

The Merry Turnabout

The night was dark, the air was cold, and Apollo Justice was very much regretting not paying his utility bill on time. The payment had been due around the same time the Phantom had reared his ugly head at the Cosmos Space Center, and Apollo had had a few other things on his mind at the time. Unfortunately, the landlord wasn't the most forgiving type, so Apollo was left to deal with the remainder of the month without any hot water or heat to speak of. Presently, he was wrapped up in a cocoon of blankets, pillows, and two sleeping bags, desperate to retain heat. Warmth wasn't usually such an issue in Los Angeles, but this year there had been a rare snowfall. Great for photos and playtime, not so great for keeping warm.

Apollo grumbled as he nestled deeper into his blanket cocoon; it was so cold he could hardly get out of bed to even *do* anything. It was fortunate that Mr. Wright had given him the week off for Christmas. Otherwise, Apollo would have to figure out how the heck he'd fill out paperwork while he was so tightly bundled up.

It was times like these that made Apollo glad to be a single person with no roommates – being incapacitated the way he presently was wasn't such a big deal when there was nothing and no one to worry about anyway. He could just recline in his apartment under the covers and allow sleep to take him far, far away from his frigid surroundings...

DING DONG

Apollo would've jolted, but he was still trapped in his blankets. Instead he raised an eyebrow at the door and sighed as he slowly untangled himself from his state of pseudo-mummification. Who could be trying to contact him *now*, especially in person? It was Christmas Eve, for crying out loud! He didn't have any plans with anyone – today was supposed to be a day he could just sit back, relax, and *not* think about anybody but Apollo Justice!

For a moment, Apollo wondered if it might be possible to just ignore the door. Yes, he could do that... just sink back underneath the warmth of his covers and pretend that no doorbell had ever even rung...

DING DONG* *DING DONG* *DING DONG* *DING DONG

That was clearly not a viable strategy, Apollo realized with some chagrin.

On the other hand, he was pretty sure he had some earplugs lying around somewhere – he could remember buying some in preparation of one of Klavier Gavin's concerts (no matter how many times he heard it, rock and roll would *never* stop being *too loud*.) Maybe if he could find those, his plan to ignore the door could still work.

“Polly? Come on, open up!”

Apollo snapped into wakefulness. What was Trucy doing here? Now somewhat concerned, he finally stumbled out of his tangle of blankets, straightened up his appearance – it was hard to feel sufficiently dressed when he was bundled in sweaters instead of the usual court attire – and answered the door. Just outside was a similarly bundled up Trucy Wright in one of her rarely seen not-my-magician-outfit sets of clothing. Instead, Trucy wore a thick, puffy coat with the same blue hue as her typical get-up,

and she had the hood up and the coat wrapped around her as tightly as possible. Apollo raised an eyebrow at Trucy – why exactly was she here? – but he held back from any judgment for the time being.

“Trucy, what is it?” Apollo asked, deciding to try and reduce his own personal confusion first. “It’s almost nine, and it’s Christmas Eve.”

“Apollo, I need your help,” Trucy said, and Apollo suddenly noticed her expression. Her eyes were wide, but focused – shock, excitement, and determination. Her hair was uncombed and snowy – she rushed here. The flush in her face and the twitch in her hands could be from rushing here, but it could also be indicative of nerves. To most this was nothing, but to Apollo and his Perception, it meant something was up.

“What’s the problem?” Apollo asked, trying to to belay too much of his concern. No need to spread the sensation of worry so early on, after all. It might, after all, turn out to be a relatively trifling matter that he’d need to calm Trucy down over.

Trucy, as she tended to, wasted no time in getting to the point. “Apollo, I need you to help me save Christmas!”

Apollo blinked, and then he painfully struggled to hold back his laughter – Trucy seemed to be taking this seriously enough, so he’d humor her instead of laugh at the humor of it. He said, “What? Do I need to defend Santa Claus on charges of running over grandma with a reindeer or something?” Okay, so maybe he couldn’t help being a *little* snarky. But could anyone blame him? He was just asked to help save Christmas! Who was he, Rudolph?

Trucy pouted at him a little and folded her arms crossly, evidently catching Apollo’s sarcasm easily. “No, Apollo, we’re not reenacting the plot of any movies,” she said. “But it’s just as important, and it *does* have to do with Santa Claus!”

“What –” Apollo started to try and question what Trucy said, but before he could even get past the first word she grabbed his wrist and dragged him outside his apartment, down the stairs to the ground, and finally out to the parking lot where he saw –

“What.” Apollo stared, dumbfounded. It – it wasn’t *possible*! And yet – and yet –

There stood a portly man in a red suit and hat with a snow-white beard next to a sleigh hooked up to nine reindeer.

Santa Claus.

For a long moment, Apollo could do nothing but stare at the absurdity of it all. *Santa Claus?* In *Los Angeles*?! Was he supposed to take this seriously? Apollo simply couldn’t help it – he *laughed*.

But he quickly stopped when Trucy socked him in the arm.

“Ow!” he said, a bit indignant. “What was that for?”

“For laughing!” Trucy said, looking upset again. “It’s no laughing matter. Santa needs our help!” Apollo

pinched the bridge of his nose, now feeling a bit exasperated. He knew that Trucy could be a little childish sometimes, but he'd expected more from her when it came to Santa Claus.

"Listen, Trucy, I know this may come as a shock to you, but Santa Claus isn't real," Apollo said, not bothering to hide his annoyance. "This is probably just some guy in a costume."

"Apollo, what do you think I am? Two?" Trucy said, and she pouted, apparently indignant. "I thought that Santa wasn't real, too! I'm just as surprised as you are!"

"Surprised isn't the word I was thinking of," Apollo said, feeling increasingly exasperated. "What has you convinced that this guy is the real deal?"

"We-ll," Trucy said, and her expression shifted as she bounced on her heels a little and tapped her chin. "He *does* have all the reindeer..."

"Granted," Apollo conceded. It's not often that one sees nine reindeer all pulling a sleigh. "But even a normal person could get this many reindeer if they tried."

"Yeah, I know," Trucy said. "What *really* has me convinced is that he knows what I wanted for Christmas!" Apollo only scoffed.

"Oh, really?" Apollo said, still feeling incredulous. "What, did he guess that you wanted a new top hat or magic set?"

"No!" Trucy said, and now she stamped one foot. "It was a lot more specific than that!"

"Really? What was it?" Apollo asked, now feeling somewhat curious. At this point, it was still possible that "Santa" was actually Mr. Wright.

"I-I'm not telling!" Trucy said as she gasped and covered her own mouth, and Apollo could see her blushing. Apollo quirked an eyebrow, but he decided to leave Trucy be.

"Let me guess how this is supposed to go," Apollo said, and he shook his head. "Santa here will tell me what I want for Christmas, he'll be astonishingly accurate about it, and then I'll agree to help him because he's the real deal?"

"Yep!" Trucy said as though it was the most obvious thing in the world, and she bounced on her heels lightly.

Apollo coughed as he waited for her to continue.

And waited.

And waited.

And sighed as he realized that Trucy wasn't going to provide any more explanation than that. With a roll of his eyes and a resignation to a bizarre life, Apollo stepped towards "Santa Claus" and, not without a grain of salt, addressed the man.

"So... you're Santa Claus," Apollo said, trying to stay matter-of-fact.

"The one and only!" the bearded man answered earnestly. Apollo raised an eyebrow as he listened – the hat cast a shadow over the "Santa's" face, preventing Apollo from trying to recognize him with his ability to Perceive, but something about the man still seemed oddly familiar... as though he'd known him for a long time, the way one would know Santa Claus –

Apollo shook his head, trying to chase away the idea. This man was *not* Santa Claus! It was impossible.

"So why do you need help anyway?" May as well figure out what the guy wants before "testing" to see if he's really Santa. "Santa" frowned and bowed his head as he spoke.

"Well, Mr. Justice –" (*Mr. Justice, now I can get used to that.*) "You may have noticed that my reindeer aren't flying the way they usually do," the man claiming to be Santa Claus said.

"I guess so," Apollo said with a shrug.

"It's because of Rudolph," the man explained, and he gestured to the reindeer in the lead. "His nose just stopped glowing red tonight out of nowhere! Because of that, my reindeer won't fly."

"Why not?" Apollo asked, more curious about the reindeer's logic than he'd like to admit.

"You know the song, don't you?" the man who was acting like Santa Claus demanded. "Rudolph's red nose guides the sleigh! Without the light of his nose, we can't fly in this kind of inclement weather."

Apollo stared up at the sky and frowned. "It's barely snowing. I mean, this is a lot for Los Angeles, but –"

"So you agree it's a lot of snow!" the doppelganger Claus interjected. Apollo sputtered a bit and tried to correct the man.

"No, I mean it's a lot for Los Angeles –" Apollo tried to speak, but "Santa" wouldn't hear it.

"So you understand my predicament, young man!" The would-be Santa said with a hearty grin.

"Yes – no!" Apollo said, and now *he* was confused about what he was trying to say. "Look, I still don't believe you're Santa Claus!" Apollo finally blustered. "Santa's" expression shifted, and his grin faded into a tall frown.

"Oh..." the man said with a quiet sigh. "I see. I suppose most of the youth don't believe in Santa Claus these days, do they?"

"Y-youth?" Apollo said as heat crept into his face. "I-I'll have you know that I'm a whole 24 years old!"

"And I've been here since the dawn of Christmas," the Santa look-a-like replied. "Everyone's a youth." "Santa" shook his head sadly despite the joke. "But I guess I can't blame you all for not believing."

"Because you're not real?" Apollo asked without really expecting an answer.

He got one anyway. "Because you're all too naughty to receive presents from me! Without seeing

evidence of me, of course you don't believe in me!"

"W-what?" Apollo reeled at the accusation that he was "too naughty," and he sputtered more than he cared to admit before replying. "What do you mean I'm 'too naughty'? What have I done?"

"Many things," the man said as he stroked his long, snowy beard. "You accused your innocent co-worker of murder –"

"Hey, you can't hold that against me!" Apollo objected angrily. "Not even Athena holds that against me!"

"You don't appreciate your superiors enough," the bearded man added.

"What's that supposed to mean?" Apollo asked, uncertain where "Santa" was getting these ideas from. "I respect Mr. Wright a lot."

"But what about your other superior? Trucy Wright?" the man inquired. Apollo blanched and sputtered for the third time that night.

"I – well – oh, come on!" Apollo said. "She's, I mean, she's almost half my age!"

"Don't flatter yourself, kid," the man said and wagged a finger. "You're a lot younger than that. Try two-thirds your age."

"Okay, two-thirds," Apollo conceded as he realized how atrocious his math had been. "But still. Younger than me. We don't even have the same profession!"

"This isn't even getting into how little you care about your *other* other superior, Charley," the man said and shook his head sadly.

"The plant?!" Apollo said, disbelieving.

"I might've told him about that one," Trucy admitted with a teasing smile. Apollo groaned and shook his head.

"Listen, Santa, I get it. I'm on the naughty list," Apollo said. "But I still don't believe you're *actually* Santa. Trucy says you know what I want for Christmas, and if you say lozenges or Gavineers tickets, I'm going to know Trucy put you up to this."

"Ho ho ho!" the red-clad man laughed heartily. "I'd never dream of getting you any of those things for Christmas!"

"Well, so far, so good," Apollo said, though he didn't quite mean it. He'd just told "Santa" not to get him any of those things after all. "So what do I *really* want?" At that, "Santa" gestured for Apollo to lean in. Apollo just shrugged and did so – may as well see what the "Santa" would guess, right?

"What you want," the man whispered. "Is a copy of Lamiroir's latest album!"

Apollo jerked back in surprise and stared at the "Santa" dumbfounded. He really *did* want a copy of

Lamiroir's latest album for Christmas, more than anything. But he hadn't told *anyone* about that... not even anyone at the Wright Anything Agency! He hadn't even let on about it to Clay while he was alive! So how could this random person know unless...

"No way," Apollo said, and he raised his arms defensively. "There is *no way* you are *Santa Claus*! I said it before and I'll say it again! It's not *possible*!"

"But I know exactly what you want for Christmas," the man said proudly. "I can tell you what *anyone* wants for Christmas!"

"Trucy?" Apollo asked, feeling genuinely curious.

"Certainly," the man answered. "She just wants –"

"NO!" Trucy leapt in between them, and when Apollo looked at her he could tell her smile was rather forced. "Y-you couldn't get it for me anyway, Apollo!"

"Why exactly is that?" Apollo asked again, and he smirked a little. At this point asking was more about getting Trucy worked up than it was about actually feeling curious about what the gift could possibly be. Instead of answering him, though, Trucy turned around and appealed to Santa.

"Please, Santa Claus, you can't tell him!" Trucy said.

"Ho ho ho!" Santa laughed and smiled. "My apologies, Trucy. I wouldn't dream of spilling the secret of anyone on the Nice List such as yourself." At that remark, Trucy turned around and stuck her tongue out at Apollo with a smile. Apollo only rolled his eyes.

"Okay, so I might – *might* – buy that you're Santa Claus," Apollo said, carefully phrasing his concession. "I still don't see how exactly I'm supposed to help you with your Rudolph problem. I don't know enough about magic reindeer biology to help get his nose shining again. Heck, I don't know *anything* about magic reindeer biology!" (*Because magic reindeer aren't supposed to exist!*)

"You don't need to know anything about magic reindeer biology," Santa answered. "I wasn't planning on getting Rudolph's nose working again. I just need *some* kind of light to guide my reindeer. Anything would do!"

"And that's why I came to you, Polly," Trucy said, and she started bouncing on her heels again. "You know that Daddy would never let me take any of the Christmas lights off of Charley at the office –"

"I maintain that Charley does *not* count as a Christmas tree..." Apollo added with a grumble, but Trucy just kept on talking as though he hadn't said anything.

"So I figured I could ask you to give your Christmas lights to Santa to light his way!" Trucy said. Apollo initially opened his mouth to object, but before he spoke a thought struck him.

Did he really use his Christmas lights anyway? He didn't have any displays up, after all, and he felt like he got his fill of decorations at the Anything Agency. Whatever Christmas lights he *did* have weren't being used for any purposes at all. The real Santa Claus or not, the bearded man before him would probably still make better use of the Christmas lights than him.

Apollo scowled at his own thought process. He wasn't *really* going to – but *he* wasn't doing anything with them, so – “Augh! You win, Trucy! I don't know if he really is Santa, but he can have my Christmas lights. I don't use them anyway,” Apollo said.

“Hooray!” Trucy squealed with delight and leapt at Apollo, giving him a hug. Apollo sighed and reciprocated. Much as his “superior” befuddled him, he couldn't deny that they were friends. She then released him and turned back to Santa. “Christmas is back on!”

“Ho ho ho!” Santa stepped forward and clapped Apollo on the back much to his surprise. “I think this kind of action means that you deserve a spot on the Nice List after all, Mr. Justice!”

“Oh, well – thank you, Mr. Claus – I mean what?” Apollo shook his head, baffled at his own words. “I'm buying into this too much...” he muttered. “Just wait here. I'll go get the Christmas lights from my apartment.”

“Thank you again, Mr. Justice,” Santa said with a wave. “I won't forget when I come to fill your stockings!”

Apollo decided against remarking that he hadn't even put any stockings up.

“Goodbye, Santa Claus!” Trucy waved as Santa Claus rode down the street, his sleigh and reindeer now adorned with Christmas lights as donated by Polly. In the front, Rudolph seemed especially pleased with the red lights he'd been given, granting him his signature red glow again.

“Merry Christmas! Ho ho ho!” Santa waved in turn as he rode away, disappearing into the darkness of the Christmas night. Trucy turned to Apollo and beamed.

“Can you believe it? We saved Christmas!” Trucy said. Apollo shook his head, but he still smiled.

“Yeah... something like that,” Apollo said. (*Score one for Trucy Wright and the spirit of Christmas!*) Trucy couldn't help but tally the “victory” in her mind, though she didn't plan on vocalizing it. “But who *was* that guy?”

Now Trucy pouted, and she realized she'd have to re-examine how victorious her victory was. “You know, Apollo. We went over this. He's Santa Claus!”

“Yeah, yeah, he's 'Santa'; I got that,” Apollo said, waving his arms somewhat defensively. “But who was he *really*?”

“Santa!” Trucy insisted. Apollo sighed and pinched the bridge of his nose.

“Santa's not real.”

“Is too!”

“Not.”

“Is too!”

“Not.”

“Is too!”

“Not.”

“OBJECTION!”

Before Trucy could respond to Apollo again, they were both very *loudly* interrupted. Trucy snapped her head in the direction of the noise, and –

Oh. Daddy.

She was *probably* in trouble now.

“Trucy, what are you doing all the way over on Apollo's side of town?” Daddy asked, sounding more worried than upset. Trucy brightened somewhat as she picked up on the apparent concern in her Daddy's eyes and face. She probably wouldn't be in *trouble* – though she definitely messed up by making her Daddy worry. Urk.

Phoenix Wright sighed with relief as he approached Trucy and Apollo. Seeing as Apollo was with Trucy, it was unlikely anything worse than feeling chilly had happened to Trucy. Was he still upset that she'd run off on Christmas Eve? Of course! But at least he knew where she was again, and that's what was important. “Trucy, what are you doing all the way over on Apollo's side of town?” he asked. Apollo immediately started to hem and haw, but Trucy answered more readily, if with a somewhat guilty air.

“Sorry, Daddy,” she said. “I didn't mean to worry you. I came here to get Apollo to help me save Christmas!”

Phoenix quirked an eyebrow, and his lips quivered into a small smile. Oh the way she still surprised him... “Save Christmas, you said?” Apollo groaned in the background, but Phoenix ignored him for now.

Trucy nodded and she brightened. “Uh-huh! Santa Claus showed up outside the Anything Agency and said he needed help. Rudolph's nose stopped glowing red, and he needed lights to guide his way through the dark, Christmas night.”

Phoenix decided against objecting on the grounds that Los Angeles was lit up rather brightly at all hours of the night. Anyway, it was probable that any Santa Claus would still need light while traveling over less densely populated regions.

“You were busy talking on the phone to Mo – Master Maya and I didn't want to bother you,” Trucy continued, and Phoenix didn't fail to notice Trucy almost slip and call her “Mommy.” Phoenix made a mental note to remind Trucy to stop searching for prospective mothers – and to furthermore stop

joining forces with Pearl to convince him and Maya to pursue a romance together. After more than ten years of it, Phoenix had to admit it was getting tiresome.

“And I knew you didn't want me to take the Christmas lights off of Charley,” Trucy said. “So I decided to ask Apollo to help save Christmas, and he did!”

“To be clear, I only gave the guy my Christmas lights because I wasn't using them anyway,” Apollo said, sounding insistent and more than a little embarrassed by his involvement. “I don't know if he was *really* Santa Claus.”

“He was!” Trucy said, and Phoenix decided that now was time to step in.

“Okay, okay, calm down,” Phoenix said as he stepped between them. “Trucy, you know that evidence is the most important thing in a court of law, right?” Trucy nodded. “So what evidence is there that the man really was Santa Claus?”

“He knew what me and Apollo really wanted for Christmas!” Trucy said, the words almost tumbling out of her mouth in her excitement. “Only Santa could know something like that!” Phoenix looked to Apollo, who looked pensive.

“I don't know how he did it, but he really did know,” Apollo said. “I didn't tell anyone that I wanted a copy of Lamiroir's newest album for Christmas – I just bought it for myself. But this 'Santa Claus' already knew somehow.”

“Strange...” Phoenix said, and he tapped his chin as he considered the evidence. It *was* awfully convincing. He hadn't even thought to guess that Apollo wanted one of Lamiroir's albums for Christmas, but in retrospect it made a lot of sense. Something about Trucy's story was still nagging at him from the back of his mind, though...

And then it clicked in his mind. Phoenix couldn't help but smirk a little as he formed his next question. “Wait, Trucy – is that the *best* evidence from the case for Santa?” Phoenix asked.

“Well, he also had reindeer and a sleigh,” Trucy added. Phoenix nodded, conceding that, but he continued.

“But there wasn't anything else really 'proving' he was Santa?” Phoenix asked. “I'm only wondering. After all, if Apollo gave Santa Claus the lights he needed to guide his flying sleigh through the air safely...”

“Then doesn't it seem a little strange that neither of you have mentioned seeing it take off from the ground?” Phoenix asked, feeling triumphant. Trucy's hand shot up to her mouth, and she jolted with shock. Apollo merely nodded and a smile grew on his face.

“Now I see what you're getting at,” Apollo said with a nod. “You're right that we didn't see him take off to the sky. He just rode off with his sleigh and reindeer, and all of them were firmly on the ground.”

“So why *didn't* Santa Claus fly?” Phoenix asked.

“Well – he must've – um...” Trucy babbled a bit, but ultimately had no recourse. Phoenix nodded and

shrugged.

“Sorry, Trucy, but the answer's pretty clear,” he said. “It's because the man *wasn't* Santa Claus at all!”

“No!” Trucy wailed, and she frowned with disappointment. “Aw... I really wanted Santa Claus to be real...”

“Don't we all, Trucy,” Phoenix said, and he sighed. “It's too bad. There was a pretty good case going for him there.”

“But wait –” Apollo said, and Phoenix recognized his questioning look. “If he wasn't Santa – who *was* he?” Trucy's expression shifted to one of puzzlement as well, but Phoenix shook his head.

“I already have a feeling who it is,” Phoenix said. “I know one guy with a Santa outfit, and he's just the type to bum Christmas lights off someone while getting a little too in-character as Santa Claus.” Phoenix wrapped his coat more tightly around him. “C'mon. Let's go pay him a visit.”

Miles Edgeworth sighed as he placed the last ornament upon the tree – a star for the very top. He stepped back and looked at the Christmas tree contentedly; he'd successfully adorned it with only the most critical eye for interior design he had. True, he was a prosecutor by calling, but he had his hobbies, and arranging ornaments was among them. Pity he could only practice it once a year.

“Edgey!” Edgeworth turned around at the sound of his name and waved to Larry Butz, who was emerging from the kitchen with a tray of cookies. “Wow! The tree looks INCREDIBLE! Heh, I never knew you had an eye for this kind of stuff!”

“It's a simple hobby of mine,” Edgeworth said with a smile. “I thought I'd share it with you this year.”

Edgeworth chuckled internally as he considered the chain of events that had led to him spending Christmas Eve with his old childhood friend Larry Butz. At Larry's apartment no less! Edgeworth was normally the first to say that his relationship with Larry was nothing short of rocky and chaotic. On the one hand there was the bond of childhood friendship. On the other hand there was the fact that “when something smells, it's usually the Butz.” That hadn't changed, no matter how much older either he or Larry became.

Edgeworth didn't *dislike*, Larry, no. He just preferred to avoid his presence. At all costs. And yet this year...

Well, when Larry sent him a lovely painting of the District Court in the mail, Edgeworth didn't quite have the heart to say no to the invitation to celebrate Christmas (or rather least Christmas Eve) at Larry's apartment.

Larry's home was modest, but functional. Edgeworth knew he could never perpetually exist in such an environment, but he had to confess that it was possible Larry knew what he was doing for himself. Spending Christmas Eve there wasn't going to hurt anyone.

It didn't hurt that Larry had actually managed to become proficient at visual and culinary art; the

painting evidenced skill and the cookies were at least passable. They'd mostly chatted about their exploits the last few years – Larry never did convince Franziska to model for “Franzy's Whippity Whip Trip,” but he *did* manage to publish a few other original children's storybooks. Edgeworth shared what he'd been doing with Wright to try and overcome the “Dark Age of the Law,” and he ignored Larry's plaintive complaints about the ridiculousness of the media's title for the so-called “age.” All in all, it was shaping up to be a fairly reasonable evening.

Until someone rather loudly knocked at the door. Edgeworth quirked an eyebrow at Larry – he hadn't mentioned other guests – but Larry only shrugged, apparently just as confused as he. They both stood and walked to the door, and Larry opened it, revealing a somewhat annoyed-looking Phoenix right and a pair of shivering youths – Trucy Wright and Apollo Justice.

“Hey, Nick!” Larry said, grinning, ever the optimist as far as Edgeworth could tell. “Are you here for Christmas Eve too?”

Phoenix blinked, evidently not understanding what Larry was talking about, and Edgeworth took that as a pretty clear sign he hadn't come to celebrate anything. “Um, no, Larry,” he said. “Actually I'm here to ask you about something.”

“Well, shoot,” Larry said, still grinning.

“Well, not exactly *ask* so much as, well...” Phoenix hemmed and hawed a bit. “*Accuse.*”

“Wait, *what?*” Larry exclaimed. Edgeworth crossed his arms and frowned, waiting for Phoenix to elaborate. “Accuse me of WHAT?”

“I've got a pretty solid hunch that you used a sleigh, nine reindeer, and your old Santa suit to get Apollo to give you his Christmas lights about an hour ago,” Phoenix said. “You're the only guy I know with a Santa suit, and getting *that* into character is something I could see you doing, so –”

“*Objection,*” Edgeworth intervened, his frown deepening. “I'm afraid that simply isn't possible, Wright.”

“Why's that?” Phoenix asked.

“Because I've been celebrating Christmas with Larry for the past *three* hours,” Edgeworth explained, and he spread his arms, his hands face up to hammer the point home. “In other words, Larry Butz has a *perfect* alibi!”

“W-what?” Phoenix reeled back, surprised that he could be so wrong. “But – wait, what? Then who was that Santa Claus?”

“Does this mean... Santa's real!” Trucy cheered and bounced on her heels, clearly pleased by this turn of events. Edgeworth raised a hand, silently asking for some quiet.

“Before we get too excited,” he said. “May I ask how this all got started?”

Phoenix, Trucy, and Apollo explained the whole thing to Edgeworth and Larry in short order. Phoenix scratched at his head, uncertain of how to work around Larry's clear alibi. His daughter maintained that this proved the Santa she and Apollo met was the real deal. Edgeworth, however, had a glint in his eyes that made Phoenix suspect he'd figured something out.

"Edgeworth, you look like you have this whole 'case' solved," Phoenix said. "Mind sharing with the class?" Edgeworth chuckled and smirked.

"Certainly, Wright," he said. "You've simply looked at the problem wrong. In your own words, you need to 'turn things around.'"

"Turn things around? How?" Phoenix asked. There weren't many clues before them. What was there to turn around?

"Indeed," Edgeworth said. "You're trying to figure out who might be Santa Claus. But the question you *should* be asking is who Santa Claus *has* to be."

"What do you mean?" Phoenix asked, and he tapped his chin as he tried to focus and follow Edgeworth's train of thought.

"There's one clue you've overlooked," Edgeworth said. "Santa's *beard*."

"Why his beard?" Apollo asked. "There was nothing strange about it."

"Exactly," Edgeworth said. "Neither you nor Trucy remarked on the beard. Both of you have eagle-vision thanks to the 'Perceive' skill you both possess, so I think it's safe to say that if something had been odd about the beard, you would've noticed."

"That makes sense," Trucy said.

"So if nothing was odd about the beard, what does that mean?" Edgeworth asked, though Phoenix could guess it was rhetorical, especially since Edgeworth plowed on with his train of thought. "It means that the beard was *genuine*. It wasn't fake or synthetic – it was a *real beard* actually attached to the chin of a person."

"So then –" Phoenix felt like he was starting to see what Edgeworth's conclusion was, and Edgeworth nodded.

"This 'Santa Claus' knew what you wanted for Christmas, so he must be familiar with you," Edgeworth said. "And his beard was most likely genuine, so he must have a beard. Who fits that description?"

"There's only one person!" Trucy said. "Besides the real Santa Claus, I mean." (*Note to self: talk to Trucy about Santa Claus.*)

"And I know precisely where he is," Edgeworth said, and he tapped the side of head.

"Well, Edgeworth," Phoenix said, feeling duly impressed. "Lead the way."

Phoenix and the others watched the scene before them with some amusement. Outside the courthouse, a veritable *party* was being thrown. There were lights and tables with refreshments, there was a cakewalk and a skating rink, and most prominently there was a bearded Santa Claus sitting on a chair besides nine reindeer draped in lights.

“His Honor's annual Christmas party,” Edgeworth explained as he gestured to the scene. “Held outside the District Court every year. Though no one gets an invitation, everyone is invited. If you know, you may go.”

“I've known about it,” Phoenix said. “But I didn't know His Honor played Santa Claus. It makes sense now that I know.”

“So the *Judge* is our 'Santa'?” Apollo asked, dumbfounded. “I can't believe I didn't recognize him...”

“Well, he's not the star of the trials, even if he's in attendance,” Phoenix said. “And I'll bet he was too bundled up for you to really see his face.”

“Definitely,” Trucy said. “But how do you think he knew what we wanted for Christmas?”

“There's such a thing as courthouse gossip,” Phoenix said. “And he's a judge. Of course he'd be the best *judge* of what people want for Christmas!” Apollo bristled at the play on words, but Phoenix suspected more than that bothered him.

“But if he's such a good judge of people,” Apollo said. “Why can't he tell when witnesses are blatantly lying on the stand?!”

“Even a broken clock is right once a year, right?” Larry interjected very suddenly and loudly. Edgeworth shook his head but smiled.

“Twice a day, but the comparison is apt enough,” Edgeworth said. “His Honor is not quite as foolish as you might assume. He's an old coot, but he possesses more wisdom than the rest of the Court combined. So while he may get tricked in the heat of a trial, when given time to consider things he can easily discern the true desires of those who appear in court often enough.” Trucy and Apollo paused to consider this, and Apollo eventually nodded. Trucy, however, remained pensive.

“Well, as long as we're here, we may as well enjoy,” Phoenix said with a smile. “I don't know about you, but seven years as a poker champion has me feeling lucky. I'll try the cakewalk.”

“Hey, wait up, Nick!” Larry said, and he dashed after Phoenix.

“I think I'll have a quick chat with Mr. Blackquill – and is that Ms. Cykes? Seems as though he invited her after all,” Edgeworth said, and he strolled off, leaving Apollo alone with Trucy.

“Well, now what?” Apollo asked Trucy, but she didn't respond. Apollo quirked an eyebrow and tried again. “Trucy? Now what do you want to do? Trucy?”

Suddenly, Trucy snapped, and she grinned. “Santa's still real, Apollo.”

“What?” Apollo sputtered *again*, but this time he caught himself quickly. “Okay, Trucy, how's that

supposed to work? We just figured out that it was actually the Judge –” Apollo's eyes went wide. “You don't really mean...”

“I do!” Trucy said, and she grabbed Apollo's hand and began dragging him towards His Honor. “It makes sense, right? None of us know his real name!”

“But that doesn't mean –”

“The judge is actually Santa Claus!”

Apollo sighed and decided against further protest. He'd let Trucy have this one thing – it'd be his Christmas present to her.

“Merry Christmas, Trucy,” he said with a sigh. Trucy paused in her mad dash towards “Santa Claus” and flashed Apollo a grin.

“You too, Polly.”

And they were off.