

Xmas Story

by stephen hastings-king

I was heading toward Andover, in Georgetown, right before the American Legion, you know the place---“best hamburgers in Essex County” the signage read, “just pull around back” but I never did because I understood intuitively that the invitation was a trap & that the Legionnaires made their hamburger from hungry, naive communists, but also that their net would likely be cast widely because Legionnaires are not typically familiar with Left sectarianism, so “I’m much more syndicalist than CP” would not have saved me---the building behind the cannon on the side of the road, the cannon on a platform of grass, by the flag poles, one for the stars and bars and the other for the MIA that Rambo went back to Nam to rescue after the government sold them out, the cannon that was still there after the Legion closed down and the building was taken over by The Blood of Jesus Bible Church, at least for a while, until, at a moment, and for reasons, that remain, for me, unspecified, the cannon disappeared, you notice that sort of thing on a stretch of country road, and that is why, even long after it had disappeared, that spot remained “the place where the cannon was” and that is why, yesterday, the police car that was parked on that spot was so very conspicuous, almost as conspicuous as were the red spinning lights and sirens coming at us in the lane opposite, responding, no doubt, to a dire emergency. As the rules require, we pulled to the side. The conspicuous police car was conspicuously just ahead. Once stopped I noticed that the emergency vehicles seemed to be traveling very slowly given the direness of the emergency that had undoubtedly called them all out. As they closed in, the vehicles grew larger and larger. It soon became apparent that they were not responding to an emergency, dire or otherwise, at all. An ambulance, a fire truck: a giant pick-up in which stood a fat man wearing a white beard and a velvet outfit, waving a white-gloved hand; another giant pick-up towing a trailer with signage “Workshop” that was presumably meant to justify the spectacle of children being

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subjected to blatantly exploitative labor practices; a large military vehicle the back of which was maybe filled with heavily armed persons in camo; still more police cars; all traveling in slow-motion, looming ever larger and I could see the leering drivers and their laughing passengers and, behind them, disembodied arms and hands waving inexplicably, pointlessly, from various heights where no arms or hands should be. The conspicuous police car was stopped conspicuously just ahead of us. It pinned us in place. The policeman cynically used the rules of the road to force us to participate in an awful parade. The vehicles grew larger and larger as they approached: they took up more and more of the road, and the feeling was one of intense Santa-Claustrophobia.

