom changing our clothes, and all of a sudden, we were surrounded by five Santas and three other elves. All of them were guys that Snowball had been flirting with. Snowball just leads elves on - elves and Santas.

(Soundbite of music)

Mr. SEDARIS: (As Crumpet the Elf) This morning, I worked as an exit elf telling people in a loud voice *this way out of Santaland.* A woman was standing at one of the cash registers paying for her pictures while her son lie beneath her, kicking and heaving, having a tantrum.

The woman said, *Riley, if you don't start behaving yourself, Santa's not going to bring you any of those toys you asked for.* The child said, *he is, too, going to bring me toys, liar. He already told me.* The woman grabbed my arm, and said *you there, elf, tell Riley here that if he doesn't start behaving immediately, then Santa's going to change his mind and bring him coal for Christmas.*

I said that Santa changed his policy and no longer traffics in coal. Instead, if you're bad, he comes to your house and steals things. I told Riley that if he didn't behave himself, Santa was going to take away his TV and all his electrical appliances and leave him in the dark.

The woman got a worried look on her face and said, *all right, that's enough*. I said, *he's going to take your car and your furniture and all of your towels and blankets and leave you with nothing*. The mother said, *no, that's enough really*.

(Soundbite of music)

Mr. SEDARIS: (As Crumpet the Elf) This afternoon, I was stuck being a photo elf for Santa Santa. Santa Santa has an elaborate little act for the children. He'll talk to them and give a hearty chuckle and ring his bells. And then he asks them to name their favorite Christmas carol. Santa then asked if they'll sing it for him. The children are shy and don't want to sing out loud. So Santa Santa says, *oh, little elf, little elf, help young Brenda here sing that favorite carol of hers*.

Late in the afternoon, a child said she didn't know what her favorite Christmas carol was. Santa Santa suggested "Away in a Manger." The girl agreed to it, but didn't want to sing because she didn't know the words. Santa Santa said, *oh, little elf, little elf, come, sing "Away in a Manger" for us*. I didn't seem fair that I should have to solo, so I sang it the way Billie Holiday might have sang if she'd put out a Christmas album.

(Singing) *Away in a manger, no crib for a babe. The little Lord Jesus lay down his sweet head.*

Santa Santa did not allow me to finish.

(Soundbite of music)

Mr. SEDARIS: (As Crumpet the Elf) This evening, I was sent to be a photo elf. Once a child starts crying, it's all over. The parents had planned to send these pictures as cards or store them away until the child who's grown and can lie, claiming to remember the experience.

Tonight, I saw a woman slap and shake her growing child. She yelled, *Rachel, get on that man's lap and smile or I'll give you something to cry about*. Then she sat Rachel on Santa's lap and I took the picture, which supposedly means, on paper, that everything is exactly the way it's supposed to be, that everything is snowy and wonderful. It's not about the child or Santa or Christmas or anything, but the parents' idea of a world they cannot make work for them.

(Soundbite of music)