

Santa's Helper

By **bobbart** — Bob Bartholomew <bobbart_99@yahoo.com>

Rated: G

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Summary: A new tradition is born in Metropolis on Christmas Eve. The impact may go far beyond the expectations of the founders.

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Christmas Eve, 2001

A gigantic pile of wrapped gifts entirely filled the center of Metro Park, the largest public park in Metropolis. The stack was easily six feet high in the center and at least twenty feet in diameter. Despite the presence of hundreds of people in the park late this evening, the pathways leading to and from the central area were clear. All of those people gathered were staying off the pathways and standing on the frozen ground.

At 10:50 p.m., the mayor of Metropolis climbed the steps of a small podium that had been set up just to the side of the pile of packages. He stepped up to the microphone and called out, "Merry Christmas!"

There was a scattering of "Merry Christmases" from the people in the crowd.

"Santa is due in..." the mayor checked his watch, "eight minutes. He has assured me that he will be extra careful going in and out of the park." The mayor looked deliberately at the people all around him. "I see that there are children here. Santa specifically asked me to assure you that he's going to be extra careful going in and out of the park. If any of our little ones were to accidentally wander out into the path, they won't be in any danger. However, it will be easier and quicker if everyone stays off the path until he's done."

The mayor looked around just long enough to verify that he had the crowd's attention. "Okay. I know you aren't here to listen to me, so I'll also get out of the way and we can all wait for Santa together."

"How long do you think this will take?" Lois asked her husband as they stood near the door of their home.

"I'm betting it will only take fifteen minutes or so," Clark answered. "It's a big pile, but I can move really fast."

"Remember to be ready for locked doors. It would be a bad idea to start a tradition with too many broken doors or shattered locks."

"I'll be careful," he said with a chuckle. "If it weren't for having to worry about those kinds of things, I could be done in less than half the time."

"Okay," Lois said with an echoing smile. "Still, you be careful."

"Yes, Mom," Clark replied teasingly. "Speaking of Mom, are you going to be ready with Lara?"

"Of course," Lois replied. "We'll be watching the tree from the sofa. You are coming here early on, right?"

"Yep," Clark answered. "So make sure she's watching right at 11:00. I'll make sure that I come by here within the first 30 seconds after I start." Clark glanced at the wall clock that he had

set so carefully only hours ago. "I need to get going or Santa will be late."

"Lara and I will be watching," Lois said. "I'll see you in a few minutes."

As the clock struck eleven, the thick silence in the park was noticeable even against the constant drumbeat of city noise. Suddenly a swishing sound seemed to be coming from everywhere at once. The people started looking around trying to catch the source of the sound, but as much as they tried, no one caught even a glimpse. What they did see was the pile of gifts shrinking at an astounding rate.

In households all over the city, parents sat up with small – and sometimes not-so-small – children watching their trees carefully. After the fact, the stories were always the same... a swirling of air, the briefest glimpse of red, and presents suddenly appearing under the tree.

In an office that overlooked the park, two men, wearing clothes that looked out of place, watched carefully as the pile of gifts shrank away. When the pile finally disappeared, they turned away from the window.

"So that's it?" the taller one asked.

"What did you expect," his friend replied, "a clap of thunder?"

"I guess," he answered. "I should know better, but this was such a momentous point in time."

"It is. Next year he'll do this in cities all over the country.

The year after that, it will be all over the world. He'll make Santa real for a whole generation. Then his children and their children will keep that spirit alive. From this time forward, children all over the world will grow up believing in the magic of giving because they will have seen it for themselves. These children will grow into adults who have seen first-hand that the most powerful person on the planet gives up his time to help the children of strangers. Tonight this was the seemingly small event that changed everything."

"You're preaching again," he pointed out.

"I know," his friend replied, "I can't help it. I've always wanted to see the true origin of the worldwide-gift-giver version of Santa. This moment creates a temporal shock wave. As it moves forward in the time line, it reinforces what he's trying to do. As it moves backwards, it carries the idea of a man in red that gives gifts to children all over the world. This event is the driving force that transforms the historical Saint Nicholas into Santa Claus."

The taller man puzzled over this for a moment. "So Clark imitates Santa. His actions create a temporal wave that goes back in time carrying the idea. That idea takes root and eventually becomes the legend of Santa which, much later, Clark Kent copies for this event. So, what's actually happening is that Clark Kent is copying an idea that originated with an event that he created. But if he's copying himself, where did the idea first originate?"

His friend simply smiled back. "Isn't temporal mechanics fun?"

He knew better than to attempt a reply to that tease. "Let's go home," he said.

As the city around them celebrated the first instance of what would become a world-altering tradition, they both pressed buttons on their time bracelets and disappeared back into the future.

THE END