

## The Turn of the Year

When Santa and Servant Rupert got ready to depart, the little miserable kitten took its one and only chance. She jumped right behind the last two bags on the sledge, unseen by anyone. Any other place had to be better than the hovel of her tormentor.



As soon as the reindeers began to move the sledge forward she sighed with relief and rejoiced.

“There is a kitten at the back”, said Ruprecht gruffly to Santa when they had stopped at their all but last point of call – the small lonely farm-house of Miss Betty.

“Oh, said Santa, looking up, “what are we going to do with her?” The little cat, dirty, scrawny, desperately clutched Santa’s coat and looked at him pleadingly with her huge green eyes.

“It’s real trouble,” said Rupert, ” we are so late already, well past Christmas.”

“She needs a new home,” said Santa slowly, “It is a very poor and frightened little cat.” The cat snuggled closer and began to purr.

“But we can’t have her,” said Rupert sharply.

“I will ask Mrs. Betty to take her,” said Santa, “You are right,

we cannot take her home. It is much too cold up north and we have to travel so much all year round to the craftshops to see to the presents for the world's children, we have nothing to offer her, really.”

The cat was very frightened to hear this. She had expected the nice grandfatherly Santa would take her home himself.

“What a sweet little thing”, exclaimed Miss Betty, “I did not know you had a cat with you on your travels, but she does look hungry. Let me give her some milk”. Santa saw this as a good sign for the cat and began to explain the situation to Miss Betty.

“How unfortunate,” she replied and looked very sad,” a real great pity, but I cannot take care of the cat. I have to go to hospital very soon and I have to stay there some weeks. And who would look after the cat?”

Who would, indeed?

Rupert and Santa took their leave from Miss Betty wishing her well for her stay in hospital. Rupert hurried to reverse the sledge to get back up north to their icy home. Santa kept the little cat warm in the fur lining of his great red coat. Thinking how he could help her. Increasingly worried.

A few miles on, the lead reindeer turned to Santa.

“It will get too cold for the cat quite soon,” she said,” but we will meet the old wolf just now. Perhaps she knows what we can do.” Under his breath, Rupert chuckled to himself: ” A nice solution that will be. But at least we are rid of this nuisance, then.” Rupert did not like any deviation from the ordinary.

Sure enough, the old wolf leader appeared not five minutes later to give her greeting to Santa, Rupert and the reindeer. The very last bag from the sledge was opened for some big pieces of meat – the present for the wolves.

“Listen, wolf-lady” said the lead reindeer politely, “we need your help with this kitten here, who has to find a new home.” And she went on to tell the whole story to the wolf.

The cat only stole a momentary glance at the huge grey wolf, then frightened for her life she buried herself more deeply into Santa’s coat.

“I can’t take her either”, snarled the wolf, “how could I carry her anywhere without eating her? Though the eating is hardly worth it.”

The reindeer kept her gaze steadily on the wolf, not taking no for an answer.

“Okay, said the wolf lady at long last, “we cannot stay here for ever...There is only one solution I can think of. We have to get her to the lion, who carries Time from the old year into the new. In the New Year she will be safe.”

“But how?” said Santa, Rupert and the reindeer all at once. “I will send for the lynx who lives near the southern border. But you have to go back a bit and do a detour to find him where the woods begin”, she pointed her snout southward. Under her and Santa’s intent gaze, Rupert swallowed his anger. The reindeer reversed the sledge at once and Santa thanked the wolf promising a reward to her pack and the lynx.

**In no time at all, the sledge reached the border of the wood, where the great red-golden lynx was waiting already. Softly he took the small cat on his back.**

**“Hallo, my dear, we really do have to hurry,” he said, “try to get warm in my fur, we have to travel for a whole night. Then we will meet the Year Lion at the northernmost point of his journey and you will be safe”.**

**So off they went.**

**Rupert quickly turned the sledge back north. For Santa and him and the reindeer it was high time to get home.**

**Through the deep dark night and the terrible frost the great lynx carried the small kitten. Not once did he stop, for fear the little cat would freeze, for fear, too, to miss the Lion. When the sun rose at last to start a magnificent day of golden wonder over the snowy landscape, the lynx and the cat were near exhaustion.**

**But then the Lion appeared, majestically riding on the track of Time linking the old year to the new.**



**The lynx bowed deeply to the Lion and told the kitten to get up quickly. Then the Lion took her tenderly up on his neck. She only had time to wave good-bye and to call “Thank you. I will never forget you,” and then the Lion went on to the safety of the New Year.**

**“Nor will I ever forget you,” called the lynx and turned to get on his slow and arduous way home.**

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**This tale was inspired by a New Year’s greeting card I found a long time ago, where a lion walked a tightrope linking the old and the new year.**

**The picture I constructed used the photo winter landscape snowy landscape close to Fenyőfő (Bakony, Hungary) by Szabolcs Sáfár, uploaded as #/1151755 at [www.sxc.hu](http://www.sxc.hu) and free clipart**