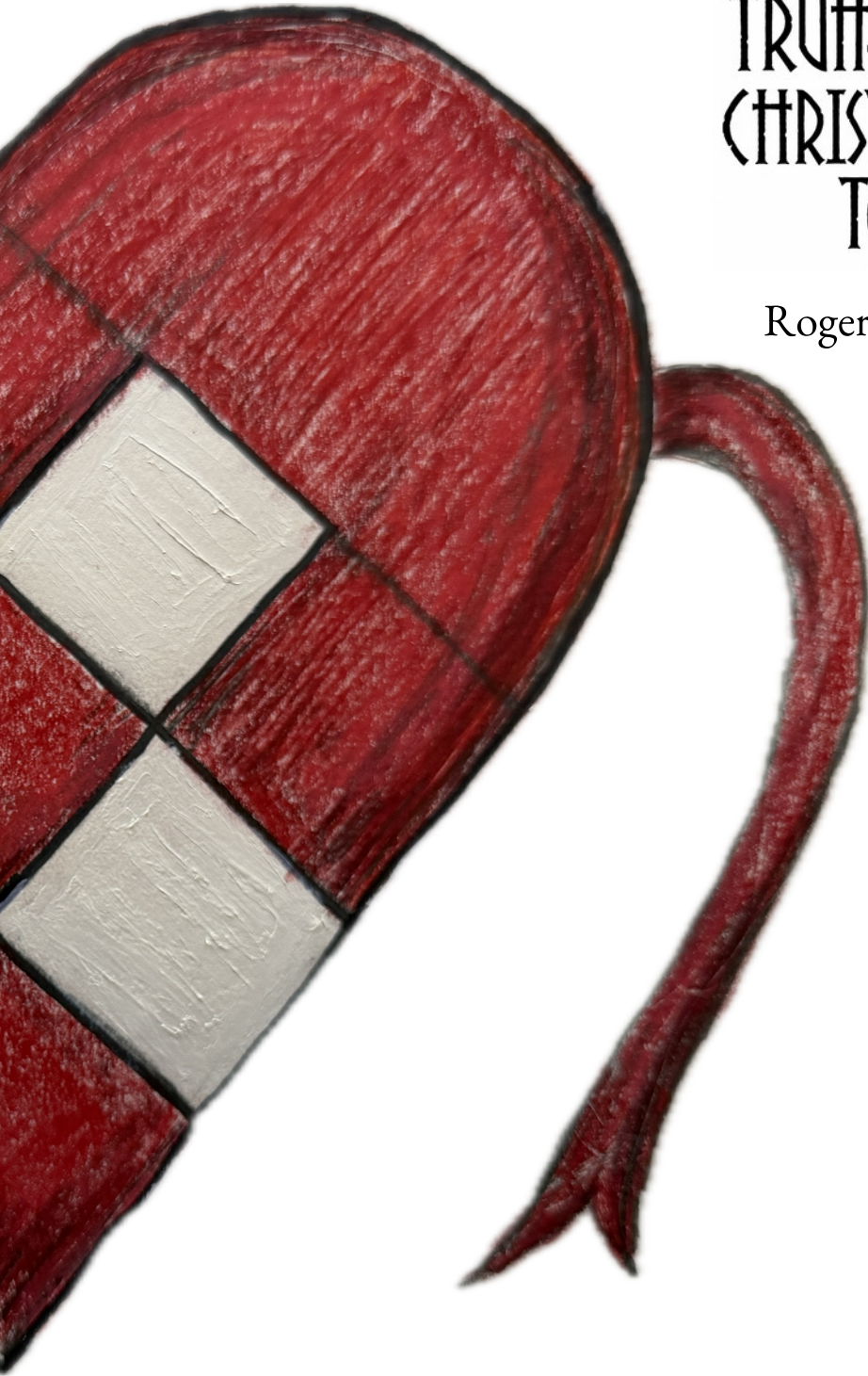


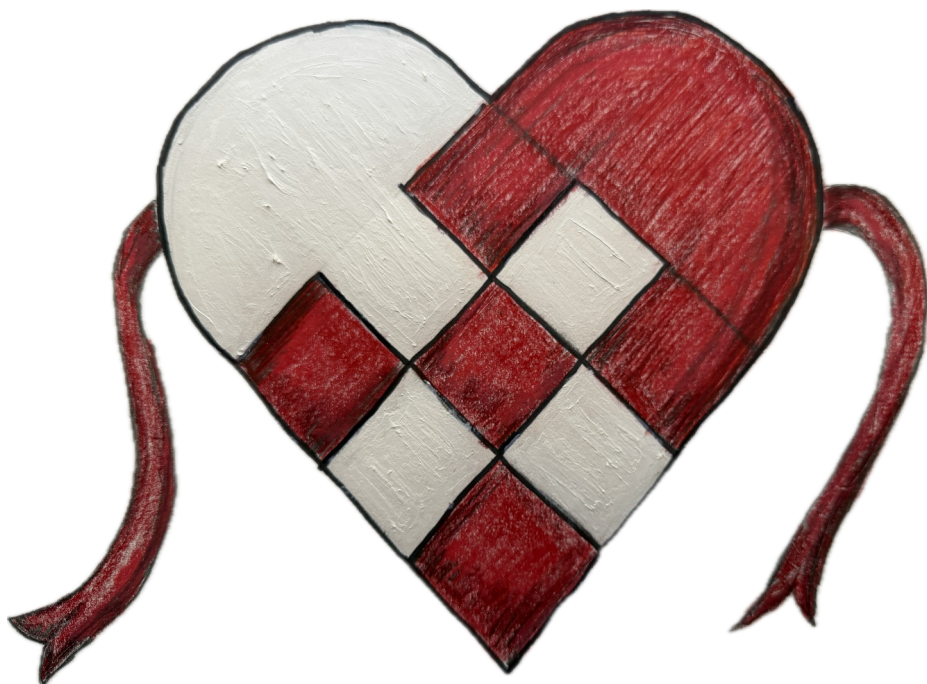
TRUHART'S CHRISTMAS TOMTE

Roger Iverson



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Truhart's
Christmas
Tomte

Roger Iverson

for
Nubbin

December 1, 2026

Truhart's
Christmas
Tomte

Far to the north,
on the edge of a frozen forest,
a Norwegian family dwelt in their stone cottage
with their three sons and one unstoppable daughter.

Her name was Truhart. Beneath her brown bangs, sparkling green eyes searched for ways to impress her big brothers. The harder she searched, the worse they teased.

She was determined to go fishing with them. Eldest brother told her no fishing pole small enough existed. When she chopped wood with them, they called her the queen of kindling. They threw their dirty laundry at her like insults. And this very morning, she woke to find a toad in her pillowcase, hay in her hair and her blankets sprinkled with goat turds.

She leaped downstairs to defend herself. Eldest brother was ready to override her. "Just see that you mend our clothes," he scolded. "Sweep the barn and basket our breakfast eggs. That's all we need from you." They skulked out the room, her orange-haired kin, a little more than gloom, a little less than men.

Little Truhart burst into the cold outside where Mother was gathering wood from the holzhausen. She yelled, "Your boys deserve to be punished!" She crossed her arms. Her eyes refused to sparkle.

She breathed deeply then said, "There are times, Mother, when a foot must be put down." She gently stomped her foot as proof. Mother held back her firewood and mushy emotion. "I must have jobs more important than thread, brooms and baskets. I'm curious, Mother. I'm mighty. I am resolute."

Mother marveled pride at her daughter. "Actually," she said, "Father and I are desperate for your unique help."

Truhart's fury evaporated. She muttered, "Mine?"

"Only yours." Mother looked about before speaking. "We have a task beyond darning, beyond sweeping and mucking and collecting." Mother leaned towards her daughter and hushed her voice, "This task is too important for Brothers." She stepped back and raised her eyebrows. Truhart raised hers also. "Remember the farmer's rhyme, 'Gotta tomte?' Well. This Yuletide, will you please, dear daughter, please protect our farm from that trickster tomte?

"Can one tomte be so dangerous?" asked Truhart.

"Sure as my name's Mother, a forest gnome will invade our farm this winter. He'll exploit our every weakness to drive us out. If you don't protect us, dear, we will all surely starve."

Truhart let her eyes sparkle. They narrowed as she considered. She scanned the fields and woodland. Snow already powdered their farmland making the surrounding pine forest look foreboding. She knew the tomte were proud of their pranks and wasn't sure if she could prevail. She lowered her voice to Mother. "Truly," she said. "Am I up to your task?"

To save them both a display, Mother again squeezed her armload of wood instead of her little girl. She knelt on one knee, peered into her little one's emerald eyes and said, "Keeping us safe is busy work, I know. But that's how you can help your family." Mother assured, "Father and I believe in you."

Well. That was all Truhart needed to hear.

Her lips whispered in Mother's ear, "Then I vow here and now to rid our farm of this intruder." Stepping back, she slowly nodded to Mother, saying, "Your task is my duty."

To show her fortitude, Truhart hefted three thin logs from Mother's arms. She leaned far back to hold her sticks. She carried them into the cottage, solemnly. *Brothers will see I'm worth seeing*, she thought as she walked. *They'll watch me and learn their lesson: I'm curious, I'm mighty, I am resolute.*

In all the rooms she carried her sticks, her brothers were gone.

But they will learn their lesson. Eventually. Rest assured, Brothers' lesson will be a revolting trial.



By evening's fire, Brothers quarreled over cards in hearth room's corner while Truhart sat on Father's lap near the blaze. The snowstorm outside howled. But inside, the fire filled the small room with light and warmth.

Father and Truhart shared a bit of toasted bread smothered in buttery jam. He showed her his winter jacket. All the pockets bulged. Each was sewn shut with crude green twine. Father told her, "Our tomte has already begun his prideful pranks."

"But where did you leave your jacket, Papa?" she asked.

Being a Norwegian man, Father was bland but didn't know it. Shadows from the fire danced across his freckled face. His blue eyes twinkled beneath raised orange eyebrows. "I left it out in the barn," he admitted.

Truhart carefully pulled the twine from one pocket. She scooped out a fistful of fennel, mumbling, "*Seed in row makes wooly fields.*" She asked him, "Why fennel seed?"

"Tomte hate fennel seed," Father explained. "Sticks between their pointy teeth. Tastes nothing like Mother's crispy juice chicken or piping lingonberry tart."

Her thumb rubbed the seed while she basked in fire's warmth and Father's lap. She muttered, "Must taste like lutefisk to them."

"Not even that good," Father assured. "We've got ourselves a tomte, playing his knaveries."

Truhart stared into Father's eyes. "Then be assured, Papa," she said. "Here and now. I vow to rid our farm of this evil."

"There's no evil here, Tru. We just..."

"I am called, Papa," she continued. "My cause is right." She reached her thin arm over Father's broad shoulder. She lowered her voice. "Faith in my vow, Papa, is your Pulpit Rock."

Father smiled. He chuckled. His sons were still arguing when he whispered back, "I knew you wouldn't let us die." He laughed.

Truhart overflowed with questions about their tomte until Father laid one calloused finger on her lips. He said, "To understand another, Tru, simply listen."

Truhart stared into the blaze and imagined.



All that blustery night, Truhart tossed in her goose-down bed, dreaming of how to catch her tomte. She dreamed and dreamed until she nearly dreamed a hole in her pillow. With the rising sun, Truhart had dreamed her answer.

Early that morning, sitting at the dining room table with Mother, she asked, "Mother? If I bake a loaf of bread, mightn't the sinister tomte snatch it?"

Mother lowered her book and long clay pipe. "I suppose," she exhaled. Her skilled eyes saw Brothers back in the hearth room also take an interest in Sister. "Are you hatching a plan?"

"Let's keep our farm for farmers," began Truhart.

Brothers sauntered into the snug dining room. Eldest told her, "You look like Death eating a soda cracker." Middle said, "You look awful." "Awfuler than usual," quipped Youngest.

They sat at her table, each wearing a brotherly sneer. They leaned back in chairs and nodded as they listened and plotted.

Truhart ignored her brothers. “My cause is righteous, Mother,” she said. “In my dream, I baked a loaf of fennel bread and took it out to the barn. Then I crouched myself in the hay. When the creature came to steal my delicious smelling bread, I snatched him by his wrist.”

Truhart’s smile twisted. Her family stared at her.

She continued, “I’ll crouch all day if I must, ready to spring. Muscles will cramp. Bones may crack. My sacrifice will be a wonderful price.”

“Glorifying your martyrdom,” warned Mother, “kills you twice.”

Brothers chortled.

“Baking is clever of you!” Mother exclaimed overriding brotherly remarks. “But tomte are very fast and sly. What if he’s too quick?”

“Then the horrible fennel taste will chase him away. Quick as a wish.” Her breathing was excited. “More than the little thief’s expecting, I’ll warrant. And much more than he’s worth. Boys, this is how I help the family.”

Again, everyone stared at Sister.

Eldest admonished, “Mending our socks and sweeping our floors should be enough to fill your little life.”

“Life!” she barked. “I’ll have no life if I don’t rid our farm of this foreigner.” Truhart leaned close to each boy, saying, “I am brighter. My calling is mightier. My faith is resolute.”

“You used to be curious,” Eldest reminded. “Where’s curious?”

She stared at him and hissed, “I already know all I need to know.”

Every brother looked at his brothers.

They burst into laughter.

Youngest brother said, “You’ll never catch this pretend creature—” “-but he may catch you,” finished Middle. “Finally!” declared Eldest. “We’ll be rid of you. Forevermore,” he crowed.

Brothers stood and snaked out the room.

Rising, Mother told Truhart, “Excuse me, dear. Your brothers and I are going to have a very short, very one-sided conversation.”

Mother left the room, shutting the door behind her.

By that evening, Truhart had baked her bread. She took her small loaf out to the barn where she wedged it low in the wall. Then she squirreled herself away in the hay to wait. The mewing cow, stomping horses, ruffling hens and the occasional bleat from a goat kept her company. She thought, *Barn stench, bread smell and animal chorus will certainly entice this rat to scuttle into my trap.*

She waited so long, her eager legs became numb, duty became chore.

Fed up with inaction, an idea tingled her brain.

Carefully, silently, she crept out of her hay hidey-hole. Leaving her loaf unguarded, she tiptoed across the dirt and out the barn, carefully watching for her tomte. She snuck to the cottage and back in the kitchen where she cut a wedge of farm-fresh cream onto a pewter plate.

On her way back to the barn, she found the doorway slid open. She stepped inside.

Her little loaf had disappeared! And she knew who had snatched it.

“They’re very fast and sly,” Mother had warned.

She stormed out into the night, through the snow, back to the cottage and into the kitchen, stomping all the way.

Looking out the kitchen window, she dried her eyes and saw.

Outside, perched on the window frame, her baby loaf waited. It was a darling nighttime vision, kitchen lamplight glowed through frosty window to brighten bread and falling snow behind.

She dashed out to save her loaf. In it, she found little teeth marks around a single bite hole. In that hole’s vacant place was pushed a gloopy lump of cowpie.



Over the next few days, brothers showed Truhart their prankish discoveries.

First, Youngest told Truhart, “We’ve got to keep you busy so you don’t drive us all crazy. Look what I found.” He tossed Mother’s tobacco pouch to her. It was filled with fennel seed.

Truhart looked at her brother and said, “Just see if I don’t get him.”

Next, Middle told her, “I’m too mature for your superstition, but come with me.” Out in the pasture, he showed her the tails of two furious goats lashed together with stout green twine.

Truhart told him, “Watch me when I wreck him!”

Last, in the barn, Eldest pointed to the floor and said, “Look.”

An earthy couplet was scrawled in barn’s dirt. How the tomte could abuse Henrik Ibsen’s fine Norse poetry confounded Truhart. *Surely*, she thought, *tomte must have their own alien language*. She grabbed her brother’s wool sweater in her small fist. Her beautiful green eyes had lost all their sparkle. She said, “Has this vermin no shame? We are we, and *they* shall not stay!”

Eldest extracted her hand from his sweater. He stepped back, considering his little sister. He opened his mouth and raised his finger. She waited, looking up to him. He thought better of his lesson and left.

By Christmas Eve day, Truhart still hadn't captured her tomte. As she paced, she thought and thought. She nearly thought a hole in the floor. She thought up an intriguing idea.

She found Mother at the table, cutting heart decorations to string around their Christmas tree. "Mother?" Truhart asked. "What do we leave the tomte on Christmas Eve night?"

Mother paused making her white-and-red julehjerter. She looked at her daughter to answer but Truhart seemed weary and guarded. Mother asked, "Are you getting rest, dear?"

Truhart's vision was blurry. She put out her hand to lean on the table and said, "I'll rest when I scrape this trespasser away."

Mother stared at her disheveled child. "Well," she reminded her, "the tomte's favorite Yuletide meal is hot porridge."

"And when we wake Christmas morn," Truhart continued, "we rush to the barn to see if he's eaten it all?"

"Every spoonful."

"Then I'll make enough porridge to bulge his belly and slow his legs. That lazy outsider will not escape me again!" She dragged herself into the kitchen, leaving Mother alarmed.

While her porridge toiled and troubled on the fire, Truhart also cooked up her triumphant fantasies.

Stirring, she pictured herself tying her little foe to the barn door where Brothers would watch her soundly beat and belittle him. *Brothers will cheer my victory*, she thought. Our sweet Truhart nursed her righteous pride, the further details of which are too horrid to mention.

She imagined and imagined until she nearly imagined a hole in her porridge. Her "intriguing idea" became a "calamitous scheme."

She left her kettle of blurbing porridge.

Avoided spies.

Mumbled over and again, "This is how I save my family."

Snuck herself back inside their only water closet.

Into family's medicine cabinet. Rummaged on tiptoe. Found what parents called, "Magically Powerful Medicine."

Apron and face were filthy. Her hurlyburleys ran rampant.

Hushed her giggles.

Whispered, "This'll fix that cockroach."

Hid package beneath apron.

Stole her way back to seething cauldron.

She stood on her cooking stool. Reveled in steam that swarmed her face.
Furtive eyes scanned for enemies.
Tore paper from medicine brick.
Fingers rubbed crumbs onto porridge. Watched particles melt into
ruinous pools. She hissed, "Parrasite likes its medicine."
Eyebrows lowered. Lips grinned.
If crumbs of magical medicine are good, she thought, more must be better.
Broke off and plopped bigger plunks in.
Cackled out loud. Caught herself. Looked about.
Whispered, "If more is better, stands to reason *all* is best." With that ill-
advised logic, she plooped the entire package of powerful magic into her
porridge, ploppity-plunk.
"As Mother says," -eyes leering for spies- "Christmastime is not frugal
time." Unabashed cackles erupted.
Still not finished, Truhart conjured this chant over her cauldron--

On my lesson you'll feast and nibble and root:
Mighty Truhart's One True Faith is Resolute.

By the time dark Christmas Eve arrived, the farmers had transformed
their stone cottage into a festive Yuletide home. All the candles were lit. From
the hearth, a great fire sang. Youngest brother strummed "*Jeg er så Glad*" on the
autoharp. Their bushy pine made the cabin bright with heirlooms and memories
and Mother's paper hearts. Father's orange mustache was white with juleøl
foam, so Eldest painted whipped cream on his own lip. From Grandmother's
Porsgrund, festive cookies beckoned.

But Truhart was still in the kitchen.

She was scraping the last of her notorious porridge into the family's
pewter basin. On top, she laid a long slab of farm-fresh cream to melt, dusted
with nutmeg.

Steam curled, sugar glooped, butter pooled, enchantment lurked.

Using oven mittens far too big, she carefully lifted the basin. The heft of
her poison filled her with pride.

Looking up, she saw her reflection in kitchen's dark window. She froze
to stare, not recognizing her own self.

Reflection looked like a used dish cloth, wrung.

She glared.

Her reflection stared back at her. It asked, "What has become of dear Truhart?" Eyes became moist. A tear dripped around a Scandinavian cheek. Her reflection warned, "Won't your concoction kill the tiny gnome?"

Truhart smiled back. She said, "I sincerely hope so."

Brothers barged into the kitchen.

Their eyes sprung wide. Eldest said, "How will he eat all that!" Middle said, "We're doomed!" Youngest mumbled, "We're going to regret this."

Eldest scolded the boys, "We promised." He looked into their Christmas room. Mother nodded back.

Truhart assumed Brothers were concerned for the alien. She instructed, "I'm doing this for you, boys. It has a lesson yet to learn and I'm its teacher." She carefully opened the door and slipped into the night.

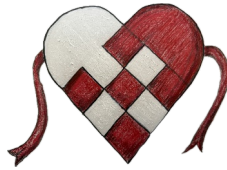
In freezing Yuletide air, Truhart was warmed by her mission.

She carried the bowl into the barn and set it on the smelly dirt floor.

"Don't eat it," she warned the penned animals. "This is something notorious."

She pushed the spoon into her trap. Already triumphant, she stepped back to admire her malice. She thought, *There. Let's see it escape me now.*

She wished the animals a happy Yuletide and skipped out the barn.



Early Christmas morn, even before the sun, Truhart was first to rise. She leapt down the stairs, sped past gifts and tree to the door where she slipped woolen feet into Father's boots. She wrapped herself in Mother's blue shawl, showing just her face and hand, which held out a lamp. She looked like a little Lutheran saint.

Fresh snow sparkled in her little lamp-lit ring. Truhart crunched over it.

She lifted the barn latch and slid the large door open a crack. A sliver of her light shone through. She peered in. The barn air smelled very much like peppermint.

Her bowl was gone! All she saw was the spoon, spiked in the dirt.

She slipped inside to search. Everything was dark and still and cold. Her breath hung in clouds. The animals were hushed. The barn waited.

In the dark, she paused. She willed her eyes to see but they refused. She held her breath to listen. She thought, *Someone else is in here with me.*

From off in the corner, a mournful murmuring wept.

Truhart held out her lamp and saw.

He sat cross-legged with her giant bowl on his lap. It was empty. His arms ringed and rubbed the rim to console himself. A stubby finger scraped inside for the last crust of porridge.

He didn't seem so evil, sobbing and caressing her bowl. Indeed, he was about her size, even smaller, but many times older; many, many times. Except for his green clan skirt and waistcoat, he was dressed from pointy toe to pointy cap in deepest crimson wool. Truhart thought it was peculiar to see a grief-stricken tomte festooned in jaunty costume.

She lifted her lamp to include him in her burgeoning ring of light.

Startled, he stood and stared.

From red lips buried in a frothy white beard chorused his fugue: all parts at once. He shuddered and bounced from foot to foot as he sang. She shook her head, confused.

He stopped and closed his eyes. He breathed in slowly through his nose, out through his mouth.

He opened his eyes and cocked his head to study her, wondering. He dragged the heavy bowl over.

The little man raised one wrinkled finger in front of her face. She was slightly afraid but mostly curious. He laid his finger on Truhart's lips the way Father had done. The tomte's eyes rolled up and fluttered closed.

Visions blossomed and swirled between them. More than just saw, Truhart also lived through his mother's marvelous pride at her tomte's birth— Truhart lived through watching his father's munching death by a troll— Through his older siblings teasing him— His gnome therapist coaching him strategies to calm himself. In her arms, Truhart actually caressed the tomte's giggling baby he named Trinket. She now understood his fugue speech because at each encounter, Truhart endured what the tomte endured.

She pondered, *Perhaps. Living another's life...* She marveled, *Can resolute faith reform?*

Tomte cried, "A wee Precious? A little wee Precious one-upped me?"

Still pondering, she heard herself say, "You're my little tomte."

He stood rigid. He snapped, "Thanking you for summoning me SeaDroWooly!"

With a small curtsy, she said, "Mr. Seedrowooly."

The little elf sobbed, "You out-tricked the trickster!" He closed his eyes and drew in a long shuddering gulp of weeping air. His eyes sprang open to accuse, "You conjured me! The barn smelled so a-feasting, I couldn't contain.

Creeped in, saw my pot, just for me—For ME! I jiggled my wee jiggle-jogle-and-leap.” He pranced his small dance that ended when his eyes burst into showers. “But when I picked bowl up, all you—” he sucked in a stuttering breath, “All you left me—” he squeezed eyes shut, breathed in through nose, spluttered out through mouth, “You only left me a minuscule spoonful.” Eyes shot open, “Spoon morsel was frivolous delicious!”

Her thoughts grew fuzzy. Knees were weak. She didn’t realize it just yet, but Truhart’s Pulpit Rock had begun to crumble.

She twisted away from the little man to wipe her eyes. She managed, “Sir, did you not enjoy my little loaf?”

He leaped back in front of her, “Little loaf says you. What loaf says I!” He yelped and shook then calmed himself again. “Precious bestowed no loaf,” he said. “Buttery bread would frumpiously delight.” Nearly to tears again, he breathed deep, whimpered then burst, “But Precious bestowed no loaf!”

Her muddled emotions and his pleading face combined to make her snort. “I mean before, Mr. Seedrowooly,” she said, wiping her nose. “My fennel bread.”

He spat. “Fennel! I know not ‘before.’ All you gave was one spoonful of porridge!” He sang out, “You beat me with spoon turning pride both black and blue!”

Truhart could not let this poor soul grieve so. “It may soothe your aching core to know, sir, I’m curious, I’m mighty. And until now, well, I believed my faith was resolute.”

Up bubbled his own snort. “Believed you resolute says you. Indeed you are says I!” He cocked his head to admire his rival. “Indeed you are.” He gazed at her a moment then said, “Before to volatizing,” he bowed. “Your Preciousness, I shall forever and always be summoning, ‘Dronningen av Prank’.”

Her thoughts teamed with shame until she nearly shamed herself into a grave. She said, “You don’t know how wrung I was, sir. Faith that condemns is not divine. And I...” She offered a lame smile. “I am sorry, says I.”

All her acid was gone. Forgotten were hatred and fear for this candy-cane gnome.

Right there, in that peppermint barn, Truhart had an actual epiphany, the further details of which are too sacred to mention.

Truhart’s curious brain blossomed back and a sparkling idea took hold. Even better, her reviving curiosity was nurtured by her humbled pride.

She lunged: "You don't have to leave, sir!"

He stepped back and scanned the barn for something like a club.

Truhart was also startled by her spirit.

She regained her best self and suggested, "I mean," she chuckled. "It is cold," she chuckled again. "And what's more, it's Christmas, sir. You could stay here for Christmas. If you choose. You'd be warm. With a full belly." She enticed, "I could sneak out food just for you."

He thought, *No thievery would steal my joy*. But out loud, he asked, "You'd brew SeaDroWooly flavors?"

"Christmastime is not frugal time," which startled her again.

"What of larger farmers who despise poor SeaDroWooly?"

Leaning in, Truhart purred with Viking confidence, "...I can fix them."

"Fix larger farmers says you. I true believe you can says I."

He steepled his fingers in front of his face and tapped their tips to concentrate what life on the farm would mean. He stopped and looked at her. His eyes glistened at his most peculiar champion. He told her, "This be quite a pig-tail-turn."

Her smile glowed. "A curl of a dilemma."

He tapped and paused then looked into her eyes. He said, "Norsemen must be fleet o' foot." He watched his fingers tap a moment longer. He stopped and looked back, "To scamper about is important work." Thinking, he watched and tapped then stopped and said, "And thieving! Important career, thieving." He whispered to her, "Strengthens the balance, don't you know."

Truhrt beamed.

He dropped his hands. "Cold's nothing to SeaDroWooly." His cheeks blushed, "Especially when Dronningen av Prank rekindle-stokes."

He considered again then said, "But won is you. Lost is I. By rite and by rule, eternal volatizing must be me."

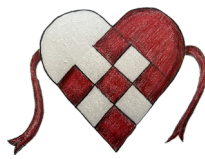
The little man held up the empty basin for her. He smiled. Unruly white eyebrows nearly lost themselves beneath his crimson cap. Bright eyes adored her one last time.

He whispered, "Merely moments for making our magic."

When she clutched the bowl, the old gentleman vanished beneath singing showers of green and red sparks.

She stared into his void.

She murmured, "True Norse poet. ...Says he, says them, says I, says nothing."



As for her family, oh my! All Christmas Day, and the next day, and into their third, brothers and parents were vicious. Each kicked and elbowed. They forced their own way inside the cabin's only water closet. Soaps dissolved. Papers spun away. A sacrificial sponge –poor melancholic sponge– rubbed tender parts raw.

Trial was indeed revolting but it did put Brothers far down their atonement trail. Especially as Truhart played nanny, doctor, cook and cleaner to all. She assumed her family had succumbed to something notorious.

Eldest stopped her in the hall. He was weak and his face looked like an embalmer's mistake. "Now's your chance, Sister. If I were you, I'd destroy me. For how I've treated you."

She looked up into her biggest brother's eyes. She slowly shook her head, "No. You wouldn't."

Staring back at her, he took a long time to say nothing. He swallowed then carefully asked her, "Why wouldn't I?"

Truhart smiled up at Eldest. She shrugged.

She said exactly what he most feared. "You love me."

Eldest took an even longer time to say absolutely not one blessed word. He could only nod. He looked like he would hiccup but he did not.

He gripped her hands. "Upon my word, Sister. I'll make you the finest fishing pole. And I'll fix it with our little bro..." He scrambled to burst into the water closet.

Truhart imagined his eyes were watery and knew he was not yet a bland Norwegian man. *He's still finding*, she thought, *what's true to his own heart*. But out loud she said, "Curious how the tomte lived when I poisoned his porridge."

Racing past, Mother stopped.

She turned to look at her youngest. Her eyes slowly narrowed.

Mother told her, "What did you say?"

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About the Story

The author wrote *Truhart's Christmas Tomte* for his daughter's 25th birthday. It began as a little fairy tale about her Norwegian heritage but he used too many words so she's stuck with this.



Also by Roger Iverson

fiction

Killing What's Dead

Escaping the Sacred

Our Tacoma Truth

This Glass Palace

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plays

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