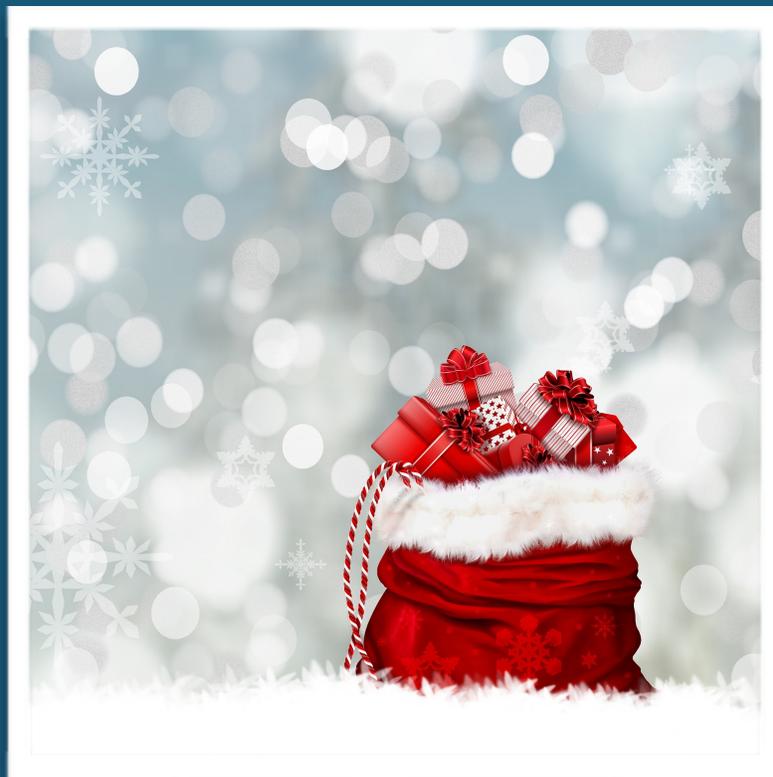


The Year Santa Slept Through Christmas



by

DiAnn Mills

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Mrs. Claus twirled into the room balancing a Christmas tree shaped platter of carrots and celery sticks. “Here you are, my love.” She set the snack on the workbench and gave him a kiss on his bald head. Oh, how she loved this time of year and her wonderful Santa.

He scowled at her. “I ordered sugar cookies with frosting and sprinkles.”

“This is healthier and will give you strength for Christmas Eve.”

He added a drop of blue sparkle to Barbie’s eyes. “I’ve eaten cookies for hundreds of years and have no intentions of stopping now.”

“Your blood pressure is up. You’ve gained twelve pounds and—”

“Clara Claus, ever since you got your girlish figure back, you’ve been driving me crazy with dieting.”

She loved him, but he always got cantankerous at Christmastime. “I’m sorry. How about a Diet Coke?”

He closed his eyes. His face was flushed. Was he ill or...angry?

“I’ll bring whatever you want.”

“Hot chocolate and sugar cookies.”

She studied him and felt his head. “Santa, you’re feverish.”

“Nonsense. I’m fine.”

“Did you skip your flu shot?”

He sighed. “Didn’t have time. I was behind schedule.” “What happened to the idea of hiring more elves and slowing down?”

“Can’t seem to let any of it go.” He finished Barbie and dabbed the wet brush into paint cleaner. “Tell you what. I’ll take a couple of Tylenol and add a short power nap.”

Mrs. Claus drew in a ragged breath. Santa never took a nap on December 23rd. And when that “short power nap” passed the two-hour mark, Mrs. Santa called an emergency meeting of the elves.

“I’m afraid he’s exhausted. What shall we do?”

Ernest, the head elf, lifted his green, pointed hat and bowed low. “Never fret, Mrs. Claus. Our motto is ‘work till it’s done, despite the rising sun.’”

Mrs. Claus tied on her apron and stepped into the toy shop. “Just show me what to do,” she said. Hours later, she took a quick break and crept into the bedroom. She touched Santa’s forehead. Burning hot!

With a gasp she hurried to the medicine cabinet for the specially marked pill bottle labeled, “Santa’s Christmas Cure.” Two hundred and thirty-nine years ago, he’d gotten a cold at Christmas, and an angel hand-delivered them to their door. The magic had worked in less than an hour.

She wakened Santa. “Dear, I want you to take one of these.”

He groaned but chewed the candy-cane flavored pill. Did he even know she was there?

Mrs. Santa said a quick prayer and kissed his hot forehead. She tiptoed back to the workshop. How would they ever be ready in time?

“Elves,” she said. “We have a serious problem. Santa is sick.”

“But he’ll be better tomorrow, right?” Ernest said. “He’s never missed Christmas Eve.”

“I’ve given him powerful medicine. The last time it worked fast.” She refused to appear worried. “I expect him to come through the toy shop door any moment.” “I have the master list.” Ernest waved a scroll, and it trailed to the floor.

So much work to do!

An hour later, no sign of Santa. Mrs. Claus and the elves worked past dinner time. When their stomachs roared, she ordered vegetable pizza and orange juice from North Pole Pizza.

While the elves worked and munched on thin crust, she checked to see how Santa was faring. His snores filled the house, and his fever had not broken. Snatching her cell phone, she pressed 777-7777 for the Angel Answering Association.

“I’m sorry. We’re out of the office making house calls. No child wants to be sick for Christmas.”

What about Santa? Panicking solved nothing.

The Christmas Clock in the hallway chimed December 24th. Only hours remained. Who would deliver the toys to all the children?

She’d not think about it. Hurrying back to the toy shop, she and the elves worked until breakfast. With no time for egg white omelets, she broke her healthy eating vow and ordered from Kringle’s Kolaches.

At twelve noon, she and the elves were exhausted. But no time to rest. She quickly made sugar-free, fat-free hot chocolate and attempted to call AAA again only to receive the same canned message.

“Ernest,” she said. “We have to find a substitute for Santa tonight. Even if his fever breaks, he’ll be weak.

I’m not sure why God hasn’t healed him. But we can’t disappoint the children.”

“None of us are his size.” Ernest swiped a tear from his eye. “This is terrible. What can we do?”

She put her arms around his shoulders and saw the other elves were also emotional. “You poor things.” She lifted her chin. “I’ll be Santa. Somewhere we have a beard, and I can add color to my cheeks so they’re rosy.” Ernest touched his mouth. “Santa is twice your size.”

She smiled. “We have plenty of pillows.” “How will you slide down the chimneys?” “I’ll use a sled.”

“And how will you get back up?”

“A rope ladder will do nicely. Now don’t worry another minute. We have to pack the sleigh. I’ll talk to Rudolph now. He’s always been such a deer.”

After all the stress and panic, Mrs. Claus finally mounted the sleigh and made a grand night of it. She slid down a million chimneys, delivered just as many presents, and did it all without a single child stirring. She even remembered how much she loved cookies and milk. Dieting was for every day but Christmas.

Once home she longed for a nap, but first she must look in on Santa.

She found him chatting with an angel and munching on carrots and celery.

“There you are, sweet Clara,” he said. “Did you enjoy yourself?”

“I really did.” She studied the angel. “What took you so long?”

The white-robed fellow smiled. “Every person who gives a gift is a Santa. And it was your turn.”

The End

DiAnn

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About DiAnn

DiAnn Mills is a bestselling author who believes her readers should expect an adventure. She combines unforgettable characters with unpredictable plots to create action-packed, suspense-filled novels.

Her titles have appeared on the CBA and ECPA bestseller lists; won two Christy Awards; and been finalists for the RITA, Daphne du Maurier, Inspirational Reader's Choice, and Carol Award contests. Firewall, the first book in her Houston: FBI series, was listed by Library Journal as one of the best Christian fiction books of 2014.

DiAnn has been termed a coffee snob and roasts her own coffee beans. She's an avid reader, loves to cook, and believes her grandchildren are the smartest kids in the universe.

DiAnn is very active online and would love to connect with readers on any of the following social media platforms or others listed at dianmills.com.

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