

With Wreath ... by Fred: A Christmas Fable by David McTier

A short time ago in a not far-off land,
lived a mischievous boy whose plans were so grand.

For Christmas was coming, the long year near spent,
just four weeks remaining, four weeks called Advent.

Just four weeks to wait for my brother Fred,
who dreamed all year long of a bright red bobsled.

"Dear Momma," he pleaded, "Please Santa," he'd write,
to bring him that bobsled before Christmas night.

To be good he promised and do good in school;
he'd help Mom and Daddy and break not a rule.

But with Fred's past track record, we'd reason to doubt
this bobsled, his Rosebud, would ever work out.

For my brother Fred was the fourth grade's black sheep:
he bullied his classmates, who called him a creep.

He chased all our neighbors, their pets just the same;
he teased them and tricked them and called them bad names.

Why, last year while shopping, he pulled Santa's hair.
"No presents!" Claus snorted, but Fred didn't care.

For Fred all that mattered his angst to release,
Graffiti eruptions with black paint and grease.

But this year was diff'rent, not quite like the rest;
for that sled our Freddie would face a big test.

No quiz on earth science nor life far beneath...
the challenge this year was our Advent wreath.

A wreath with four candles, their flames burning bright,
a light in the darkness, the joy of our night.

One candle for each week before Christmas Day.
On Sundays, at dinner, we'd light then and pray.

And think of our blessings through good times and bad,
with our wreath at Advent, with Mom and with Dad.

But Fred gave no credence to rites with beeswax,
nor flora nor fauna, nor fiction nor facts.

For Fred all those candles—just min'ature fire.
A forest a blazing-now that would inspire!

And from flames a leaping would spring Captain Fred!
A ten-year-old hero on his red bobsled.

No force known could stop him on earth or divine...
or so he envisioned, this brother of mine.

His eyes they did glaze o'er... Oh, bless'd Christmas Eve!
He plotted his mission; he drooled on his sleeve.

"Enough of such daydreams," quoth Mother. She said,
"This year's wreath will be made by you, our dear Fred."

A wreath by my brother, with candles as well?
How fright'ning! How awful! How not joie Noel!

Well, Fred he did grimace. "No way!" he did croak.
But there was no question for Mother had spoke.

"No wreath, then no bobsled." (No Christmas, no fun!)
No more words were needed. Fred's test had begun.

With dream now imperiled, Fred couldn't be lax.
He rushed to the forest with switchblade and ax.

He'd make them a Yule wreath, the best they did see.
For no one would cut short his bobsledding glee!

Swoosh! Chop! Went that old ax way up in the sky,
And down came much green'ry piled high round his thighs.

Just what he was cutting, he hadn't a clue.
For anything leafy he thought would make do.

He scooped up his green mound; it covered him o'er.
He marched back to our house, flung open the door.

"I'm back," barked my brother from under the pile.
"I'll make you a Fred wreath...just gimme a while.

Then off to the basement he stomped all the way.
How long he was down there, I really can't say.

But later that night (we'd all gone to bed)
Out from that dark cellar came Fred's wreath and Fred.

He crept through the downstairs, past cranny and crook,
In search of the right place where might rest his work.

For his wreath demanded a special milieu,
And Fred then decided what he had to do.

The hours they flew by; great bullets he sweat...
Fred's Christmas obsession—much more than a bet!

He toiled all that long night, 'neath his tattered cap,
And then settled down for a short winter's nap.

The next morn we woke and tromped down the stairs,
Found Freddie and his wreath in Dad's fav'rite chair.

Which one looked more odd ball I couldn't tell you...
This chaos of green'ry and tinsel and glue.

A circle of cardboard with ivy tight bound,
With marbles and berries and stuff from the ground.

No candles on this wreath, just four old flashlights
With spray-painted light bulbs that glowed fiery bright.

Attached to these beacons that blinked off and on
(In time with Fred's snoring and even our yawns)

Were four monster garlands that wrapped round the room
Like Hollywood pythons—Fred's Temple of Doom!

At each garland's end (I'll never forget!)
Stood more sure than ever Mom's potted poinsetts.

Bright petals of crimson with green leaves beneath,
For serpents transformed into lips, tongues, and teeth.

And placed in each center of flowery gold:
The bulbs from our nightlights...snake eyes to behold.

And guarding this creature with wings and halo,
An angel from what once was Fred's GI Joe.

Not an inch did he spare from parlor to den,
Our home now converted to Fred's Yule playpen.

Each room had its palette, its own Christmas theme,
With motifs most abstract like nothing we'd seen.

The whole house a vision of Christmas surreal
With crepe-covered hubcaps in scarlet and teal.

We stood in amazement—a pin you'd hear fall—
And stared at our Freddie, our little Warhol.

Yes, stared at my brother and all he did make.
He stirred then most gently and started to wake.

His eyes they did open, a smile on his face.
No smirk, frown, or grimace, but vision of grace.

For Fred had discovered he wasn't a beast,
a bad boy, or loser...he was an artiste.

Those pranks he had pulled, just creative whim,
for this boy who flunked out of science and gym.

Each braid pushed in puddle—a substitute brush—
his Rauschenburg moments with dog poop and slush.

Yes, Fred found an outlet for what was inside
and felt a warm feeling, a feeling called pride.

Now proud to be diff'rent, not better or worse;
his not like the others no longer a curse.

His true self discovered, he'd follow his heart
and make what the critics would call modern art.

But those days of glory were still far away.
What mattered right now was to live through this day.

Fred's smile, oh, so lovely, began to mutate;
his swelling of pride turned to puffy bad fate.

For on both of Fred's arms, his legs, face and chest,
Were hundreds of itch bumps that refused to rest.

If Fred had just listened in his science class,
He might have now known what tortured his ***.

For his wreath that Christmas, his art work, you see,
was covered all over with poisoned ivy.

That Sunday we cautiously prayed by our wreath
while Fred's hands did fidget and scratch underneath.

And later I heard come from Fred's swollen lips,
his first prayer in honest, though uttered in clips:

"Bless Mommie and Daddy, and our home so fine.
Forget Rosebud, my bobsled, just bring Calamine!"