

## A Season of Happiness Presents



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### Story Thirteen – WOMBAT’S WOOD-FOR-ALL IDEA

By Dave Hawkins

Winter had come to The Valley and it was beginning to get very chilly. Pronto was out on his deliveries, peddling his little cart along the country lanes which was keeping his legs and body warm, but his hands felt really cold. As he stopped to rub them together trying to warm them up, he noticed something float down from above to land on the back of his glove. It was white and had a very pretty pattern. “Well I never,” he declared in surprise, “It’s a snowflake. Fancy that.” Looking up into the sky he could see where it had come from. In fact, there wasn’t much sky at all, not the blue part anyway, because it was almost completely covered by a big, grey cloud. And as he watched, more snowflakes began to fall from it.

Nearly at the end of his deliveries he was looking forward to going home to a nice warm fire when he came across Wombat with the six Drumlins. “What are you doing out here, Wombat?” he asked.

“Gathering firewood,” Wombat answered grumpily, “And I haven’t got time to chat – I’m busy.”

Pronto frowned. From what he could see, Wombat was doing nothing except standing by his wheelbarrow. The ones actually working were the Drumlins. Red was giving orders very loudly: “Make sure you pick up all of the firewood, Drumlins; and if you didn’t bounce around so much, Purple, you wouldn’t keep dropping the sticks.”

“Sorry, Red,” Purple called back, “But it’s cold, and jumping up and down keeps me warm. The rest of you should try it.”

“No, thank you,” said Yellow, “It is most unladylike.” Bending as gracefully as she could, Yellow picked up a single stick and took it back to place it on the growing pile next to Wombat’s wheelbarrow.

Wombat scowled at her. “If that’s the best you can do, Yellow, this is going to take us all day.” He paused to look up into the sky, and as he did a snowflake settled on his nose and immediately turned to a drop of water. “We’ll have to hurry before more snow comes,” he said,

then turned to watch Orange and Blue who were tying the sticks into bundles with string before placing them in the wheelbarrow.

"I'm puzzled," said Pronto. "Why are you collecting firewood when you've already got a huge pile in your garden?"

"Because," droned Wombat with a big sigh, "You can never have too much in this weather. In case you hadn't noticed it's starting to snow." He said no more, figuring that Pronto knew what he was talking about.

As it happened, Pronto was still confused. "I don't see what snow has to do with anything."

Wombat tutted. "Sometimes you really are dumb, Pronto. Once the snow covers the ground – and it will as it always does – it will also cover the wood laying there making it hard to find." He was watching Orange tying a bundle and complained: "Not so many sticks in a bundle, Orange. I want them smaller."

"Sorry, Wombat," whispered Orange. "I didn't realise."

Wombat waited as Orange pulled two sticks out of the bundle. "That's better, Orange," he said. "We have to make sure there'll be enough to go round."

"Now I'm more confused," said Pronto. "What do you mean by 'go round'? Go round where?"

"The Valley people, of course," declared his friend. "You didn't think all of this firewood was for me, surely? That would be pretty selfish."

Hearing this, Pronto was surprised. "You amaze me, Wombat. You are actually gathering firewood for The Valley folk? That truly is very kind of you."

"Aren't I always?" said Wombat, "And you, my friend, will be just as kind by delivering it – two bundles to every house so that people can keep their fires going."

"It might have been polite to ask me first," complained Pronto.

Wombat gave a little smirk. "Kind I can manage; but *polite*...? That's expecting a bit much, Pronto." He turned towards the Drumlins and said: "I'm off now to take this barrow-load home. You carry on gathering wood and bundling it. I'll be back for some more shortly." He flapped a hand at Pronto. "Off with you and finish your deliveries. I'll see you back at the wood pile in my garden and we can start loading it into your cart. Then we'll take it out to The Valley people." He looked up into the sky. "Don't be too long – we could be in for quite a big snow storm later."

While Wombat trudged home with his wheelbarrow, and Pronto pedalled off to continue his deliveries; Red watched the two friends go; then he gazed around the wood-gathering area and declared: "That seems to be it, Drumlins. We've collected all the wood there is here."

"Yes, er," Blue began, then paused to stroke his tie while he thought about the next words he was about to say, "So, er, what do we, er, do now?"

"We could go home," suggested Yellow. "I'm getting really cold." She saw Purple bouncing over and, knowing she was about to say something, decided to get in first: "Don't even mention jumping up and down, Purple. I absolutely refuse to make a spectacle of myself."

Purple shrugged and bounced away. "Suit yourself; but don't expect you can cuddle up to me to keep warm."

Yellow groaned. "Perish the thought."

Although amusing, Yellow's and Purple's little disagreement didn't solve the problem of what to do next. Green, however, had been thinking on it and said: "There are a lot of people in The Valley and Wombat said we need to make sure we have enough firewood for everyone." He looked around and Red had been right – there was no sign of any more wood; not at all, at all. "If we spread out," Green continued, "And went in different directions, we might be able to find more wood before the snow covers it."

"At least it would keep us moving," whispered Orange, "And warmer than just standing still."

"Then," sneered Yellow in Purple's direction, "We wouldn't need to leap around like complete lunatics."

So, Red ordered the Drumlins to walk off in different directions in search of more firewood. In the meantime, Wombat had returned home and unloaded his wheelbarrow onto the wood pile in his garden. Because it was so cold, he decided to make himself a nice hot mug of cocoa before going back to the Drumlins for another load of wood. This was when the door opened and Pronto came in. "Back already?" said Wombat. "I thought you'd be much longer."

"The snow came down very heavily," said Pronto, "And it was covering the roads making them hard to see. I thought it best to return while I could still find my way." He frowned. "Where are the Drumlins?"

"Still collecting wood, I hope." Wombat was pouring milk into a big pan. "Do you want some cocoa?"

Pronto ignored the question. "Do you mean to tell me that you left them out there in *this*?"

"Oh, they'll be okay," said Wombat casually. "The storm's not here yet. So, do you want cocoa or not?"

"As long as we don't take too long," said Pronto. "We need to bring the Drumlins home as soon as possible. I'll go and load my cart with firewood while you make the hot drinks." Pronto went outside and had only just begun putting the bundles of firewood in his cart when Purple came bounding along; but from what Pronto could see Purple was quite alone. "Where are the other Drumlins?" he asked.

"I lost them!" Purple replied, most distressed. "We split up to find more wood and one minute they were there, and the next minute they'd gone. It's the snow, Pronto. When Drumlins get cold they lie down and go to sleep. The snow must have covered them."

Pronto was puzzled. "How come you didn't go to sleep too, Purple?"

"Because bouncing and jumping up and down kept me warm," she explained. "I told the others to do it, but they weren't interested; especially not Yellow."

“Oh dear,” moaned Pronto, “This is terrible.” Turning towards Wombat’s hole, he called out: “Leave the cocoa, Wombat! There’s something very important to do; and we have to do it NOW!”

Wombat ambled outside, grumbling as usual; but as soon as he knew the problem, drinking cocoa was the last thing on his mind. “It’s all my fault,” he groaned. “If I hadn’t left the Drumlins out there on their own this wouldn’t have happened. We have to get going, Pronto!” Just about to climb into the delivery cart, he said: “Hang on.” Rushing to his hole, he leaned through the door and grabbed his umbrella from the stand, then rushed back. “I have a feeling that we might need this,” he said as he climbed aboard.

Although the snow storm was becoming heavier, with much difficulty they managed to find the original wood-gathering site; by which time even the pile of wood was covered with snow. But as for the Drumlins, they were nowhere to be seen. “We’ll never be able to find them on our own,” said Wombat, starting to open his umbrella. “I’m going to call Rainbow.”

Pronto looked up and could barely see the sky through the falling snow. “I don’t think the message will get through to Rainbow in this,” he said dismally.

“Well, I’m going to try anyway,” declared Wombat; and he began to twirl his umbrella. As he did, bright lights rose from it the same colours as Rainbow and the Drumlins. In moments, instead of the lights twisting into the usual spiral, they began fanning out. As they did, the snowflakes closest to each colour turned to those same colours of red, purple, blue, green, orange and yellow. Then the coloured snowflakes started to climb up into the sky. It was as if the snow wasn’t falling anymore, it was actually rising.

“Well I never,” said Pronto.

And Purple finished for him: “Fancy that.”

The message of the coloured snowflakes continued to rise and eventually broke through the cloud to reach Rainbow. As she appeared, she shone right across The Valley turning the white covering of snow to different colours. It truly was a wonderland. “You must have a problem,” she said. “How can I help?” When told about what had happened, she reassured the two friends that it was not as serious as they’d thought: “The Drumlins are simply asleep; they aren’t harmed. I can show you where they are; but I believe you will have difficulty reaching them with the snow being so deep.”

“So, what can we do?” pleaded Pronto. “We have to get them back home and in the warm.”

“Please be patient,” said Rainbow.

They watched Rainbow rise higher in the sky; then her arm came out like a many-coloured snake and became very long. Next, she spread her six fingers, the tips of which glowed brighter than even Rainbow herself. As the hand moved over the land below, one at a time a ray of light came down from each finger and seemed to disappear into the snow on the ground. “The lights must be shining on the spots where the Drumlins are sleeping,” said Pronto.

“All well and good,” grumbled Wombat, “But the snow’s got even deeper while we’ve been standing here. We’ll never be able to push through to where the Drumlins are.”

“I did say be patient,” said Rainbow. “And you don’t need to go anywhere. Stay where you are and the Drumlins will come to you.”

Apart from Rainbow’s Priz-magical performance to find the Drumlins, she had also made them very warm; so warm, in fact, that the snow which had been covering them while they slept began to melt. Not only that, but as each stood up and began to walk, the heat from their bodies melted the snow around and in front of them. The three waiting at the woodpile knew they were coming, because they were bringing with them their own ray of light from Rainbow’s fingers. Purple was so excited. “They’re coming, they’re coming!” she called out, jumping and leaping and twirling. And each time she landed in a different spot, she too melted the snow close to her.

If no-one else had noticed this, Wombat had. “I’ve been wondering how we could deliver the firewood to everyone through all this snow,” he said, “And I’ve just had a brilliant idea.” He pointed to where Purple was bouncing. “See how she’s melting the snow near her. If Purple could keep bouncing, she could lead the way, melting the snow in front of your cart, Pronto.”

Pronto had been listening, but his attention was focussed on the rays of coloured lights coming through the snow. Then the five lost Drumlins were right before them, glowing brightly; and so hot that the snow around them melted instantly. “We haven’t just got a bouncing Purple,” said Pronto, “We will have six hot Drumlins to lead our way.” He paused to look up to the sky. “Thank you, Rainbow. Not only have you found the lost Drumlins; but you have also made it possible to deliver firewood to everyone in The Valley. Soon every home will be warm again.”

And this was what happened. With the six Drumlins clearing the snow before them, Pronto was easily able to pedal his little cart, delivering firewood to every single house. It was a long day, but a very satisfying one for all. Once they had returned home, Wombat invited Pronto and the Drumlins to his hole for mugs of hot cocoa. Pronto was very surprised. “This really must be your day of kindness, Wombat, offering to make us cocoa.”

Wombat slumped into his armchair. “I only invited you in for cocoa, Pronto. Surely you don’t expect me to make it myself?” He grinned. “Not when I have three Drumlins to do it.”

Pronto sighed. “You’ll never change, will you, Wombat?”

“Certainly not, Pronto. And aren’t you glad I’m so reliable? You can always count on me to be...”

Before Wombat could say more, Pronto and the six Drumlins called out: “LAZY!”

And this made everyone laugh; including Wombat.