

A 2020 Homage to Baxter Black's "Rudolph's Night Off"

In his memory, twas midnight and forty below;  
Old Billy was settled in a nice steady glow.  
His retirement in Vegas was fine, but short lived.  
So he'd headed back North with sins to forgive.

Seems all of your life things are not what they seem  
All the tinsel and garlands fall flat and turn green.  
And all the applause and acclaim that he'd earned,  
Only left Billy that much more bitter and stern.

Why all the shouting? Billy cried to the night.  
What's all the point of my Christmas Eve flight?  
I get one shot at glory, then it's back to the barn  
With a pat on the head and a ball of gold yarn.

Junior, said Billy, to his Nephew from Phoenix  
All you get from those reindeer is Fancy Dan knee kicks!  
Give me a goat that pulls with his heart  
And we'd have that whole sleigh home just after dark.

"Oh, I've lived in Gresham and I've lived in Lampasas,  
Been to Mankato and seen New Yorker eye-lashes,  
And when it's all said and when it's all done,  
There's no place for an old goat once the race has been won."

So Billy packed his pack and found the North Star,  
Fixed one beady eye on it and put hoof to the tar.

Alaska was frozen when it shoved into view, and  
All of it gleaming like it was dusted with dew.  
But Santa Town was quiet, not a soul to be seen.  
Not an elf, not a reindeer, and not Santy himself.  
It was quiet, too quiet, as Old Billy touched down.  
And he squinted and spit as he looked all around.

The shops were all shuttered and empty and dark:  
Only one small dim candle glowed on one little hearth.  
So Billy went over and nosed open the door  
And there was a mouse stretched out on the floor.

“Hello, stranger,” said Billy, in his big booming voice  
“What’s going on here, on this night of nights?  
Where’s the elves and the reindeer, the boxes and bells?  
Did I take a wrong turn and go straight to Hell?”

“Oh, no,” the mouse answered, recovering from fright.  
They are all here on lockdown and forbidden to fly.  
It’s the saddest time ever and everyone’s scared  
They quarantined the reindeer and gave Santa a shot!  
Now everyone’s sick and the elves are on strike.  
And....

The people who did this went home to Palm Beach!  
They said, “Grow up and give up--  
we’ll be back here next year!”

The mouse put his paws up to his watery eyes,  
Blew his nose, gave a hiccup, and slumped back to the floor,

And Billy stood silent, one old goat in the door.  
With his rump to the west wind, he started to roar.  
Now, a goat-roar is a strange thing and one seldom heard;  
It's the roar of a lion and the song of a bird.  
But Billy stopped roaring and said with a glint,  
"That's the gubmint for you. Come to help us agin'."

Then he backed his way out, the same way he came in  
And he went looking for Santa, wearing a big silly grin  
"Hey, Santy," he said, when the elf came in sight.  
"They can't quarantine goats on Christmas night."

Santa stood up and rubbed his eyes disbelieving  
But there was Old Billy still stamping and steaming.  
And he said, "Gimme some light bulbs and tinsel and flares---  
A side order of candles, and five pounds of cheer."

So Santa still numb and feeling quite faint, woke the elves  
And the Missus, and put on the feed bag.  
They stuffed Billy full of everything bright: rainbows and sunshine,  
And flashy car bumpers, old silver dollars, copper kettles, and spotlights.  
Then they washed it all down with ten shiny new windmills  
Neon noodles and spurs.

He ate it all with a grim happy glee and he got on the phone  
While he was munching it down, and he called up his Cousins  
From all the world round, "Hey, Texas.... Hey, Broomstick....  
Hey, Great Cousin Cletus..... Hey, Marlborough....Hey, Foxy....  
Hey, Wadnick and Nexus....

In no time at all, he had his teams all assembled  
Seventy-two goats, and they were ready to rumble!  
They split up the load and took to the skies  
They zoomed over Brussels and swooped down on Rome  
They raced up the spillway of the Panama Canal  
They set records on the Autobahn – it was like breaking a spell.  
Instead of grim darkness and fear, there was light.  
And when Old Billy grinned, it was a grin just for spite.

“Thought they were gonna stop Christmas?” he said with a snort.  
“Better try turning ten turtles into a horse!”  
“No, Christmas is coming, and it’s coming on fast!”  
And like the Indy 500, he flew down the track.

Oh, yes, it was glorious, and yes, it was fun.  
The cretins in Palm Beach got rain and no sun.  
And Billy and his Cousins hardly puffing a whisker  
Showed up for breakfast at Billy’s Big Sister’s

“What you boys been up to?” she asked with a sniff.  
“Don’t you know there’s a pandemic and curfews and such?”  
They just smiled at her with sly, secretive smiles.  
There’s things that you do, and things that you’ve done,  
And the very best ones are the ones you keep mum.