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Runny Noses and Other Winter Tales

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Christmas is a time of miracles, so do not be surprised if your sofa suddenly starts to sprout feathers or your dog reveals itself to be a promising young artist. At this time of year, one may also spot the occasional runny nose here and there! The city, too, is full of curious happenings: icicles decide to make themselves useful, ice cream takes over snow's job, and one man turns the entire city's snow plowing into an adventure. The greatest effort of all, however, is made by the planets, which join forces to create the largest snowman in the world.

The book contains thirty-one delightful winter tales, sure to raise a cheerful smile on the faces of both children and their parents.



Runny Noses and Other Winter Tales: Excerpt

[pp. 9–13]

The Friendly Mitten

Alfred was what you might call, well, a bully. He tended to pick fights with others and wherever he went, trouble always started right away. He pushed over snowmen when he walked past and packed snowballs that were too hard to throw at kids too hard, leaving the target with a painful sting where it hit.

Many found this kind of behaviour inappropriate, but it was unacceptable most of all to Alfred's own mittens. The mittens were very polite, well-mannered, exceptionally well-raised, and as friendly as could be. That made them all the more displeased with Alfred's bullying. His mittens didn't want to pack icy snowballs or hurl them at other kids. Nor did they have any desire to ruin snowmen or pick on kids in any other way.

Alfred's grandma hadn't knit him the mittens so that he could use them to get into mischief. She'd woven in love and goodness, of course! His well-behaved mittens would've much rather built snowmen, pulled sleds, waved, hugged, and held someone's hand. Alas, Alfred never offered them opportunities like those.

One day when the weather was a little warmer and Alfred's mittens were in his pocket, he happened to be on a playground refusing to let anyone else use the slide. He simply sat there blocking the way and grinning while the other kids waited and grew sadder and sadder.

"Out of the way! We want to slide!" they demanded.

"Nah-nah-nah-nah-nah! No!" Alfred taunted, refusing to budge.

That was the very last straw for one of Alfred's mittens and it jumped out of his pocket. Alfred didn't notice and after getting bored of bullying the other kids, he went home without it.

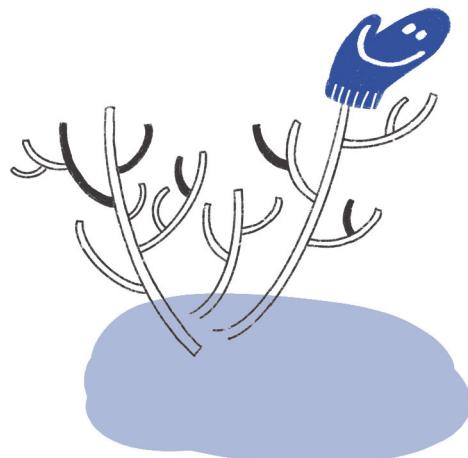
The mitten that leapt from Alfred's pocket lay in the snow and watched the clouds drift by high up in the sky. It looked up and waved to the birds flying across the heavens. The mitten thought it saw the birds seem to wave back, too. Lying here like this is very nice, the mitten thought, and it stayed there for several delightful days.

But then, something unexpected happened: a mother walking across the playground picked the mitten up. "Someone's lost such a beautiful mitten!" she gasped and hung it on a bush growing at the edge of the playground.

The mitten's new spot on the branch was absolutely amazing, as there was now much more to see besides clouds and passing birds. There between the sidewalk and the playground were things galore to watch and wave at. So many people walking by, so many dogs trotting at the ends of leashes, and so many candy wrappers dancing in the breeze!

Every time a stronger gust came along and made the bush's branches rock back and forth, it helped the mitten wave at passersby. And the passersby waved back, too. One boy even gave it a high five!

The mitten couldn't be happier with its new home and life. People strolling past would sometimes pity it, saying, "Look at that – a poor, lost, lonely mitten!" But the mitten didn't feel lonely. It wasn't lost or alone but rather finding itself!



And Alfred's other mitten wasn't any worse off, either. Now that its partner had vanished, Alfred no longer took the lone mitten along anywhere. The boy's hands were frigid for the rest of that winter, and he kept them stuffed meekly in his pockets. That made everyone glad!

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The President's Snowman

The President stared longingly out his office window. The glittering snow and sunshine looked so inviting.

A knock sounded on the door and two of the President's advisors barged right in.

"Good morning, Mr. President!" they said politely.

The President took a few deep breaths. "Good morning," he replied without turning away from the snow drifts outside.

"Well, then," the first advisor began. "Today's going to be a very important and busy day."

"You have 248 meetings, 39 speeches to give, and 34 monuments to unveil," the second advisor chimed in. "Here's your coffee and printouts of your speeches!"

The President kept staring out the window and couldn't care less about coffee or speeches.

"I don't feel like doing work today!" he announced stubbornly. "I want to relax and play!"

The advisors exchanged surprised glances and said in unison: "No, no! That's not an option!" Seeing that the President was serious and didn't erupt in uproarious laughter or grab the documents from their hands, they continued, "The President doesn't have a day off! You have duties, sir; people are expecting you!"

The President let loose a deep sigh, spun on his heel, and zipped out of the room as fast as lightning, pushing right through his advisors.

Moments later, the horrified pair saw the President outside aiming snowballs at the big oak trees in the yard. Then, he fell onto his back and rolled around in the snow like a playful puppy.

"What on earth has gotten into our President?" an advisor asked in astonishment. "I've never seen anything like it before!"

The other advisor didn't know what to say, either. The President had always behaved with dignity and duty but was now romping around outside like he'd seen snow for the very first time.

Suddenly, the President popped up out of a drift, patted snow off his coat and pants, and started purposefully rolling a snowball. Although it was small at first, the snowball gradually grew bigger and bigger beneath the President's hands. When it finally reached up to his waist, he left it and started rolling another. When that one had grown to the height of his knees, he lifted it on top of the first.

"I guess he's building a snowman," one of the advisors murmured.

And that's just what the President was doing. He made a plump, round snowman that was exactly his size. Then, the head of state took off his tie, tied it around the snowman's neck, pulled off his coat, rested it on the snowman's shoulders, removed his hat, and set it on the snowman's head. He used his cufflinks to give it eyes. Once finished, he ran around the park without any winter clothes on at all, making snow angels and shrieking in joy.

The advisors couldn't just stand around watching. They ran after the President and begged him to return to his post.

"Mr. President, please come to your senses! It's time to get to work; you have so much to do!" one of the advisors shouted.

"Would you come here, please? We're going to unveil a monument. Come along, I'm begging you!" pleaded the other.

"Take the snowman from over there! It can stand in for me at unveilings and give speeches in front of the cameras. I want to relax and play!" the President declared.

He jogged away, petting strangers' dogs and frolicking in the snow.

After a couple hours, the President nevertheless got tired of playing in the snow and returned to his palace.

"Okay! Now, my batteries are recharged. Bring me a mug of hot cocoa and a pair of dry socks, please. Let's get to work!"

However, the advisors had obeyed the President's command and put his snowman to work. It stood straight and stately in his tie and coat, the hat balanced on its head, grinning at everyone around. The snowman was just a little short on words.

When the President realized the snowman had taken over for him, he felt a wave of relief. He didn't have to go to 248 meetings, give 39 speeches, or unveil 34 monuments! But as often happens when stress fades away, the President soon fell ill. Sometimes being a little sick isn't the worst thing in the world, though, especially when it means you can lie around in bed, drink tea with honey, and read your favourite books. And that's just what the President did for several days straight.

Everyone who encountered President Snowman meanwhile found it to be very quiet but to have a wonderful grin. The advisors managed to hold all the meetings and unveil all the monuments with the snowman's help, so despite the President feeling a little under the weather, the country's affairs ran uninterrupted and everything that needed to be done was accomplished.

Two presidents are sometimes needed for everything to be taken care of – work and relaxation alike. But it's a fact, of course, that there's usually only one president at a time.



The First and Last Snow

The season's first real cold wintery weather had arrived. Everyone had long been impatient for snow to finally fall. There was so much fun to be had when the first flakes did: sledding, skiing, building snow forts, and seeing the whole world turn wonderfully white!

All the while, the snowflakes up in a big, thick cloud were arguing over who would get to fall first.

"It's me! I want to be the first one to fall!" a thick, fluffy flake demanded.

"No, I do! I do!" argued a little flake made of tiny, packed flecks.

A wise old grey and somewhat frosty flake watched the debate and wasn't the least bit interested in taking part. It had absolutely no desire to fall first.

"How about you draw straws to see who goes first!" the old flake proposed.

They did, and the flecks ended up being the first to fall. Not much snow reached the ground, however, because half of it melted before landing.

Even so, people went wild. They grabbed their sleds and pulled them across the sheer layer of snow, scraping against the ground. Gritting their teeth, they tried to ski across barely whitish pastures and make snowballs out of nearly non-existent icing.

High up in the cloud, the thick, fluffy flake who lost in the draw was sad watching the scene below. People down there were all made so happy by the first snow.

The wise old frosty snowflake comforted it.

"Don't worry – the first snow always melts!"

And the wise old snowflake was right: in just a couple of hours, the first snow had already melted.

Now, it was the thick, fluffy snowflake's turn to fall, and it wasn't disappointed: there were sledders and skiers galore, though they were nowhere near as excited as they had been to see the first snow. The bears were especially pleased because the first icy flecks naturally weren't enough to cover their dens in a thick, soft carpet of snow. Aside of the bears, however, no one really remembered that fluffier second snowfall. By the end of winter, no one could recall what it was like at all, when it fell, or how long it stayed – just that it had been snow.

The wise old frosty snowflake's arrival late in April made everyone very angry, on the other hand! It had stayed up in the cloud daydreaming for far too long and forgot to fall when the time was right. No one was pleased to see that snow. Not a single skier or sledder came out to welcome it but wrinkled their noses instead and shovelled the snow from their flowerbeds to give the first spring flowers sunshine. The bears had given birth to cubs meanwhile, too, and would've preferred to show their little one's fresh green grass. Finally and to everyone's delight, the last snow also melted. As that snow trickled away, it told itself that next year, it would try hard to remember to fall well before April, and best of all if it came down in time for the ski marathon in February!



The Feather-Growing Sofa

One dreary evening, Merike flopped down on the couch to read.

"Ow!" she cried out the moment she landed on her side. The girl jumped back up as if stung and gingerly touched her thigh.

"What was that?" she gasped. "There are feathers poking up everywhere!"

On closer inspection, it turned out that Merike's sofa had indeed resolved to sprout feathers. Day after day, more and more started poking out of the cushions. So many popped their little heads out from between the stitching and even the pillows that soon, it was impossible to sit on the sofa at all. The sofa itself had also grown a bit feisty meanwhile and slumped uncomfortably when anyone tried to take a seat, as if it didn't want them there at all.

One day when Merike made another attempt to settle on the sofa, it barked:

"What are you doing!? Get up this second! There'll be no plopping down on me!"
Merike was confused.

"But you're a sofa! Where do you think I should sit?!"

"Sit wherever you please; I don't care! Just don't sit on me for the next two weeks!"
the sofa grumbled. "Otherwise I'll fly away, okay!? Down south!"

So, Merika and her parents obediently took seats on the floor in front of the sofa while it sighed and grunted and flung feathers around the whole room.

One morning a couple weeks later, the family noticed that a cute little armchair had appeared next to the sofa. The two were the exact same shade of blue. And on the following morning, a tiny blue footstool awaited in addition to the sofa and the armchair. The soft upholstery looked nice and comfy, but no one dared to sit on it.

Merike crept into the living room the next night to see whether any more furniture would mysteriously appear. But to her astonishment, she saw that the footrest and the armchair had snuggled up next to the sofa! The sofa picked cookie crumbs from between its cushions and fed them to its little babies, which snuffled contentedly.

Before long, the sofa was back to its old self again and allowed Merike to stretch out on it and read a book. "Hop on, but please read out loud so my little darlings can pick up a few grains of wisdom, too!"

Merike read and the sofa's offspring grew bigger and bigger. Soon, the armchair was so tall and plump that it could even hold the girl's dad in its lap. And the footrest absorbed so much knowledge from her reading to it that nobody in their family dared to say that anything or anyone was as "foolish as a footrest" ever again.

