

The Man Who Called Wolf

By Marilyn Reeves

When Jeffrey Holmes was a boy he wanted to be a fireman. There was a fire station a couple of blocks down the street and every day the fire trucks would come roaring by his house, bells clanging, sirens wailing, men in red helmets hanging onto the sides. Jeffrey would hop on his bike and follow them as fast as he could to the site of the fire, and then stand there, fascinated, as the men dragged out the heavy hoses, climbed ladders, and went about the business of putting out the flames.

Like most boys, by the time he became a man Jeffrey had all but forgotten his dream. He joined the army right out of high school, but a brief tour of duty in Afghanistan found him back home again – minus his legs – and wheelchair bound.

He had taken to sitting out on his front porch – once again watching the fire trucks as they rolled by, although he was no longer able to follow them to their destination.

One year at Christmastime Jeffrey bought himself a small tree, and when the Holidays were over he had the bright idea of burning it in the fireplace. He hadn't reckoned on it toppling over onto the living room rug, however. In an instant flames were licking at the walls above the mantle and eating their way through the rug! Jeffrey grabbed his phone and dialed 911, then rolled out to the front porch to await the firemen.

Luckily they arrived within minutes and quickly dispensed with the flames, but left behind the blackened walls, the ruined carpet and the smoke-damaged furniture. Even this devastation was offset by the excitement of watching those men do their job, however. And once the ordeal of dealing with the insurance adjustors, and hiring people to restore the damaged items was behind him, Jeffrey grew lonely and bored again.

He decided it would be fun to report a fire at the address across the street. And sure enough, here came the truck, sirens screaming, bells clanging, stopping right across from his front porch. A few minutes later, he heard the cry, "False alarm!" and the firemen rolled quietly back to the station. Less than a month later, he reported a fire at the house next door to his. Same drama, same anti-climax, but it was fun while it lasted.

The following summer Jeffrey went out to the back patio to light his charcoal grill. Seemed like it took forever for the briquettes to get hot, so he doused them with kerosene – and, *WHOOSH!* Flames shot up out of the grill in an explosion of energy and caught the old wooden shutters on fire, working their way up to the eaves, and soon the roof itself was on fire, sending up clouds of black, billowing smoke into the air.

So once again Jeffrey dialed 911 to report that his house was on fire. But the dispatcher said, "I'm sorry, Mr. Holmes, but you're on record for having reported two false alarms within this past year. We will be sending you a citation, but no one will come to put out your so-called fire."

So poor Jeffrey rolled out to the front walk to watch his house burn to the ground.