

Note from the author, Bea Magnan:

Like many people, Christmas is my favourite time of the year. It's not just about receiving gifts, it's about giving. In particular this year, due to the pandemic we are going through, I have found many adults are in need of a little magic, as well as children. For this reason, I am pleased to offer you, for your personal enjoyment, "The Story of Santapurrs." It's a magical story, for 'children of all ages'. I hope you enjoy it.

The Story of Santapurrs

By

Bea Magnan

"Okay, Grandma," said Julie, as she entered the living room with the two grandchildren in tow. "They've cleaned up and changed into their pajamas, and now they're ready for their Christmas Eve story."

Richard smiled, and Elizabeth reflected, not for the first time, that her husband had a smile that could light up a city block. "Okay, kids, grab your goodnight kisses and skedaddle into your room."

John Jr., quite the little man at six years old, led the way, allowing first his grandfather and then his mother and father to hug and kiss him.

Little Emily, at almost four, followed suit.

As usual, Junior announced, "Okay, but I'm not sleepy."

Emily agreed. "Me neither."

"Good," said Elizabeth, "That way you'll both stay awake right to the end of the Story of Santapurrs."

"Yeah," they said in unison, as they ran towards the bedroom where they always stayed when they visited their grandparents.

Elizabeth moved quickly towards their bedroom, understanding full well how impatient children could be, especially on Christmas Eve.

She entered and softly closed the door behind her, then turned to see Emily, in her twin bed, sitting up with a green Christmas throw around her shoulders in one of the twin beds, and Junior, wrapped in a red Christmas throw, sitting bolt upright in the other. They were determined to stay awake this time.

Elizabeth sat in the big leather chair close to the foot of their beds and reached across the table for their favorite story.

She opened it, carefully moving the silk bookmark from the first page, and began:

“The Story of Santapurrs

Lizzy could feel the cold wet snow right through the corduroy pants she had quickly pulled over her pajamas. No matter. Somewhere nearby there was an animal in terrible distress, and it was up to her to save it.

In no time flat, she was able to pinpoint the source of the sound. Somehow, near the top of the chain-link fence of the playground beside her apartment building, a dark, very large cat was stuck, hanging by its collar from one of the ties. It was struggling to get loose, but the struggling was just making things worse.

Without a moment's hesitation, she ran over and began to climb the fence.

As she climbed, she spoke quietly, ‘Okay, fella, I’m on my way up and I’ll get you out of there, but it would help if you’d stop moving around so much. It makes the fence shake, and if I fall, it’ll make it harder and longer before I can help you.’

‘Okay,’ said the cat, in a distinctly feminine voice, ‘but please hurry. I don’t know how much more of this I can take.’

As Lizzy pushed herself to climb faster, she realized that of all the times she had spoken to any animals she had ever met, this was the first time one of them had answered her, at least that she was aware of. It made her wonder what wonderful conversations she might have missed out on.

With one final burst of speed Lizzy reached the cat, placed an arm under it and through one of the diamond-shaped spaces of the fence, and tried to lift it in order to loosen the hold the tie had on its collar.

The cat tried to cooperate by holding on to what it could of the fence, but it was no good.

‘I’m afraid I’m stuck but good. Can you think of anything else that might work?’

‘I can only think of one other thing. I’ll climb right to the top and throw a leg over. You grab my other leg to stop from choking, and then I’ll have to cut your pretty collar.’

‘No problem. I have lots of collars, but after tonight, I just may stop wearing them.’

‘Okay.’ Lizzy climbed to the very top of the fence and threw a leg over it for balance, while she placed her other leg as best she could under the cat’s belly to ease some of the pressure on its throat.

She reached into her pocket and pulled out the Swiss knife set that her uncle had given her for her birthday and opened the scissors. They were good quality scissors, but the cloth collar was pretty thick. Still, she kept at it until she had

managed to cut right through it. It fell away from the cat's neck and down onto the snow, beside a large, stuffed-looking cloth bag.

The cat shook its head, glad to be free of its constraints, and began to purr. It was a wonderful sound.

Lizzy began the long climb down. The cat, now above Lizzy, said, 'Do you trust me?'

'Sure,' said Lizzy, but almost regretted it in the same instant as the cat grabbed her jacket, at the back of her neck, and proceeded to jump, albeit gracefully, down onto the snow-covered ground.

The cat immediately stood up on its hind legs and extended a paw, and said, 'Santapurrs, at your service and forever beholden to your kindness.'

Lizzy extended her hand and gently shook the paw. 'I'm Lizzy. So, you're Santapurrs, not Santa Claus.'

'Correct. I work with Santa every Christmas Eve, though. He delivers gifts of toys to all the boys and girls in the world, and I deliver gifts of food to all of the pets who have been abandoned all over the world.'

'Oh,' said Lizzy, 'how wonderful. I wish I...I mean,' she stopped in mid-sentence and simply repeated, 'that's really wonderful, to be able to help animals in need.'

'I can tell you love animals, Lizzy. Is this what you want to do also? Feed the hungry ones?' The bright green eyes of Santapurrs searched Lizzy's face, and she somehow had the feeling the cat could see right into her...her deepest thoughts and wishes.

'Actually, I want to be a veterinarian, but I can't. My dad says it would cost too much money, and besides which, girls can't be veterinarians...and my dad knows everything.'

'And he's certainly right about there not being any girl veterinarians. Of course, there are also no boy veterinarians. On the other hand, there are some truly fine women veterinarians as well as men veterinarians, for whom I have the deepest respect.'

Lizzy felt as if a light had gone off in her head. She had never thought of it that way.

'Well, still, it would cost a lot of money and, like I said, my dad knows everything.'

'That's wonderful news. I'm so glad you have such a father. But there's one thing neither he nor anyone else can know, you know.'

'Like what?'

'Miracles. The magic in our hearts and minds that produces them. Sit with me for a minute while we both catch our breath and let me tell you about

something I wanted so much, that was impossible...until I experienced the magic of a miracle.'

Lizzy looked where Santapurrs had waved but saw nothing to sit on except for the large bag, but before she could sit down on it, it had risen and stretched out to form a comfortable-looking bench for two.

Lizzy sat down as directed, and Santapurrs followed suit.

With another wave of her paw, two mugs of steaming liquid appeared in mid-air before them, and Santapurrs said, 'It's just warm milk. As a cat muse, I don't drink chocolate milk. But it will warm you as I tell you the story of how I came to be known as Santapurrs.'

Lizzy was happy to hold the warm mug in her rather cold hands, and even though warm milk was not her favorite drink, it tasted unusually good to her just then.

Santapurrs began, 'It was long ago, in what I think of as my former life, that this began. You see, I was born into a family with humans. My mother had four kittens, and although the family of humans were pleased with my two brothers and sister, they didn't want me.'

Lizzy couldn't help interrupting. 'Why not?' It seemed unfair to her.

'Because I was black, and there are a lot of superstitious people who believe that black cats bring bad luck. There is less of that superstition around now, but it still exists. They waited until I was weaned, and then they abandoned me. The oldest boy brought me to a cemetery and just left me there. He never even looked back.'

She paused to take a sip from her mug. 'Had it not been for the kindness of the feral cats in the neighborhood, I would not have survived. They taught me how to hunt, when and how to defend myself, and when to run. I loved them so much.'

'Had they all been abandoned? Were they all black like you?'

'No. Only a couple were. The others had been abandoned when the humans they thought loved them so much moved away and just left them behind. A few became homeless when their humans got old and died, and a lot of the others had been born to feral mothers. They were wonderful to me, and I loved them, each and every one.'

I became adept at hunting and at finding things, edible things, in the trash cans. I would drag them to my home in the cemetery and share what I had found with my feral family. On one bitterly cold Christmas Eve during what had proved to be a particularly harsh winter, I found a bag that had in it a large piece of salmon. Due to the cold, it was half frozen of course. In the same trash can, I found some other edibles, and even a couple of raw carrots with green tops. I was elated.'

'You...like raw carrots?'

Santapurrs smiled. ‘No, but a lovely little bunny that had been recently abandoned had found her way to the cemetery, and we were all trying to help her out as well as take care of ourselves. Oh, she was a dear sweet thing and I just knew she would really enjoy the carrots.’

‘Oh. I like bunnies too.’

Santapurrs smiled, but then became quite serious. ‘The problem was that the winter had been rough on all of us, and I was weak from hunger but determined to deliver my treasures to my loved ones. Unfortunately, my determination was not enough. I became exhausted from the walk and the cold and the weight of my bag of treasures. That, combined with my own gnawing hunger, made me finally decide to take a short break. I curled up beside my bag, and fell into a deep sleep, still dreaming, though, of the joy I would be able to bring to my loving family.’

‘Oh, Santapurrs...it was dangerous for you to just lie down like that.’

‘I couldn’t help it. I literally could not take another step. Oh, Lizzy, please don’t look so sad. My story has the happiest ending you could ever imagine.’

Lizzy tried to brighten up, but she couldn’t help the few tears that spilled over and Santapurrs quickly grabbed the ribbon that had been her collar and wiped the tears from Lizzy’s face.

‘I woke up in a warm and lovely place, surrounded by light, but not a glaring light. A light that I can only describe as soft and somehow loving. I know that probably doesn’t make sense to you, but I felt that the light was aware of me and cared about me. I was lying on a very comfortable cat bed, with a warm blanket thrown loosely over me. And before me stood Santa Claus, Mrs. Claus, Flute, the elf who had found me, and another elf. The last one’s name was Gustaf. He seemed more ancient than time itself and had a grey beard so long it almost reached the floor. At the time I didn’t know who these people were, although I was familiar with the idea of Santa Claus and the elf, because of the decorations I had often seen at that time of year. Mrs. Claus seemed awfully nice, but I must admit that Gustaf kind of scared me.’

She paused for another sip of milk and continued. ‘Of course, as my luck would have it, it was Gustaf who spoke first. He asked me what I last remembered. I answered that I vaguely remembered someone dressed in a green jacket and green and red striped hat picking me up, and me begging him to put me down so I could continue on my mission of delivering my treasures to my beloved family. That was Flute, of course, and he interrupted me by letting me know that he had quickly passed me to Santa Claus and had himself proceeded to the cemetery and delivered the goods. He added that everything was greatly appreciated, and as he was leaving he noticed that the bunny was happily chomping away on a carrot.’

‘Oh, that’s so wonderful.’ This time Lizzy’s tears were tears of happiness.

‘Yes. It filled my heart with joy. Then Gustaf explained that Santa Claus, Flute, and Mrs. Claus had approached him with the idea of having me join Santa every Christmas Eve to pass out gifts of food to the hungry pets who had been abandoned for whatever reason and had to forage for themselves. Needless to say, I was so thrilled I began to purr. My purr is quite loud and very rich-sounding, as I’m sure you’ve noticed.’

Lizzy smiled. ‘Yes. It’s really lovely.’

‘In a surprise move, Gustaf turned to Mrs. Claus and granted her the honor of bestowing upon me the name I would bear as I performed this precious, eternal work.

She seemed surprised, but she happily answered, ‘I hereby name you Santapurrs. And that is the story of how I came to work with Santa Claus and how, every Christmas Eve, while he delivers toys all over the world to deserving boys and girls, I deliver gifts of food to the abandoned pets or their descendants all over the world.’

With that, Santapurrs drained the last of her mug of milk, flicked a paw, and the mug just disappeared.

‘Oh, Santapurrs, that’s so beautiful. I can’t help wondering how come I never heard about you before.’

Santapurrs smiled. ‘Because cats can’t write, of course.’

‘It’s different than me wanting to be a vet, though...’

‘Not so different as you might think. My wish was for food, not just for myself, but for my feral friends. You don’t just want to be a vet because it would please you, you genuinely love and care about animals. That is a miracle-attracting type of wish. If you hold onto your wish and don’t let it go, the way will be presented to you. Trust me. I know this. And to make sure you always have that faith in magic and miracles, take the ribbon that was my collar,’ Santapurrs handed it to Lizzy as she magically caused Lizzy’s empty mug to disappear, ‘and keep it with you always. You’ll see.’

Lizzy held it carefully in her hand. ‘Oh, I will. I promise you.’ She looked behind her at the apartment where she lived, and said, ‘I’d better go now. I know I’ll probably get into trouble. You see, I climbed out of my bedroom window when I heard you. I’m supposed to be in bed, sleeping, so Santa can visit.’

‘Dear Lizzy, I guess you haven’t noticed it, but ever since you came to help me out you have been existing in the non-time in which Santa and I do our work. Don’t you remember that it was snowing when you first saw me?’

‘Yes, but it still is.’

‘Look again, Lizzy. There are big snowflakes all around us but take a closer look.’

Lizzy looked. There were still snowflakes all around them, but they weren't falling. They were suspended in mid-air.

'Oh, wow.'

'Now, I'm going to play with time just a little here. I'm going to send you back into your bed just as you were before you heard my cries for help.'

Lizzy said, 'Oh no, please don't do that. I don't ever want to forget you or this night. Even if it means I get into trouble.'

'I wouldn't do that to you. As long as you keep this ribbon with you, you'll always have the knowledge of the magic of a wish and the miracles that can make it come true.'

Santapurrs waved her paw and Lizzy found herself back in her bed, awakening to a glorious Christmas morning.

Her mother popped her head into her room and said, 'Good morning, sleepyhead. This is the first Christmas Day you've ever slept in. Come on, up you get and see what Santa's brought you.'

Lizzy smiled and said, 'Okay,' as her mother left the room.

She sat up and went to rub the sleep out of her eyes, then realized she was holding something in her hands.

It was a ribbon, with green and red stripes...and the memory of the night before flowed back into her mind, as well as the absolute certainty of the magic and the miracles that could make wishes come true.

The end.'

Elizabeth carefully moved her bookmark back to the beginning of the story and looked over at her two grandchildren. They were both slightly slumped over and had fallen asleep.

She opened the bedroom door and motioned to her daughter to come and properly tuck them in.

Richard got up from the couch where he had been sitting, enjoying the warmth of the fireplace, and motioned to Elizabeth to sit down while he poured her a glass of Christmas punch.

As he rejoined her he said, "I was just telling John about our good luck in being able to buy the property next door so that we can expand the clinic."

Her son-in-law said, "Luck? It's more like a miracle. That's a prime piece of real estate and the owner's letting you two have it for almost half of what he could get on the open market."

Richard smiled and said, "Miracles follow Elizabeth around like puppies, just clamoring for her attention. I knew she was special the first time I met her. You see, my old cat, Ollie, had gotten an abscess and my usual vet was closed."

Elizabeth had just set up her veterinarian clinic, and I was her first customer. She said so herself. So, after she took care of Ollie and handed me the bill, I asked for a discount.”

“Oh,” John said, “and did she give you a nice, hefty one?”

“Nope. But she did offer to scrape a couple of years’ worth of tartar buildup from my teeth and give my mane a nice trim.”

Elizabeth leaned her head back and let out a peal of laughter, saying, “That’s funny. I don’t seem to remember being so generous.”

John and Richard were both still laughing, as Julie returned to join them. She handed Elizabeth the storybook of Santapurrs, saying, “You left it on the table, and I can’t guarantee the kids will be careful when they wake up tomorrow morning. They’ll be so excited.”

“Oh, thanks,” Elizabeth said, as she rose from the couch. “I’ll just go put it away on my bookshelf. Be right back.”

As she entered her bedroom, she looked through the large window and realized that snow had begun to fall, in large, feathery flakes. It was perfect for a Christmas Eve.

Before placing the book on the bookshelf near her bedroom window, Elizabeth opened it and gently touched the green and red striped ribbon that she used as a bookmark. The colors were as rich and vibrant as the day she had received it. Carefully, she ran her fingers over the gold-embossed script that read: *Santapurrs*.

She looked once more out the window, where, for just a couple of seconds, the snowflakes stopped, as if suspended in midair.

“Thank you so much, Santapurrs. And Merry Christmas.”

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