

The New Mrs. Claus

By Maverick and Magmaman

They say that behind every great man is a great woman, and there is perhaps no greater example of this than Mrs. Claus. The unsung hero behind Santa, Saint Nick, Kris Kringle and a dozen other colorful aliases you'd expect from a man who breaks into millions of homes each year, Mrs. Claus was content to remain in her husband's sizable shadow as he received the kudos for his one-night-a-year zips around the world. Nevertheless, Mrs. Claus' role in Santa's workshop—baking cookies, caring for the reindeer, approving toys, and preparing his route—was critical.

Unfortunately, no one realized just how crucial she was until she was gone.

It was only July, but the abrupt passing of Mrs. Claus that spring had made Santa's workshop as cold as Christmas. (I know, there's not much seasonal variance in the North Pole, but you get my point.) Of all her unsung abilities, her greatest was at boosting morale, which was now lower than the arctic temperatures. Santa could be edgy, especially as the Big Day approached, but Mrs. Claus was always there to ease tensions with a big cookie and an even bigger smile (and even some eggnog if the going got really tough). Most importantly, her regimented ways kept Santa and the other elves on task and ahead of schedule.

Not this year. This year, Santa rarely ate, spoke, or left his room. His stomach shrank, his beard grew, and by mid-summer he looked like one of those scraggly mall Santas in need of a shower, shave, and a pillow to look presentable. The rest of the workshop tried to prepare per usual, hoping Santa would eventually snap from his malaise, but it was a rudderless ship. Cookies were burned, toys were duplicated and poorly made, and the reindeer games got cutthroat.

A few of Santa's elves tried to fill the leadership void, but much like Snow White's dwarves each had a character flaw: Shiny Upatree, the oldest elf, was too feeble and crotchety; Pepper Minstix, the workshop's chief security officer, was too militant and bossy; and the super sweet Sugarplum Mary, Mrs. Claus' assistant in the kitchen, was too busy filling Mrs. Claus' shoes (as well as her pies, chocolates, and creampuffs) to be counted on for direction.

The workshop desperately needed some smart cookies to step forward. Instead, they got Chip, Crunch, and Crumb, three gingerbread men who weren't nearly as quick on their feet as the folktale would suggest. Though they worked gingerly, most of the schemes they cooked-up were half-baked.



“Santa looks so lonely,” Chip said, peering through a frosty window. He had climbed to Santa's sill to do a little recon.

“Get down from there!” Crunch shouted from the frozen ground below. “Before Santa gets his claws in you.”

“Does his belly still shake like a bowlful of jelly?” Crumb yelled from Crunch’s side.

“No,” Chip said, taking a second look. “He’s scrawny and skinny and watching the telly.”

Crunch shook his ginger head. He could put up with Chip and Crumb’s habit of conversing in rhyme under normal circumstances--when it was in keeping with the workshop’s festive atmosphere--but with circumstances anything but normal and the workshop far from festive, it had gone from cloying to annoying. “Guys, we have to come up with a plan to help Santa.”

Crumb shrugged. “Maybe we could pump him with a sugarplum vision?”

Crunch smacked Crumb so hard a chip flew off his shoulder. “Those only work on children!”

“He shouted in derision,” Chip chimed from his windowsill perch.

Crunch shot Chip a dirty look, then scooped a dollop of buttercream from the button on his chest and handed it to Crumb.

“Thanks,” Crumb said, icing his wound with it. “Well, we have to do something to pump him with life.”

“I’ve got it!” Chip declared. “Santa needs a new wife!”

“That’s not half bad,” Crunch considered. “But we don’t have much time.” Then he shook his fist at Chip. “Don’t you dare speak in rhyme!”

Chip smiled at the tough cookie below. “Sounds like you’ve got it covered, chief.”

“What about Ingrid?” Crumb queried. Ingrid was a particularly well-endowed toy-making elf who wiggled while she worked.

“I don’t know.” Chip sat on the edge of the sill and kicked his legs. “She seems a bit frigid.”

“Everyone is frigid around here!” Crumb shouted back.

“Listen, guys, we’re not going to find a match for Santa anywhere in the workshop,” Crunch said. “We need to think globally.”

Crumb raised his buttercream-stained hand. “Why don't we check Santa’s list for naughty girls who’ve aged out?”

Crunch nearly smacked Crumb again. “We can’t set Santa up with any ol’ Ho-Ho-Ho! We need to find a nice girl. Preferably, someone he loves and who already loves him.”

An instant later the cookies shouted in unison, "Millicent Mulroney!"

Little Millicent was Santa’s favorite. Sure, he loves all children—blah, blah—that’s the company line, but he had a soft spot for Millicent. One Christmas Eve he found her curled up on the sofa next to a crumb-filled plate with a crayon-scrawled message, “*Sorry, Santa, I couldn’t help myself. Love, Millicent.*” He patted her swollen belly, tucked her into bed and, in addition to her allotment of presents, left behind a note of his own: “*Help your mother bake extra cookies for next year. XO—Santa.*”

Millicent more than made up for the cookie shortage the following Christmas, with a custom-made buffet of snickerdoodles, seven-layer bars, macaroons, and other delights she had perfected with her mother over the course of the year. Santa fell so far behind schedule sampling them that he had to skip the houses of a few borderline kids.

In subsequent years, Millicent continued to grow on Santa—both literally and figuratively. By the time she was ten, she was chunkier than her chocolate chip cookies, and although her roly-poly figure was largely due to her year-round work perfecting recipes for the Jolly Old Elf, her fondness for sweets was partially fueled by the extra servings of sugarplum visions Santa slipped in her dreams and the candy he overstuffed in her stocking. Santa didn’t mind that carrying Millicent to bed got harder on his back each year; her cookies, love notes (“*Try the raisin ones first. Trust me. Love, Millicent*”), and sleepy satisfied smile were the highlights of his annual journey.

Until the inevitable day came that she aged out. That Christmas, Santa was downright surly barking orders and making demands. Many elves speculated he was frustrated with the reindeer, who had unionized that spring ('Let's put the team in teamsters!' rallied their leader, Prancer), or was having marital issues with the benevolent-but-not-blind Mrs. Claus. Both may have been true, but those in-the-know understood the real reason he was grumpier than he'd ever been in his life.

At least until the present day.

Crunch trudged through the snow towards the workshop. "Let's look her up on the Christmas Computer."

"I thought only Alabaster Snowball could use the Christmas Computer!" Crumb yelled after him.

"That cantankerous cousin of Keebler?!? Screw him!" Without Santa’s steady leadership and Mrs. Claus’ warm smile, longstanding racial tensions had reemerged. Elves had become the butt of Pole-ish jokes, and the reindeer were excluding poor Rudolph from their games again.

Like many corporations, the workshop's IT department was located in the basement's bowels. Also like many corporations, security was lax. Nobody really cared who was naughty or nice until November and, since Santa wasn't around, Pepper Minstix and his safety contingent spent most of their time patrolling the workshop's main floor. Tiny and quick, Crunch's bunch easily evaded them and slipped down the stairs, past a creepy assortment of broken or misassembled toys that had been saved for scrap, and into the dusty IT office that housed an even dustier Candy Apple II computer.

"Santa really needs a new PC," Crunch moaned as they waited for it to boot.

"Don't say 'PC' to Santa," Crumb quipped. "He says it's why he's visiting fewer and fewer houses each year."

After what seemed like an eternity, the screen flickered to life and they tap-danced M-I-L-L-I-C-E-N-T-M-U-L-R-O-N-E-Y across the keys. Unfortunately, since Millicent had aged-out all her photos and recon reports were several years old. They ultimately discovered her on something called "Instagram."

They were shocked by what they saw:



"Look at that body!"

"Millicent's gone naughty!"

As they read on, however, they learned Millicent wasn't naughty at all. She had recently graduated from a Catholic boarding school and was spending her summer volunteering at a local hospital. She was sweet, pretty, caring, and an expert baker--by all accounts a perfect match for Santa. Save for one fatal flaw.

"She'd freeze to death up here!" Crunch barked. "Besides, Santa likes a little tinsel on his tree if you know what I'm saying."

Surprisingly, Chip and Crumb DID know what Crunch was saying. Despite his advancing age, Santa remained a sucker for Mrs. Claus' zaftig figure until the end. Anytime she wobbled through the workshop delivering cookies to the elves, he would call a break and disappear with her for a while. (A "pause for the Claus" as he referred to it.)

"Maybe we should tell her the truth?" Chip opined.

"And how should we present it?" Crunch retorted. "Mature elf seeks hot young human. Must be nice, willing to gain 100 pounds, and move to the arctic to tend to workers and service animals."

"Ok," Crumb nodded. "Deceit and subterfuge it is!"

Crunch addressed his cookie comrades with an icing stare and a glazed expression, "I know EXACTLY what we're going to do."

Thousands of miles away, Millicent Mulroneu staggered into her room and collapsed on her bed. She had overdone it helping her mother develop new Christmas cookie recipes. It was a ritual they began when she was seven, and one of the few that remained from her childhood. And just like when she was a not-so-little girl there was a bit too much trial in their trial-and-error. She'd have to do some extra time on the bike tomorrow.



Millicent undid her belt, unsnapped her pants, and quickly fell into a food coma...until gentle singing disturbed her slumber:

*Christmas is coming.
Santa's loading up his sleigh!
Now is not the time.
To worry what you weigh.*

*'Tis the time for snacking. Feasting. And imbibing.
An extra Christmas pound or two,
are merely pleasant tidings.*

*So, eat up, feast up, drink up and be jolly.
And in your dreams, you'll grow as round,
As berries on the holly!*

As the song ended, Millicent opened her eyes to a gingerbread man standing on the mattress beside her.

"Hi!"

"Jesus Christ!" Millicent sprang from the bed, forgetting the flaps of her jeans were open. "Who the hell are you?"

"Don't tell me you forgot!"

Two more gingerbread men fell in behind the first. "We've missed you, Millie-billy!" said one. "We brought treats for your belly!" said the other.



With that, the first cookie snapped his fingers, and a puff of ginger-smelling smoke introduced an assortment of Millicent's favorite desserts: cherry pie, chocolate cake, donuts, and cupcakes. Most of which she hadn't eaten since she was thirteen.

That's when Millicent remembered. Every year around the holidays, she'd dream vividly about feasting and frolicking with an assortment of Christmas characters including gingerbread men. "I haven't dreamed about you guys in YEARS!"

"She remembers!" One cookie shouted as they danced between the treats. "Hooray!"

"I can't eat all this though. I'll balloon back into a butterball."

A cane-wielding cookie hooked his peppermint candy around a cupcake and pulled it close. "You can't get fat from a dream, silly!"



Millicent hesitated as she ran her finger along the edge of the icing. *Just a taste*, she thought, bringing it to her lips. Its rich creaminess coated the inside of her mouth and, as she swallowed, pleasant warmth spread throughout her body like someone had lit a furnace. "Mmmmm, this is better than I remember!" she exclaimed. "Certainly better than sugarplums!"

"Sugarplums are overrated," the first ginger snapped. "Try a donut."

"Eat some pie!"

"Santa says it's do or die!"

"What?" Millicent mumbled; her mouth full of Bavarian Cream.

"Never mind," said the cookie with the cane. "Santa just wants you to know that he loves you and hasn't forgotten you."

"That's so sweet," Millicent sighed. "I miss him, too."

Although Millicent realized she was in a dream, and Santa didn't really exist, she truly did miss the magic of the holidays. She wasn't sure what prompted the dream (The nostalgia of baking with her Mother? Going to bed on a full stomach? Raw cookie



dough?), but she was going to enjoy it. So, she ate, and ate, and ate as the three little men served and serenaded her. When she finished a donut, they brought her some cake. When she finished the cake, they brought her some pie. Before she knew it, the goodies were gone, and the cookies were tucking her in.

Millicent was thrilled when she dreamed again the next night. This time the gingerbread boys brought strawberry cheesecake, strawberry cream cake, and a partial pizza.



"What happened to the pizza?" Millicent asked.

The one who called himself Crunch gave the smallest cookie, Chip, an evil eye. "Somebody got hungry."

"Hey," Chip protested. "It was a long trip."

"There's plenty," Millicent said, offering them a slice. "I'm happy to share."

"Nope," Crunch said. "This is all for you, my dear. Santa's orders."

"Well, in that case I'd better do what Santa says." Millicent took a bite and a saggy string of cheese dribbled between her breasts and onto her dress. "Even if it means being naughty."

Slowly but surely, Millicent worked her way through all the food again as the gingerbread trio danced and sang their signature song:

*Christmas is coming.
Santa's loading up his sleigh!
Now is not the time.
To worry what you weigh.*

*'Tis the time for snacking. Feasting. And imbibing.
An extra Christmas pound or two,
are merely pleasant tidings.*

*So, eat up, feast up, drink up and be jolly.
And in your dreams, you'll grow as round,
As berries on the holly!*

Night after night, to Millie's delight, the trio returned with an assortment of goodies for her to gobble...

And before long the thousands of real calories Millicent consumed in her 'dreams' began to show.

"It's working!" Crumb shouted as he scoured Millicent's Instagram on the Christmas Computer. "Millicent's gaining weight!"



Crunch's plan was beginning to pay off. Santa forbade the unauthorized use of Christmas magic, so they had to fatten Millicent the old-fashioned way--with sleighfuls of food. It was a lot of work. They had to bribe the reindeer to borrow the sleigh and then have it back before the elves went to work. Under normal circumstances that would be dawn, but thankfully their routine had gotten lax. The cookies needed the extra time for clean-up and waste disposal. They couldn't risk Millicent finding out her dreams were real by leaving behind a stray wrapper or crumb.

Crunch squinted at the screen. "Her shorts are certainly getting tight."

Crumb smiled. "Buttoning them took all her might!"

"Still," Chip contemplated. "Is what we're doing right?"

Even though Millicent's va-va-voom figure made her seem like she'd been around the block a few times, she was really a sweet and naïve girl. And taking advantage of her innocence didn't sit well with Chip. Millicent even assumed they were the same gingerbread men who appeared in her childhood dreams. Gingerbread doesn't keep THAT long! (Of course, most humans thought gingerbread men looked the same. They were a bit racist like that.)

"Stop it, you Gingerheads!" Crunch shouted. "We're simply doing what has to be done. Only we have to do it much faster."

Time was not on the trio's side. The calendar had flipped to September and at Millicent's current rate of gain she wouldn't set-off Santa's fireworks until the 4th of July. And that was assuming the cookies wouldn't crumble in the meantime.

"Drastic times call for drastic measures," Crunch continued.

"But Santa's sleigh won't fit more dishes!" Crumb cried. Without Santa's sacred sack the storage space of his sleigh was roughly the size of an overhead bin on Jet Blue.

"And he forbids any magic wishes!" Chip chirped.

"No, no, no...we're going to do this by the book," Crunch explained. "But coming at night isn't enough. This mission requires stockings on the ground."

Margaret Mulronee wasn't sure what had gotten into her older sister...other than about ten extra pounds. Sometime in August, Millicent had transitioned from fit outdoor adventurer to sweat-wearing couch potato. She partly blamed her mother, who was always tempting them with treats--especially as Summer crept to Fall--but Millicent had resisted them before, at least ever since she'd gotten her childhood weight issues under control. Sure, she'd humor Mom with a bake session or two for old time's sake, but she quickly rid those calories with bikes and hikes. This year all that batter was making her fatter.

An intervention was in order.

Margaret was returning to boarding school and it would be the last time she'd see her sister, who had graduated the previous spring, until winter break. If things kept going the way they were going she'd be more than just her big sister by then. She'd be her BIG sister. Still, Margaret wasn't sure she should



say anything until she spied Millicent wolfing down a Monte Cristo sandwich on the morning of her departure.

"Uh sis, I know you don't have to worry about fitting in your uniform anymore, but don't you think you should take it easy?"



"There's nothing wrong with a few holiday pounds," Millicent said, defiantly taking a giant bite of the syrupy sandwich. "And my uniform still fits like a glove." Margaret had been envious of her figure ever since she dropped the baby fat a few summers ago. Now that Margaret was heading off to boarding school while she got to relax, she was just being spiteful.

"No offense, sis, but it's only September. And why don't you put your money where your mouth is on that uniform thing."

Millicent forced the remainder of her meal in her mouth, licked her fingers, and stormed upstairs.

Time to show snooty little sis who was boss.

"Get down here or admit defeat! I can't be late!" Margaret yelled upstairs from the kitchen.

"Defeat!" came the distant retort.

"C'mon, sis, it can't be that bad. Give me a quick fashion show."

Millicent thudded down the stairs and turned into the kitchen. Margaret stifled a laugh. While Millicent's modest gain was innocuous in sweats, she looked positively scandalous in her old uniform. A ripe surge of cleavage spilled from the top, while her butt bordered indecent exposure below. In between, the tailored material tugged tight against the swell of her stomach.



"Not bad," Margaret assessed. "If you were a stripper."

"Great," Millicent grumbled. "I'm a candy-striper who looks like a stripper named Candy."

Margaret laughed and wrapped her arms around Millicent's slightly squishy waist. "Just because Sister Mary would send you home in a heartbeat doesn't mean you don't look good. You were too thin anyway."

"Look who's talking, Twiggy!" Millicent returned Margaret's embrace. "I'm going to miss you, sis."

After a lengthy hug, Margaret grabbed her suitcase and headed for the door. “I’ll see you at Christmas. Just promise to be careful while I’m gone, OK?”

“Don’t worry. I’m going to go tell mom right now no more cookies!”

“It’s not that,” Margaret said with a smile. Then she tossed in a bomb as she closed the door behind her, “I won’t be around to cover for the guys you’ve been sneaking into your room.”

TO BE CONTINUED...