



Manu in the Christmas Spiritworld



Prologue

Once upon a Christmastime there was a little girl called Manu who lived in a very secret village at the heart of the North Pole. Her after-school job was to clean the reindeer stables and today this was especially important because it was Christmas Eve and Nicholas Claus, the Father of Christmas himself, was on his way.

Just as she finished brushing the last straw and scooping the last reindeer poop, Santa walked in.

“Little Manu what a fine job you’ve done here! I know where you’ll be on the list.” Just then he exclaimed with surprise, “The list! I completely forgot to send it to Albert!” He rummaged around his pocket and pulled out a small red notebook that was bound with a golden ribbon. He reached out and placed it into her hand. “Would you mind delivering this to the door?”

Manu’s hand trembled a little as she took hold of THE list. “You want me to take it...to the door?”

He chuckled and said, “You’ll be fine. Run along now, not much time to release the bubbles.”



It wasn’t long before Manu approached the door. Elegantly inscribed in its wood was ‘The Christmas Spiritworld’ and under that was an ancient-looking bronze letterbox. Manu took out the notebook from her pocket and carefully opened the letterbox flap to slip it in. Just as she did, a letter that was stuck halfway through fell to the floor. She picked it up; it was a folded paper note. Inside it read...

‘Nicholas, something is wrong with the Christmas Spiritworld and Albert has gone missing! Please send help or there won’t be anyone to deliver joy this year!’

You see, Albert Claus is the less-famous brother of Santa. He works and lives in the Christmas Spiritworld, a magical land just beyond our own. His job is to collect the bubbles of joy that pop through into their world every time a child feels pure happiness in ours, and then to release them all at once, all around the world, on Christmas day.

But now he was in trouble, Santa didn’t know and he’d already left to deliver the presents. Without Albert, children would look unexcitedly at their gifts and feel no joy at all. Christmas would be ruined and there was only one night to save it. She didn’t know what she’d find on the other side, but Manu took a deep breath and opened the door...





Hoshi – Spirit of Christmas Lights

The bird in front of Manu shimmered with a yellow light as it opened its wings. “Hello, I’m Hoshi, the spirit of Christmas lights. What are you doing here little girl?” he said, in a soft singsong voice.

“I’m looking for Albert Claus, have you seen him?” Manu asked.

“The last time I saw him was when he was visiting Yukitoko.”

“Oh thank you”, Manu said, just as Hoshi lifted his wings with a yellow flash and sailed off into the dark night sky.



Koto – Spirit of Christmas Song

Manu heard a rumbling noise like a deep drumming and then saw the giant smiling figure. He was beating big fluffy drumsticks on his belly and it was wobbling back and forth, making the loud noise. He didn’t notice Manu until she shouted, “Hello!”

“Hello,” he beamed, “are you lost?”

“No, I’m looking for Albert Claus, he’s gone missing.”

“Oh, Albert Claus is missing?” Koto said, looking quite worried.

“Yes, it’s terribly important that we find him tonight.”

“I see, and who is Albert Claus?”

Manu could see that Koto wasn’t going to be much help.



Fuwafuwa – Spirit of Christmas Decoration

A thousand sparkles shimmered as the figure in front of Manu moved. Glitter seemed to float from her as she walked over.

“Me...Fuwafuwa...Spirit... Christmas Decoration. You from... North Pole?” the tinsel yeti asked.

“How did you know?” said Manu surprised.

“Was me... left note... worried about Albert. Children decorating Christmas trees... joy bubbles bursting... nobody to collect.” She looked down sadly.

Manu held her soft, shiny hand. “Don’t worry Fuwafuwa, we’ll find him I promise.”

Tobio – Spirit of Christmas Nature

As Manu walked along a forest road with a blasting wind at her back. One of the trees suddenly walked out and spoke to her.



“Howdy stranger! I’m Tobio.”

“Oh, hello Tobio, pleased to meet you.” Manu smiled.

“Well how’s about that! You don’t see many humans around here.”

“My name’s Manu. Are you ok?” she asked because, despite the warm words, he seemed sad.

“To tell you the truth I was hiding out in the forest because of this terrible wind, it’s getting all my leaves in twist. Say, if you bump into Peng would you asking him to turn it down a bit.”

Manu asked about Albert, but Tobio didn’t know anything so she went along on her way.



Peng – Spirit of Christmas Weather

As Manu climbed over a snow drift, she saw the giant penguin-like spirit bouncing along from one foot to another. She called out and said hello.

The Christmas spirit looked at her without expression.

“I’m looking for Albert Claus have you seen him?” she tried.

He sighed wistfully, “Another little girl asking for favours.”

“That’s odd, you’ve seen another girl here?”

“Yukitoko usually asks me for snow but she wanted winds this time...strong winds she said.”

As he said this he seemed to lose interest and bounced off over the snow.



Kuma – Spirit of Christmas Food

Manu heard a rattle and crash as she came upon a little cabin on a snowy hill. She peered through an open window and saw what looked like a polar bear in a chef’s outfit. He appeared to be in quite a rush, spinning from one side of the kitchen to the other, balancing dishes and bowls and juggling long handled spoons, whisks and rolling pins. He spotted Manu but ignored her and carried on working.

“Excuse me, could you help me please?” asked Manu.

“No”, came the quick answer from the bear.

“But...” she was about to protest.

“Waffles, I have to make waffles for Ryo sorry... no time”, and with that he swung the window closed.

Ryo – Spirit of Christmas Games

Manu spotted the fox hiding behind a blackberry bush. He was quite elegantly dressed for a fox. She leaned over and said hello. He seemed to be disappointed that she had spotted him. “Oh drat, you found me.”



“I’m sorry, I didn’t know you were hiding. Who are you hiding from?” Manu said.

“You silly. We’re playing hide and seek.” He flashed a mischievous smile.

“Oh, I didn’t know,” said Manu surprised, “but I’m looking for Albert Claus. I don’t have time to play I’m afraid.”

The fox smiled even wider and said, “He’s on a path that can only be seen when you’re not on it.”

Manu thought about what he said, “a path that you can’t see while you’re on it...” and then it occurred to her, “I’ve got it! A path that you can only see fully from the outside is a maze, when you’re in the maze you can’t see it.”

Without another word he laughed cheekily, jumped up and bounded off into the trees.



Okashi – Spirit of Christmas Sweets

Manu came to a clearing in the forest and saw a brightly coloured deer walking happily along. It turned to her smiling and said, “Hello Manu, I’ve heard you’ve been looking for Albert.”

“Oh yes that’s right. What’s your name?”

“I’m Okashi, the spirit of Christmas sweets. I’m afraid there’s not much I can tell you about Albert. I don’t know where he is.”

“Ok” said Manu disappointed.

“Well, there is something strange I suppose. I’ve been smelling waffles somewhere nearby, it’s strange because that’s Albert’s favourite desert.”

Omocha – Spirit of Christmas Toys



Manu saw the lights from the building from far away. On a sign above the door it simply said 'Toy Workshop' but from inside came a rainbow of glowing lights and the humming, whizzing and buzzing of activity. She knocked on the door but when it was answered, only the bottom half of the door opened. A little man with white curly hair looked out from below. He had a workman's belt full of tools on and smiled up at her. He spoke loudly above the clatter behind him, "Hello there, I'm Omocha, spirit of Christmas Toys. Are you looking for a toy?"

"Oh hello," she said, "no I'm looking for Albert Claus actually."

"He's not here, not seen him today anyway. Just Yukitoko."

"Yukitoko was here?"

"Yes, she picked up a new toy, a kind of catapult he asked me to make."

Manu pondered this and said goodbye.

Yukitoko – Spirit of Christmas Fun

As Manu walked down the moonlit road, all of a sudden something soft splattered her back. She turned around and a snowball hit her square in the face.

"Ops" exclaimed the girl in front of her. "Shouldn't get the face sorry" she said, but held back a snigger.

"Who are you?" Manu said, a little peeved.

"Can't you tell? I'm Yukitoko, spirit of Christmas fun. Would you like to play?"

Manu replied, "I can't right now. I'm on a mission to find Albert Claus, don't you know he's missing? It's terribly important that we find him."

Yuki seemed to think this over for a moment, "so... him going missing isn't fun?"

"No, not at all. It's very serious, Christmas could be ruined!"

Now Yuki looked downright mortified, "oh no, he said it would be fun."

"Who said it would be fun?" Manu said surprised.

"Gotta go, sorry!" she said, and before Manu could reply, she sped off down the path.





After hours of walking in the Christmas Spiritworld and speaking to each of the spirits, Manu finally had an idea of what might have happened to Albert Claus. She went back to speak to the elegant foxy spirit of Christmas games, Ryo. As she approached, she noticed Yukitoko having a heated discussion with him and, across the whistling sound of the wind, her angry words jumped out “You told me it would be fun!”

Manu walked up to them and interrupted, “I had a feeling you had something to do with this Ryo”.

Yukitoko replied, “He’s only gone and got Albert stuck in his silly maze, now we’ll ruin Christmas!”

Ryo looked hurt, “I assure you it was just a bit of fun, I admit I’ve been catapulting in Sir Albert’s favourite food to trick him into going into the maze, but he should have easily found his way out by now”.

“Well it’s time we got him out! Show me the way”, said Manu confidently.

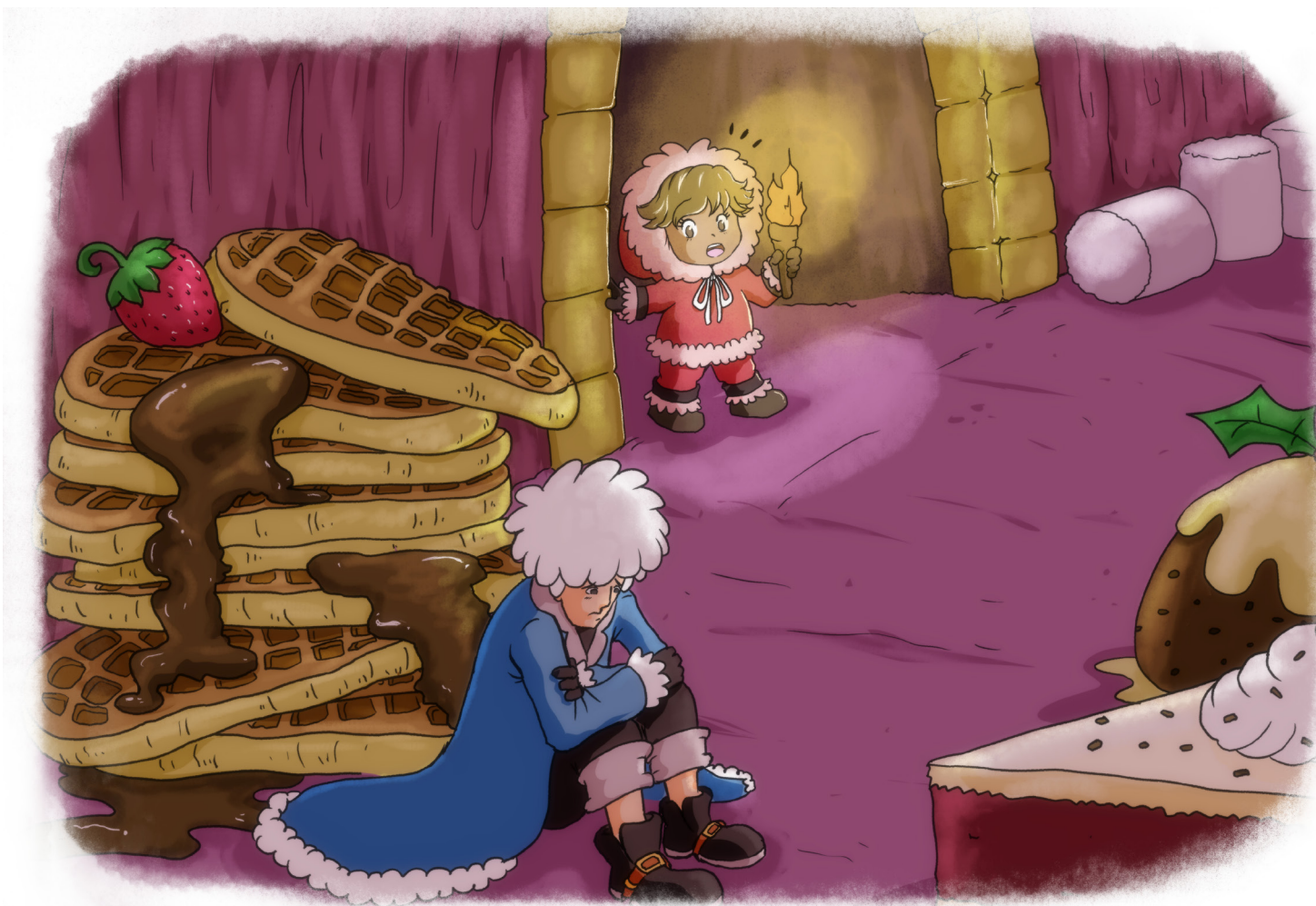


Ryo pointed to a parking in the forest and Manu could make out a dark doorway beyond. Beside the doorway she found a torch, and, without a moment's pause, she strode off into the maze.

Inside there was a blistering wind and she could see the moon through the branches above, it was very low, they didn't have long before the sun would come up. There seemed to be corners and passages everywhere she looked. She turned back to see the way she'd came, but it was so

windy that her tracks had already been blown over. She realised that sneaky Ryo had arranged for Peng, the spirit of Christmas weather, to make it so, for just that reason.

Suddenly, a familiar scent reached her on the wind. It was the sweet smell of waffles! Her nose told her exactly which way to go, and onwards she marched until she saw a light coming from a doorway.



Finally, Manu had found Albert! Sitting by the biggest waffles Manu had ever seen was a very glum looking Claus brother. She sat down beside him and introduced herself, he just smiled and looked down without a word. “What’s wrong Mr Claus? Don’t you know that it’s Christmas Eve and you’ve got to release the joy bubbles? Are you stuck in here? Is that why?”.

“Oh no, that’s not it. It’s just that I’m not sure about the whole thing anymore. I missed so many bubbles this year, there are too many children now! Besides, these days all they want are more and more

presents, they don’t care about the spirit of Christmas.”

Manu was about to reassure him when she had an idea. “Oh, you might be right I suppose. It’s not like you’re paying attention to us kids either.”

Albert looked shocked, “Not paying attention! Of course I do! Just like Nicholas knows if you’ve been naughty or nice, my own power is that I know when you’ve been happy or sad”.



Manu looked doubtful but said nothing.

“That’s right! Little Manu from the North Pole, I know all of your happiest moments.” He started speaking like he was reading from some invisible list, “When you were five and you really wanted just one more sweet from the bag and then you found an extra one hiding in the fold - happy. Last year when you got accepted to help at Christmas village, taking care of the reindeer – extremely happy. And even now when Nicholas gave you the list to deliver – happier than ever”.

“That’s all true but what about at Christmas, was I happy?”

Albert smiled for the first time, “Well of course, every child is happy on Christmas Day”. He smiled even wider, “And that’s the point isn’t it? Bringing those moments of happiness, wherever they come from. It’s not about the presents, it’s about bringing the spirit of Christmas”. He laughed and jumped onto his feet. “You’re a clever little one, aren’t you?” Now it was Manu’s turn to smile.

He put a thumb and finger to his lips and blew an ear-splitting whistle, “Ok, let’s get a move on!”



Just a few moments later, the tree branches above them rustled and split with an enormous cracking noise. A hole appeared and through it they could see the shape of a gigantic yellow bird. It was Hoshi, the spirit of Christmas lights, but ten times bigger than when Manu had seen her on the roadside.

Hoshi's feet descended beside them and Albert jumped onto one of her talons, wrapping his arms tightly around her leg. "Come on then, let's go!"

Hoshi lifted them high into the air and sped past trees, mountains and

rivers until finally settling on the top of a hill. Down below, at its foot, Manu could see a shimmering yellow castle and, not far from that, what looked like some kind of large machine.

"Is that the Christmas machine? Why didn't you land us there?" Said Manu pointing over to it.

Albert smiled, "That would spoil the fun". Just then, the trees parted behind them and out bobbed Peng, the spirit of Christmas weather.

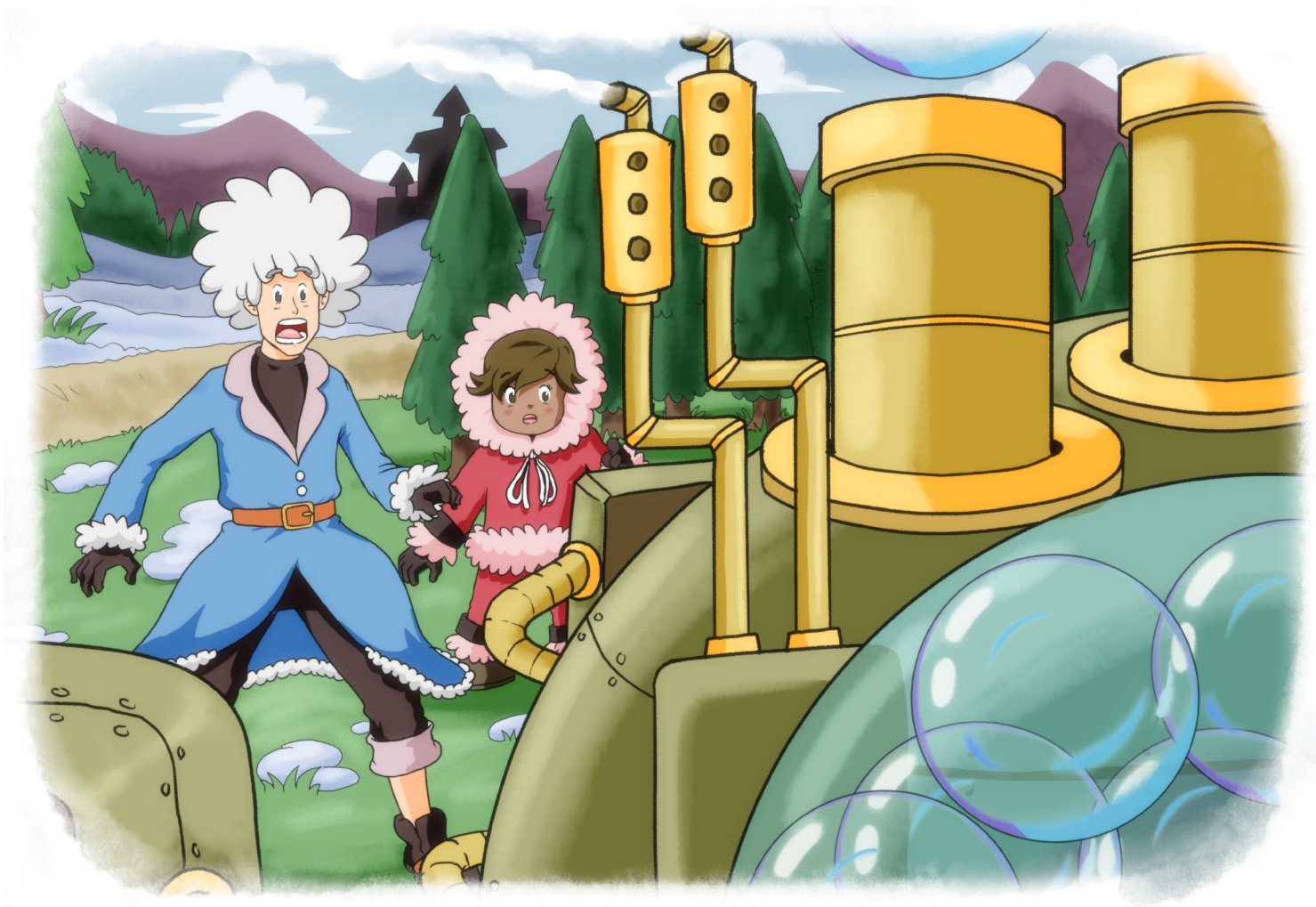
"Ready for another ride?"



“Come on then”, said Peng in his tired tones, before crashing down on his belly into the snow.

Manu followed Albert as he climbed up and held onto Peng’s fur. With a great swoosh of his giant tail, Peng sent them shooting down the hill at lightning speed. But as they sped along, Manu noticed the sky getting lighter on the horizon; Christmas Eve night was almost over!

Moments later Peng came to a stop as they reached the great machine. Up close, Manu could see gears and pipes, cogs and whistles, whizzing gauges and tubes with a glowing rainbow coloured liquid inside.



“Oh no!” exclaimed Albert, as they arrived at the machine control panel.

“What’s wrong?”, said Manu.

“The bubbles are all ready to go but there’s no list! Without Nicholas’ list of naughty and nice children, I won’t know where to send the bubbles.”

Just then Manu remembered what had been in her pocket all night, she anxiously reached in and, with a sigh of relief, felt it still there.

“Oh, by the way”, she smiled slyly, “did you forget Santa gave this to me?”

Albert’s eyes lit up, “Of course!” He grabbed the book and slotted it into an opening next to the control panel. Lights immediately started blinking and a deep bubbling sound started to emanate from further inside the machine.



Bubbles started bouncing out from the chimneys with loud pops and before long there were thousands of them floating up into the sky. The sun was creeping over the distant mountains and Manu feared that it would be too late, but she saw the bubbles shoot, at incredible speeds, in all directions. For a moment the sky was chock-a-block full of millions upon millions of rainbow coloured bubbles. It was like they were under an enormous bubble bath sky, and then, just as quickly as they had appeared, the bubbles were almost all gone.

Albert was glowing with happiness. They'd done it, and just in the nick of time. He turned to her and said, "well my little helper, you've saved Christmas".

Manu felt as proud and happy as ever before but, just then, something strange started to happen. A shiny film appeared in the air close by to her and, after a moment, she realised that she was in a bubble! The bubble grew bigger and bigger until even Albert was inside it.



“This has never happened before!” Albert said, “But then again, we’ve never had such a happy child here before either. You’ve made a happiness bubble around us. Stop being so happy, or we’ll float away!”

“I can’t!” laughed Manu. Indeed, they started to float up amongst the last few bubbles which were whizzing off to their lucky children. Albert shrugged and laughed too. In the distance, the sun had broken free of the mountain and Manu realised that it was officially Christmas Day.

Albert turned to her, “You’ve got a knack for this work.”

She blushed, “Me...no... I’m just a stable girl.”

He looked at her with a kind smile, “When someone else believes in you more than you believe in yourself, you should really listen to them. That’s what you did for me isn’t it?”



And so, that was the story of how the kind and courageous little Manu became Albert Claus' assistant in the Christmas Spiritworld. These days, working together, they never miss any happiness bubbles – even the little ones that appear when you ace a spelling test or find a penny on the floor. Manu has become great friends with all the Christmas spirits – yes even Ryo - and still visits the reindeer in the North Pole

from time to time. So, when you cuddle someone special this Christmas or dig into something yummy or open your present, you won't feel it, but there's a good chance a happiness bubble has just popped over your head. You can thank Albert and Manu for that, but what they want most of all, is for you to have a Merry Christmas.

The End and...

*Merry
Christmas!*