

## Fixing Christmas Time

“You hear me?” shouted Mrs. Claus. “We  
are  
over.”

She slammed the door so hard a clock fell off the wall and clattered to the floor.

Santa shouted, “Fine, leave! I’ll do Christmas by myself!”

But when no reply came, Santa muttered into his beard, “You’ll see. There’ll be a good, *traditional* Christmas. With toys that are new - shiny and new - for every child.”

He huffed. Mrs. Claus had spoken his greatest fear - how could they make enough toys for the world’s booming population? But no way could he agree with Mrs. Claus’ newfangled, “eco-friendly” ideas. For Santa, the most important thing about Christmas was tradition, and, traditionally, Santa built all toys new.

Only, because of Santa’s increasingly draconian management style, the elves had gone on strike. And, with only ten days until Christmas, thousands of presents still needed building. Santa looked down at the broken clock, a cuckoo clock he’d given Mrs. Claus on their first Christmas together. And for the first Christmas since, he felt alone.

Chingle-changle.

A bell. Could it be?

Santa ran to the door, bursting to apologise to Mrs. Claus; together, he knew they’d find a way to save Christmas. But she wasn’t there.

Instead, a long, hairy face looked up at Santa. But though clearly not his wife, Santa smiled, “If Rudolph’s still here, and if I once built that cuckoo clock, then of *course* there’ll be Christmas. I’ll just make the presents myself.”

Santa slept only three hours a night and worked until exhausted. But sure enough, by Christmas Eve, he’d converted pyramids of plastic and metal into colossal sacks of presents. In the light of Santa’s kitchen lanterns, the gifts glistened. Shiny and new.

“Eat up, Rudolph,” said Santa, tired but eager, and handing Rudolph a carrot. “Tomorrow, we fly.”

The journey started well; although only Rudolph pulled the sleigh, the hydrogen-powered turbo-booster Mrs. Claus had given Santa last Christmas powered them through the sky. But their fortunes changed over London when, exhausted from building presents, Santa fell asleep at the reins.

He awoke to see the sleigh careering towards a ginormous, glowing clockface.

“Gah!” Santa yanked at the reins, but too sharply. They glanced off a giant Ferris wheel and crashed.

A morbid silence followed. Then Santa howled.

“The-the-the,” he stuttered, “PRESENTS!”

Gifts littered the street like garishly wrapped snowdrifts.

“Quick, Rudolph,” said Santa, bending down and scooping them up, “get them back in the sack!”

But Rudolph looked at Santa as if to say, “I can’t because I haven’t got any hands.”

Santa stared at Rudolph. Checked his wristwatch. Blinked. Then exploded, “You stupid, bumbling twerp. If you’d just flown straight, we wouldn’t be in this mess. Now, *millions* of children won’t get their presents!”

Rudolph stared indignantly at Santa. Then turned to leave.

“Wait!”

But Rudolph had already flown away. Just like the other reindeer. And the elves. And Mrs. Claus. Now, Santa was truly alone.

At first, he frantically scooped the presents into his sack. But then, feeling one gift through its wrapping paper, his heart caved in.

The crash had broken the toy inside. Santa caressed it as though a bird lay dying in his hand. He checked another present, and another: broken. All his hard work, wasted.

Santa slumped against a brick wall and slid to the ground. Although too old to cry, a painful knot formed at the roof of his mouth. He gulped and closed his eyes.

He remembered his first Christmas with Mrs. Claus, how he’d built her that cuckoo clock. Somehow, he’d misplaced the most important part - the cuckoo. So, in a flurry of love, he’d sawn off an old umbrella handle and carved it into a new cuckoo, and put that in the clock instead. He’d watched anxiously as she unwrapped the gift. But when she declared it her favourite clock in all the world, he’d almost wept for joy.

Now, a quivering whine escaped Santa’s lips, “Oh, Mrs. Claus. I’m so sorry. All I wanted was a normal Christmas. But everything’s ruined.”

Chingle-changle.

Santa opened his eyes.

Chingle-changle-chingle-changle.

Santa sat upright. He stood. He looked across the flood of broken presents to find the source of noise.

There, from around the corner, galloped dozens of reindeer. Reindeer *and* elves. At the front, cantered Rudolph. And, gripping Rudolph's antlers, sat sideways with majestic grace, rode Mrs. Claus.

Santa bounded over the sea of broken presents to meet the procession.

"Oh Mrs. Claus," he gazed up, "I'm so sorry. All I wanted was - was a...," Santa lowered his head.

"Come on you great idiot," she said, "cheer up. We can still give kids a magical Christmas."

"But the presents are broken. Even with the elves, we just don't have time."

But Mrs. Claus, twinkle in her eye, beckoned behind her. Three elves dragged a colossal sack towards Santa.

"When I left, I went straight to a famous chain of charity shops," said Mrs. Claus. "But when I learnt every shop had mounds of toys, only a *little* too damaged to sell, I called the elves."

Santa saw where this was going. Despite his joy to see Mrs. Claus again, he frowned. "Children deserve a good, traditional -"

But he stopped. Atop the pile of upcycled gifts, something caught his eye. But it wasn't a toy for a child.

"Go on," smiled Mrs. Claus.

Santa picked up the object and gazed at it with wonder: a clock. And not just any clock, but *their* clock. The one he'd built for Mrs. Claus all those years ago. Fixed and repainted; shiny, but *better* than new.

Santa looked up at his wife. And, for the second time that night, felt close to tears. But not because he was sad. And not because he finally believed children could have a wonderful Christmas with upcycled gifts. It was because, after all the presents had been delivered, he'd go home, hang the mended clock back on the wall, and warm himself by the fire with Mrs. Claus.