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IMAGINATION OVER KNOWLEDGE

Ririro

## Uncle Wiggily's Christmas

Down swirled the snow, its white flakes blown by the cold December wind. From the North it came, this wind; and a bird—not a robin, for they had long ago flown South—a bird went in the barn, and hid his head under his wing, poor thing! It was cold in the woods around Uncle Wiggily's hollow stump bungalow, and the rabbit gentleman brought in stick after stick of wood for Nurse Jane Fuzzy Wuzzy to pile on the blazing fire that roared up the chimney. Uncle Wiggily, having filled the wood box, took his cap, and his fur-lined coat down from the rack.

"Dear me, Wiggy! You aren't going out on a day like this, are you?" asked Nurse Jane.

"Yes," answered the bunny gentleman, "I am, Nurse Jane. I promised Grandfather Goosey Gander I'd go down town shopping with him. He wants to look through the stores to see what they have for Christmas."

"Oh, well, if it's about Christmas, that's different," said the muskrat lady. "But wrap yourself up well, for it is storming hard. I don't want you to catch a cold."

"I don't want to get sick," said Uncle Wiggily. "My pink nose gets very red when I sneeze. I'll be careful, Nurse Jane."

Out into the snowy, blowy woods went Uncle Wiggily. He passed the burrow-house where Sammie and Susie

Littletail, the rabbit children, lived. Susie was at the window and waved her paw to the bunny gentleman. "Only three more days until Christmas! Aren't you glad, Uncle Wiggily?" called Susie.

"Indeed I am," answered Mr. Longears. "Very glad!"

Johnnie and Billie Bushytail, the squirrels, looked from the window of their house.

Johnnie held up a string of nuts that he was getting ready to put on the Christmas tree.

"Billie and I are going to help Santa Claus!" chattered Johnnie.

"Good!" laughed Uncle Wiggily. "Santa Claus needs help!"



The bunny hopped along through the snow until he reached the kennel of Jackie and Peetie Bow Wow, the puppy dog boys.

"We're popping corn!" barked Jackie. "Getting ready for Christmas! That's why we can't be out!"

"Stay in the house and keep warm!" called Uncle Wiggily.

He hopped on a little farther until he met Mr. Gander, and the rabbit gentleman and the goose grandpa made their way to the stores. Each place was piled full of Christmas presents for animal boys and girls, and animal fathers and mothers were shopping about, to tell Santa Claus what to bring to the different houses, you

know. Uncle Wiggily saw some things he knew Nurse Jane would like, and Grandpa Goosey bought some presents that had come directly from the workshop of Santa Claus. Then along came Mr. Whitewash, the Polar Bear gentleman.

"Ho! Ho!" roared Mr. Whitewash, in his jolly voice. "Come to my ice cave, gentlemen, and have a cup of hot, melted icicles!"

"I'd like to, but I can't," said Uncle Wiggily. "Nurse Jane wanted me to get her some thread. I'll buy them and go back to my bungalow."

"Then I'll go with you, Mr. Whitewash," quacked Grandpa Goosey, and he waddled off with the bear gentleman, while Uncle Wiggily, having bought the thread, hopped toward his bungalow. The bunny uncle had not gone very far before he heard some children talking behind a bush. Uncle Wiggily could hear what was said.

"Is Santa Claus coming to your house?" asked one boy of another.

"I don't think so," was the answer. "My father said our chimney was so full of black soot that Santa Claus can't get down. He'd look like a charcoal man if he did, I guess."

"It's the same way at our house," sighed the first boy.

"Our chimney is all stopped up. I guess there'll be no Christmas presents this year."

"That's too bad!" thought Uncle Wiggily to himself.

"Christmas should be for everyone, and a little thing like a soot-filled chimney should not stand in the way. All the animal children whom I know are going to get

presents. I wish I could help these boys. And they probably have sisters, also, who will get nothing for Christmas."

Uncle Wiggily peered over the top of the snowbank. He saw the boys, but they did not notice the rabbit, and Mr. Longears knew where the boys lived. "I wish I could help those boys who are not going to have a Christmas," said the bunny gentleman to himself, as he hopped on with Nurse Jane's spools of thread.

And just then, in the air, he heard the sounds of: "Caw! Caw! Caw!"

"Crows!" exclaimed Uncle Wiggily. "My friends the black crows! They stay here all winter. Black crows—black—black—why, a chimney is black inside, just as a crow is black outside! I'm beginning to think of something! Yes!" The rabbit's pink nose began twinkling very fast. It always did when he was thinking, and now it was sparkling almost like a star on a frosty night. "Ha! I have it!" exclaimed Uncle Wiggily. "A crow can become no blacker inside a sooty chimney than outside! If Santa Claus can't go down a black chimney, a crow can! I'll have these crows pretend to be Santa!"

Uncle Wiggily put his paws to his lips and sent out a

shrill whistle. "Caw! Caw! Caw!" croaked the black crows in the white, snowy air. "Uncle Wiggily is calling us," said the head crow. "Caw! Caw!"

"How do you do, Crows!" greeted the rabbit. "I



called you because I want you to take a few Christmas presents to some boys who, otherwise, will not get any. Their chimneys are choked with black soot!"

"Black soot will not bother us," said the largest crow of all. "We don't mind going down the blackest chimney in the world!"

"I thought you wouldn't," said Uncle Wiggily. "That's why I called you. Now, of course, I know that the kind of presents that Santa Claus will bring to the animal children will not all be such as real boys and girls would like. But still there are some which may do."

"I can get willow whistles, made by Grandpa Lightfoot, the old squirrel gentleman. I can get wooden puzzles gnawed from the aspen tree by Grandpa Whackum, the beaver. Grandpa Goosey Gander and I will gather the round, brown balls from the sycamore tree, and the boys can use them for marbles."

"Those will be very nice presents, indeed," cawed a middle-sized crow. "The boys will like them."

"And will you take the things down the black chimneys?" asked Uncle Wiggily. "I'll give you some of Nurse Jane's thread so you may easily carry the whistles, puzzles, wooden marbles and other presents."

"We'll take them down the chimneys!" cawed the crows. So among his friends Uncle Wiggily gathered up bundles of woodland presents. And in the dusk of Christmas eve the black crows fluttered silently in from the forest, gathered up in their claws the presents which the bunny had tied with thread, and away they flapped, not only to the houses of the two boys, but also to the

homes of some girls, about whom Uncle Wiggily had heard. Their chimneys, too, it seemed, were choked with soot. Softly did they make their way, not a boy or girl heard them! As silently and as quietly as Santa Claus himself went the crows!

All during Christmas eve they fluttered down the chimneys at the homes of poor boys and girls, helping Santa, until all the presents that Uncle Wiggily had gathered from his friends had been put in place. Then everybody went to bed and the next morning they woke up.

"Merry Christmas, Uncle Wiggily!" called Nurse Jane.

"Merry Christmas, Nurse Jane!" answered the bunny.

And all over the land voices could be heard saying:

"Merry Christmas! Merry Christmas!"

Near the fireplace in the homes of some boys and girls who had not gone to bed with happy thoughts, were some delightful presents. They opened their eyes and stared—these boys and girls had not expected Christmas.

"How is it possible!" exclaimed one of the two lads whom Uncle Wiggily had heard talking in the bushes.

"How in the world did Santa Claus get down our black chimney?"

So all over, in the Land of Boys and Girls, as well as in the Snow Forest of the Animal Folk, there echoed the happy calls of: "Merry Christmas! Merry Christmas!"