



Santa's helpers

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This year, Santa is snowed under. He still has so much work to do before Christmas Eve!

“Dear oh dear,” he moans. “How will I manage? Christmas will be here soon but nothing is ready!” He rubs his beard as he thinks...

Suddenly, someone knocks on his door.

A boy appears, holding a parcel in his hands.

“Hello Santa,” the boy says. “I had a bit of trouble finding your house, but I kept on searching, and here I am. I have a parcel for you.”

Santa opens the parcel. “My word,” he exclaims, “Still more letters from children! Whatever will I do? I’ll never manage all by myself!”

The boy is about to leave when Santa grabs his sleeve, “I say, young man, would you be able to help me? You look like a smart cookie, I need someone like you. There is still so much left to do...”

“Well, thank you Santa,” replies the boy. “I hope that I’ll be up to scratch. You’re my all-time hero!” he adds with a blush.

“Don’t worry,” says Santa. “I believe in you.”

“Well... okay then, yes!” says the boy.

“Thank you!” says Santa. “I’m so relieved. We’ll be a great team. So come by tomorrow morning. By the way, what’s your name?”

“Arthur,” replies the boy, who whistles happily as he leaves.



The next day, when Santa wakes, he dresses quickly and goes out to the garden. Outside, Arthur is waiting for him already.

“Hello, my friend,” says Santa. “Today we’re going to try out the sleigh in the shed to see if it’s working properly.”

After a year of not being used, it’s all dusty and covered with cobwebs.

“Oh no!” complains Santa. “It’s looking so shabby! It will need a good scrub...”

“I’ll take care of it,” says Arthur. “I’ll dust and polish it until it shines.”

Arthur takes a cloth and begins to scrub the sleigh hard, hard, hard...

And craaacck! The sleigh breaks into a thousand pieces!

Santa is upset. “Well... Luckily you’re here,” he says at last. “Together we can fix it.”

Arthur and Santa start to put the sleigh together again with tools. But the wooden planks are old and worn. It’s no use, the sleigh can’t be fixed.

So Santa says, “Arthur, I’m going to set you a new mission. You’re going to go to the village woodcutter and collect as much wood as you can.”

“You can count on me, Santa,” the boy replies. And Arthur sets off.

To fix the broken sleigh, Arthur goes to the woodcutter from the nearby village. He knocks on the door and a girl opens it. "Hello, young lady," he says. "I'm looking for the woodcutter. Santa's sleigh is broken and it needs to be fixed." The girl replies, "My father isn't here. My name is Mara. How about you?" "Arthur." "Well, Arthur," Mara replies, "I think that I can help you." Arthur thinks that the girl looks fun. She is wearing a jolly hat, a bracelet with bright green beads, and a yellow dress. "Oh thank you!" says Arthur. "You're saving my life." Santa's new assistant and the woodcutter's daughter smile at one another. Arthur takes Mara's hand and leads her to the workshop. Inside, it's a complete mess! But Mara finds a dozen planks of wood. Arthur's eyes open wide. "Errr," he stumbles. "These planks are all different colours, with drawings of flowers and butterflies on them..." "Yes," replies Mara. "I painted them. Do you like them?" "Very pretty," says Arthur, "but it's not really what I'm looking for." "Come on," Mara exclaims, "the sleigh will be much prettier this way!" Together, they saw, glue, nail together the planks. Too bad if it's not entirely straight. One hour later, the sleigh is ready. Even if its colours don't match and it's... a little wonky! Arthur smiles, "I knew we'd get there!"





The next morning, when Santa wakes up, Arthur is already waiting for him outside. "Today," says Santa with a smile, "I'm going to try on my costume. I want to make sure that it will still fit me! I hope that I haven't put on weight just because I like eating..." Santa looks everywhere, in the wardrobe in his bedroom, in the dresser in the living room, even in the cupboard in the kitchen... His costume is nowhere to be found! The only thing he finds, in one drawer, is his hat. Santa slips it on his head and says, "Well Arthur, I need you. Please go to the haberdashery and bring me back red fabric and thread. We're going to make a stunning costume ourselves." Arthur goes to the haberdashery in the nearby village. What a disaster, it's closed! That's when he comes across Mara, the woodcutter's daughter.



“Don't worry, Arthur,” says Mara. “I'll help you. People tell me I have fairy fingers!” She takes Arthur's hand and leads him to her house. She looks for red fabric everywhere but can't find any. So in her wardrobe, Mara takes out fabrics in yellow, green and pink... as well as feathers and ribbons. Then she takes out her sewing machine and sews the fabrics together with colourful thread.

Soon, the costume is ready... even if it's as colourful as the sleigh!

Finally, the two young people find Santa.

When Santa sees his costume, at first his eyes open wide... Then he exclaims,

“Thank you, thank you, my friends. Luckily the children won't see me when I give out the presents!”

And Santa bursts out laughing.

The next morning, when Santa wakes up, he can hear noise from the kitchen. It's Arthur and Mara busy in the kitchen. They are mixing butter, sugar and chocolate. They giggle when they get flour all over themselves.

"Santa," says Mara, "we know that you like eating. So we're making you a delicious cake. You can taste it before you go to the toy workshop."

"You two are adorable!" cries Santa. And when the cake is ready, he finds it so delicious that he takes more, and more, and more...

Arthur warns him, "Watch out Santa, this isn't the time to get sick."

But suddenly, his face goes white. As white as the pompom on his hat. "Oops," he groans, "I think I should have listened to you. I've eaten too much! I'm going to lie down a little on the couch."

The two children go to fetch a blanket. Arthur reassures Santa, "Don't worry and get a good rest. We'll look after the toys."





While he rests, Arthur and Mara go to the toy workshop. Over there, they discover... a band of busy-looking elves. "Hello, children!" exclaims one small fellow. "I'm Head Elf. Over here we have Funny Elf, Handy Elf and Grumpy Elf. What are you doing here?"



"We've come to help you," Mara replies, "because Santa is a little sick. He ate too much cake."

The elves burst out laughing. "Santa is very greedy," they say, "and this always gets him in trouble!"

Meanwhile, Mara looks at the presents. She is very surprised.

"These presents look a bit dull for children! I have an idea to make them more colourful. Elves, would you mind helping us?"

Head Elf agrees. Funny Elf bounces about everywhere, Handy Elf picks up some tools, and Grumpy Elf grumbles, like always.

Next, Mara digs around her bag and pulls out heaps of fabric scraps and ribbon strips. "You'll see, Arthur," she says,

"we're going to make magnificent gift wrapping."

And all of them start cutting, sewing and sticking bits together to decorate the parcels.

All the colours look so cheerful!

Soon, the presents are ready, wonderfully wrapped up.

"We've done it, it looks marvellous!" exclaim Arthur, Mara and the elves. And they hug one another joyfully.





The elves start carrying the presents, but they can't even lift them! "Whew," exclaims Head Elf, "we're all weak. We've lost our muscles since last Christmas."

"Don't panic," Mara says. "We'll train you up and build your strength again!"

Arthur says, "you'll need to do some sport. So off you go, time for a run!" And the elves start running. Jog, jog jog!

"Good," says Arthur. "Now it's time to practise parcel-throwing! Fast, accurate, with a careful flick of the wrist for fragile parcels... Come on, take turns throwing."

And the elves start throwing the parcels to one another very carefully...

Next, Mara ties a rope between two tall posts. "Now," she explains, "you are going to practise keeping your balance. This is important for walking on the rooftops."

Grumpy Elf gets up on the rope... and boom, he falls on the ground.

"Grmflgr," he groans. Funny Elf helps him to get up.

"Come on, try again," says Head Elf. "You'll get there!" One by one, they have a turn.

Soon, all the elves have completed the exercise. Even Grumpy Elf smiles!

"Bravo, you're good and ready for Christmas Eve," cheer Arthur and Mara.

"Hurray!" shout the elves, jumping around joyfully.

Santa is feeling better now. He gets up from his couch and goes to the toy workshop. He opens the door gently, and sees Arthur, Mara and the elves sitting in the middle of the toy workshop and chitchatting with each other happily.

When Mara and Arthur notice Santa, they run to give him a hug. "Thank you, Santa!" they say. "Thanks to you, we've had a terrific time! To thank you, look! We've made you a hot-chocolate fountain. This will warm you up on Christmas Eve."

"What a good idea!" says Santa. But when Arthur and Mara try to install the chocolate fountain on the sleigh, they realise that it is too big to fit!

"I think we will have to build another sleigh..." says Arthur with a smile.

"Come to my place," Mara offers. "Together, we'll manage... I'm sure of it!"

The planks of wood are as colourful as before. And they need to saw, nail and glue them again...

Soon, the second sleigh is ready. When Santa discovers it, he grins from ear to ear. "Thanks to you, my friends," he says, "this Christmas will be a Christmas like no other. And that's a very good thing.

Of course, I'm counting on you to accompany me on Christmas Eve!" Arthur and Mara blush with delight. "Thank you, Santa!" they cry. "It will be the most beautiful night of our lives!"



THE END