

# Santa Slims down

a Christmas Story by Ursel Scheffler

illustrated by Jutta Timm

English version by Donald Arthur



1

"Well, that takes care of that!" said Santa Claus with a sigh. He pushed his sleigh into the shed behind the house and tossed his empty burlap sack in the corner. Then he knocked the snow off his boots and coat and went indoors.



2

The first thing he did was say hello to his dog. Then he lit the fire in the chimney. A big cup of hot tea and a pine needle bath - that just what he needed now!

Towards the end of the trip his boots had been really tight. But he kept on hurrying to get all the presents under the Christmas trees on time. Now he could rest and relax. Vacation time until next year. Hooray!



3

When Santa Claus went to bed later, he was very satisfied with himself.

“Oh, yes”, thought Santa. “I’ve got a strenuous but a really important, beautiful job. I can make people happy.” Then he pulled the covers up over his ears and in seconds he was fast asleep.



4

For eight days and nights he slept like a log. Then he was awakened by the sun peeping in through the dusty windowpanes. Still sleepy, he rubbed his eyes and growled: "My goodness, have I slept so long that it's already springtime?" He turned on the radio. First he heard music, and then the weather report for Thursday the second of January. "Cloudless skies, clear air, crisp and cool weather, followed later by snow flurries. January already? The New Year had come tiptoeing in without waking him. His tummy started to rumble. After all, he hadn't eaten anything for a whole week. Was he ever looking forward to a big breakfast with bacon, eggs and all the trimmings. Yes, indeed! But first he would have to get out of bed and go shopping.





5

As he stepped out of the front door with his dog, he didn't look the least bit like Santa Claus any more. Nobody in the neighborhood knew who he really was. For all they knew he was just a kindly old gentleman who raised a few vegetables and had a little workshop next door. At the super market he bought some freshly ground coffee, eggs, butter, bacon, milk and dog biscuits. Along with that a little cheese and today's newspaper. Then he went to the bakery for fresh rolls.



6

"I haven't seen you in ages. Were you on a skiing vacation?" asked the lady behind the bakery counter.

"Skiing vacation?" Santa asked, a little baffled. "No, it was more like a sleighing vacation."

"Well, you certainly look refreshed," said the baker's wife with a chuckle.

"Oh, yes, I desperately needed a little relaxation," Santa reassured the lady, a bit confused.

"Well, enjoy your meal and a happy new year!" the baker's wife called after him as he stepped out of the shop.



7

"Mm hm - well, I'm really looking forward to my breakfast!"  
Santa thought to himself as he set the table. He fed his dog.  
He breakfasted for almost two hours and gobbled down all  
the rolls and muffins and drank five cups of coffee.



8

"And now, let's take a look at what's happening in the world" he thought, and picked up the newspaper. But he couldn't believe the headline!.

"Jolly old Santa needs to get updated. This white-bearded, pot-bellied old fool brings our kids nothing but unhealthy sweets and useless toys with no educational value. ...





9

He also brings some pretty superfluous stuff to the grown-ups. No wonder everyone storms the shops after the holidays and exchanges everything again. The old codger just has to tune up with the times... Modern adults need practical healthy gifts - jogging shoes instead of Christmas cookies!

**...And that beard has got to go, Mr. Claus!"**



10

And with that, Santa's good mood vanished into thin air. He had spent the whole year baking, building, tinkering and trying to make as many wishes as possible come true... And what thanks did he get for it? Enough to make anybody wild with fury. Santa Claus saw red. Angrily he rose to his feet, pulled in his pot belly, held his breath and strode resolutely over to the mirror.

For the first time in a long time, he took a critical look at his reflection. He'd never had time for it before.

"Great merciful sugarplums!" he shouted in horror. "Whoever wrote that stuff in the paper wasn't so far from wrong! I'm just to fat! What am I to do?"

And then there was the beard! It looked disheveled and badly groomed. Perhaps he really would look better without it?



11

He stepped into the bathroom. Snip-snap, he cut off his beard. Then he soaped his face with the shaving brush and took off the last bits of stubble with his straight razor. He looked satisfiedly over at his work. "It's a fact! I look years younger," he mumbled, "I really did look horribly old-fashioned before. From now on I'm going to be a modern, healthy, practical Santa Claus."

The beard was gone. But how was he going to get rid of his belly? Santa Claus touched his trouser waist - his corduroy trousers were stretched tight. Well, after all, he *had* just eaten seven rolls, three fried eggs, bacon, cheese and a humungous cup of coffee with sugar and cream. Now, he remembered that he almost got stuck twice in chimneys this Christmas.

If only he had kept one of the diet books he had been giving to people. He looked all over the place, but he couldn't find one. Well, that was no excuse. There were plenty of books in the bookshops and the library!



12

Santa pedaled his bike into the nearest big town. The public library was right across the street from city hall. But to get there he would have to fight his way through the crowds on Main Street. And there was as much hustle and bustle here as there had been before Christmas!

What on earth were all these people doing here? Had they all come here to exchange their Christmas presents? Had he brought them the wrong stuff? He leaned his bike against a building wall and went into the library.





13

The librarian was very helpful when he asked her for books on diet and health. She showed him where the self-help books on modern and practical gift-giving were. He borrowed a whole stack of books and jammed them all into his bicycle basket. As he pedaled back home, his good mood was back, because now he knew exactly what he wanted to do: he wanted to study up on proper gift-filing until the steam started coming out of his ears. He wanted to be the best, healthiest, most practical, modern and beloved Santa Claus the world had ever seen!



14

Santa went into his office and buried himself in the books. He read and read. While he was doing this his hair really stood on end. He really had been doing things wrong all his life! He brought the children what they asked for and not what their wise and educated elders thought was best and most useful for them! He gave them presents from his heart, and not from his mind.

For a moment he seriously considered hanging up his red coat for once and for all. But then he decided to put what he had learned into practice. And he planned to start with himself:



15

Santa Claus prescribed a work-out plan for himself - and a diet. In the morning, before eating his müsli, he would jog a half hour through the woods. When he got to the crossroads, he would do seventeen deep knee-bends and twelve sit-ups. Then he would take a good deep breath and go on jogging.



16

Every Tuesday and Thursday he worked out in the body building gym.

Whenever he saw those big exercise machines, he would have to muster his courage to start again. But he didn't give up. In the evening before he went to bed, and every morning after he got up he would do loosening up exercises in the bathroom, and then he would work out with his punching bag.

Soon his success became visible: his corduroy trousers hung loose around his hips, and whenever he ran up the hill to his house, he no longer had to stop and gasp for breath.





17

In the summer there was plenty of work to do in the garden. Santa Claus harvested rhubarb, carrots and tomatoes. He mixed his own müsli with home-made yoghurt, all as part of a good healthy diet.



18

This year the children, too, would get nothing but healthy and useful presents: woolen socks, long underwear, oatmeal cookies, müsli bars, and perhaps a jumping rope. Simple wooden toys instead of fancy electronic gimmicks. Earmuffs instead of iPods. Flutes instead of iTunes. Being reminded of the simple things of life would do them a lot of good.



19

But as the weather started cooling down, Santa spent more and more of his time in the workshop, building things. Wish lists? This year he didn't take them seriously. He knew much better from his studies what presents the children should get. And because he had learned a lot about handling raw materials, he designed Christmas cards on recycled paper. He had his hands full of activities as Christmas got closer and closer.



20

The annual pre-Christmas press conference with reporters from all over the world was scheduled for early December at the Park Hotel. Santa picked up his red coat from the dry cleaners. He had to wrap it twice around his body and tie it with a laundry line because it kept flapping all over the place.

Before going off, he tossed a glance at the mirror. He stroked his smooth chin and muttered contentedly: "You're looking good, old boy! Athletic, dynamic, Just as healthy as a hog!" And then he rode his bike into town.





21

Shortly afterwards he parked his bike and comfortably climbed the stairs to the hotel entrance. The journalists were already waiting for him. Horrified, they stared at him and shouted, "What? This is supposed to be Santa Claus? - Could we see your ID? - That is impossible! - All his charm is gone! We can't sell that to our readers! - A Santa Claus without a beard and belly? Nobody would believe us!"



22

Before he could say “Kris Kringle”, little helpers popped up from every corner. They brought him what they thought he was missing. Cotton batting for a beard, lots of sofa pillows for a big fat tummy. On top of that walnuts to stuff up the thinned-down cheeks!



23

Finally he looked just as fat and round as he had before.  
Then the photographers were satisfied and took the usual  
pictures to put on the covers of their magazines. Then they  
started their interviews.





24

Then Santa Claus gave an interview. He told them a little about healthy and sensible gift-filing and also things he had learned and thought about throughout the previous year. But the reporters couldn't care less.

"What are the most beautiful presents this year?" a lady inquired.

"That's a secret! If the people can read everything in the paper, then there won't be any more surprises under the tree."

"Well, what are we supposed to write about then?" she asked disappointedly.

"You can write, that I mostly visit the children who believe in me," answered Santa with a wink of his eye to the young lady before disappearing through the glass door leading out of the hotel.





25

As Santa started riding up the forest trail at twilight. looking back at the little village church in the distance, it started to snow. All of a sudden, the whole world seemed to fall silent. And Santa Claus thought to himself: "What a crazy day this was. What a crazy year!" But he had learned a lot. Especially, he now knew for certain what the best part of his job was: the joy of giving! And all the smart-alecs in the world were not going to take that away from him!



26

So he made a bee-line into the house and went right back to work.



27

On the evening of December 24<sup>th</sup>, he packed up his sleigh, as he did every year. Right on the top he put an especially beautiful present. What was inside?

We won't tell - after all, it just might be for you?