

# **A Surprise For Santa**

*An Emma and Erik story*

**By Heather Atkinson**

**Illustrations by Patrick Lepage**



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EMMA AND ERIK are sitting at the kitchen table in Emma's house.

Emma's momma has given them each a blank piece of paper. On the paper they are supposed to write what they want Santa to bring them for Christmas.

Emma sighs. "I decided I don't want anything from Santa this year." Emma's piece of paper is still blank. "My bedroom is full of toys. I couldn't fit in one more thing."

"That's what Christmas is for," says Erik. "Santa bringing us stuff. That's his job." Erik's paper is not blank. It is full of suggestions for Santa. More plastic dinosaurs. Another video game. A toy robot named Charlie. A new electric bike.

Emma shakes her head. "No. I think Christmas is not about getting. Christmas is about giving."

"You could give some of your toys away," says Erik. "That would make room for more."

"I could," says Emma. But she isn't convinced. "I would feel happier if I could give Santa a present."

"Like what? Santa can make anything he wants," says Erik. "That's why he has elves."

Emma considers this. "What if we give him something he doesn't have and his elves can't make?"

Erik looks doubtful. "How would we know what Santa doesn't have? How would we know what his elves can't make?"

Emma takes a moment to think. "Come with me."

## §



ERIK FOLLOWS EMMA into her bedroom. She points to her book case. "My Christmas books are on this shelf. We need to go through all the

pictures to see what Santa has and what he doesn't have. Pay attention to pictures with elves."

They spend the rest of the morning looking at Emma's Christmas books. They find a great many things that Santa has.

"He has a lot of snow. And trees," says Erik. "And a great flying sled. And magic reindeer."

"Toys of course," says Emma. "Trains sets. Blocks and puzzles. Dollies. Lots of books. I'm also seeing a lot of candy canes in these pictures. So, he doesn't need candy."

"Doesn't need cookies either," says Erik. "He must get a billion cookies every Christmas." Erik has diabetes. He knows eating too much sugar is unhealthy.

"Same with milk," says Emma. "He gets billions of glasses of milk. I don't know how he drinks it all in one night."

"Maybe he gives some away," says Erik.

Emma nods. "That sounds like something Santa would do."

"We've figured out what not to give Santa," says Erik. "We still haven't figured out what to give him."

They continue looking at the pictures in Emma's books. Suddenly Erik notices something. "Santa doesn't have sand! He doesn't have a beach!"

Emma looks around her bedroom. "We can't give Santa a beach," she says. "Where would we put it?"

"We can take our buckets to the park and bring back some sand," says Erik. "We can lay down a beach blanket in front of the fireplace. We can wear our bathing suits."

Emma smiles. "That might work," she says. "We can surprise Santa with a beach party."

"We can play beach volleyball," says Erik.

"We can drink sparkly water in colorful glasses with those little umbrellas," says Emma.

"Wait a minute," says Erik. "I just thought of a problem."

Emma stops thinking about the beach party. "What?"

"Our beach party won't be special," says Erik.

"Why not?" says Emma.

"Because Santa travels to hot countries with beaches every Christmas. He leaves presents for the children who live there."

Emma nods. "You're right. Santa doesn't need a beach party."





ERIK SIGHS. "We need to keep thinking," he says. "What else would Santa like that he doesn't have?"

Emma looks at the pictures again. "Santa has Mrs. Claus. I noticed she's in a lot of the pictures. But we never see Santa's children."

Erik flips through the pictures. "You're right. You never see little girl or little boy Clauses."

Emma nods gravely. "Elves don't count as children. I think elves are very small grown-ups."

"Right," says Erik. "And the billions of children Santa visits on Christmas Eve are asleep. So, they don't count."

Thinking about the children that Santa doesn't have has given Emma an idea. "I know something we can surprise Santa with," she says. "Something that children are super good at giving. Something that we can give him."

Erik looks puzzled. "What?"

Emma rolls her eyes. "What is the best gift children can give adults?"

Erik is stumped. He takes a moment to think. "Dandelions? Finger paint drawings and macaroni crafts we bring home from school?"

"Good guesses," says Emma. "But I'm thinking of something way more special." Emma is smiling the way she does when she knows a secret.

"I give up," says Erik.

"Hugs!" says Emma. "Without children of his own at the North Pole, and with the children of the world asleep when he drops off their presents, Santa never gets special hugs."

Erik is excited. "You're right. Hugs from children are the most special hugs of all!"

"Exactly," says Emma. "We will give Santa our special hugs on Christmas Eve!"

## §



EMMA AND ERIK are back in the kitchen. They are pleased with themselves. Emma serves Erik one of her special peanut butter sandwiches. They are special because she spreads on the right amount of peanut butter and pushes the strawberry jam only to the edges of the bread and no further.

"Thanks," says Erik. "This sandwich is great."

Emma licks her lips. She is frowning. "I thought of a small problem with hugging Santa."

Erik swallows the last bit of his sandwich. "What?"

"I'm shy," says Emma.

Erik lets out a long sigh. "Me too. I might be too shy to hug Santa."

"So, we need to get over that," says Emma. "We need to practice hugging."

"Yuck," says Erik. "Do we have to?"

"Yup," says Emma. "It's for Santa. He deserves our most special hugs."

After they finish their sandwiches and put their plates in the dishwasher, Emma and Erik return to the living room. They stand in front of the fireplace and spend the next hour hugging.



Emma is finally satisfied. "I think we're doing it the way we're supposed to," she says. "Squeezy, but not too squeezy."

"Long, but not too long," says Erik. A thought suddenly occurs to him. "I have never stayed awake long enough on Christmas Eve to see Santa. Have you?"

Emma understands the problem at once. She shakes her head. "Nope," she says. "Never. Not once."

"In that case," says Erik, "I have an idea." He tells Emma they should spend Christmas Eve together. "I can come to your house. We can keep each other awake. We can work as a team."

"Great idea," says Emma. "But first we need to work out a staying awake plan."

### §



EMMA AND ERIK are sitting in front of the fireplace. They are thinking of ways to stay awake on Christmas Eve.

"I will write everything down," says Emma. "But you have to tell me how to spell the words."

"Okay," says Erik. "Number one on the list is noisy cartoons. Watching them always keeps me awake."

Emma writes "1" on the piece of paper and then looks up. "How do you spell *cartoon*."

Erik closes his eyes. He is trying to picture the word in his head. "I know how to spell *car*. I am pretty sure *cartoon* starts with 'c-a-r'."

"I'll just draw a car," says Emma. "We'll know what we mean. What else?"

"Your turn to think of something," says Erik.



"Okay," says Emma. She knows a great way to stay awake. "Water," she says. "Lots of water right before bedtime. I can't sleep if I have to go to the bathroom."

Erik grins. "Perfect. We could keep sipping water until Santa comes."

Emma writes "2" on the piece of paper and beside it draws a picture of a glass.

"I think that's all we need to do to stay awake for Santa," says Erik.

Emma's momma pokes her head into the living room. She has been in her office working on her computer. She sees the picture of the car and the glass that Emma has drawn on the piece of paper. "What are you two doing?"

Erik explains. "We are planning to stay awake on Christmas Eve so we can give Santa hugs for Christmas."

Emma's momma smiles. "How sweet." She looks harder at Emma's piece of paper. "But what do a glass and a car have to do with it?"

"We need to stay awake," says Emma. "Neither of us has ever stayed awake for a whole Christmas Eve. But if we drink lots of water and watch noisy cartoons, we can stay awake and surprise Santa with hugs."

"Sounds like a plan," says Emma's momma. "But what happens if you accidentally fall asleep and aren't awake to hug Santa? You should have a back-up present. A present Santa can take back to the North Pole."

Emma and Erik are tired of thinking. "Momma, if you have an idea, please tell us," says Emma.

Emma's momma giggles. "You two are very smart. You'll figure something out." She plants a kiss on Emma's cheek. Emma's momma is wearing dark red

lipstick so her kiss leaves a dark red lip shape on Emma's cheek.

Emma's momma blows Erik a kiss and goes back into her office.

"I guess we need to do some more thinking," says Emma.

"Yup," says Erik. He is staring at the lip shape on Emma's cheek. It has given him an idea. "If we can't give Santa hugs because we're asleep, we could give him kisses as a back-up present."

Emma shakes her head. "If we can't hug Santa because we're asleep then we can't kiss him either," she says.

Erik points to Emma's cheek. "Look in the mirror."

Emma stands in front of the big mirror by the fireplace. She smiles when she sees Momma's lipstick kiss on her cheek. She turns to Erik. "Perfect. I will get out a fresh piece of paper. We can fill it with bright red Christmas kisses."

Emma goes into the bathroom and comes back with the almost used up tube of red lipstick that Momma has given her. Emma likes to put on the lipstick when she is pretending to be a grown-up.

Erik stares at the tube of red lipstick. He imagines himself with bright red lips. He shakes his head at Emma and steps back. "I'm not putting that on my lips," he says. "The kisses can come from you. Santa won't be able to tell."

Emma purses her lips. "Yes, he will. Half of the kisses have to be from you."

Erik sighs. He lets Emma run the lipstick tube over his lips. "Now smack your lips together," Emma tells him. "Like this." Emma makes a smacking noise.

Emma and Erik take turns kissing the piece of paper until both sides of the paper are filled with kisses and there is no more lipstick left on their lips.

"It looks very Christmassy," says Emma.

"I think Santa will like it," says Erik. "But only as a back-up present. The main present will be hugs."

Emma thinks about this. "If we stay awake, Santa can have both," she says.

"True," says Erik, knowing at once that Emma is right. "Kisses often come with hugs." Erik looks in the mirror and smiles. He is happy to see that his lips are back to normal.

## §



IT IS NINE O'CLOCK on Christmas Eve. Emma and Erik are very excited. Erik is wearing his favorite green and red Dinosaur Dan PJs. Emma is wearing her Priscilla Pig nightie.

"This is it," says Emma. "The big night."

"The Christmas Eve when we finally get to meet Santa," says Erik.

"When we get to give Santa the hugs he deserves," says Emma.

"Good luck you two," says Emma's momma. "I'm going to bed. I look forward to hearing all about Santa in the morning."

Emma and Erik cuddle on the sofa and watch noisy cartoons until 10 o'clock. They sip water. They take turns going to the bathroom. At 11 o'clock, Emma starts to yawn. Erik yawns too.

"Uh oh," he says. "I'm catching your yawns."

At 12 o'clock Emma is having trouble keeping her eyes open. "The cartoons aren't working," she says.

Erik agrees. "They are making me sleepy."

"We need more water," says Emma. "And more hugging practice. We need to stay awake."

"Yes," says Erik. "We need to do it for Santa."

At 1 o'clock Emma and Erik are tired of hugging. They are tired of sipping water. They are tired of going to the bathroom. They are tired of watching noisy cartoons.

"I'm tired of being awake," says Erik.

"Me too," says Emma. She looks at the Christmas tree. The space under the tree where Santa is supposed to put presents is still empty. "At least we haven't missed Santa."

At 2 o'clock Emma's momma comes downstairs. She sees that Emma and Erik are still awake. "Has Santa come yet?"

"Not yet," says Emma.

Emma's momma smiles. "In that case, may I make a suggestion?"

Emma and Erik are too weary to respond. They wait for Emma's momma to explain.

"How about if I tuck you two into bed and I wait up for Santa?"

Emma is puzzled. "How could you give Santa hugs from us?"

"I could say they were from you," says Emma's momma. "Because that's the truth. I would never have thought of staying awake to give Santa hugs. The idea is entirely yours."

Erik is still uncertain. "But we've practiced our hugs. You might not do them the right way."

Emma's momma giggles. "That's easy to fix. You can teach me how."

Emma and Erik perk up.

They take turns hugging Emma's momma, and she hugs them back. At last Emma and Erik are satisfied.

"You're doing the hugs just right," says Emma.

"Squeezy, but not too squeezy," says Erik.

"Long, but not too long," says Emma.

"Practice makes perfect," says Emma's momma. "Now it's time to tuck you into bed. It might be an hour or two before Santa arrives. It depends on how many houses he has to visit before he gets to our house."

"Or maybe he's taking longer to get here because other children have the same idea as us," says Erik. "Maybe they're all waiting up to hug Santa."

Emma claps her hands. "Yes!" she says. "Santa could be stopping for hugs from little children all over the world."

## §



IT IS ALMOST 3 O'CLOCK in the morning. Emma's momma tucks Emma and Erik into the giant bed Emma uses for sleep-overs.

"Merry Christmas you two," she whispers, but Emma and Erik are already fast asleep.

On this special night Emma and Erik are dreaming the same dream. In their dream every child in the world is giving Santa a hug on Christmas Eve and Santa and all the children in the world are smiling.



**The End**