

CHRISTMAS TALES 9



Christmas Tales 9



A collection of Christmas stories for kids 8 – 12 years

There are ten cheeky elves on the cover. Can you find them all?

Christmas Tales 9

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Junior Fiction: A collection of Christmas themed short stories and poems from writers all around the world.

Fun and adventure, Christmas celebrations, Family relationships, Animals, Poetry, Christmas legends, Santa Claus, the Magic of Christmas

Ages 8 – 12 years

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Sibling Rivalry

Elizabeth Macintosh

“We’ll thrash you,” says Brett, my irritating older brother.

“This is supposed to be social tennis,” I respond, bouncing a ball.

Dad comes to my aid. “Yes, it’s a Howard family tradition. Big Christmas lunch, an afternoon nap and tennis at night on the local courts.” He adds quietly, “Come on, Tara, Mum and Brett haven’t a chance.”

I don’t believe him.

Brett checks the height of the net. He’s deadly serious. We win the toss and Dad lets me serve. I throw the ball up but lose it briefly in the glare of the lights. It lands over the service line. I ignore Brett’s calls to hurry up. My second serve drifts in, he smacks it back. The ball catches the frame of my racquet and sails over the fence.

“You hit it out, so you have to get it, that’s the rule,” says Brett.

I dawdle past him and stare beyond the fence.

“Ooh, Tara’s scared of the dark,” he says.

Now he’s in Year 6, Brett thinks he knows everything.

I don’t want to admit that he’s right so I go to search, making sure I stay within the glow of the lights. I can’t see much in the long grass but I do find a red hat. What’s that doing here? After a minute or so, my foot bumps the ball.

Back on court, Mum returns my serve and lobs it high into the air. Dad leaps up and hits it back but Brett drives a forehand near me that I miss completely.

“We’re not playing for a million dollars you know,” says Dad, adjusting his Santa cap.

Brett glares before he turns on his heel and walks to the baseline.

I land my best serve ever but Mum flukes it and the ball comes back faster. I over hit the shot and it flies into the bushes.

“Did you have too much Christmas dinner?” asks Brett.

Wishing he’d drop the sarcasm, I stick out my tongue. “Did you have too many dumb pills?”

I trudge outside the court.

Something rustles in the bushes. I’m not sure what. I spot the ball nestled against the base of a tree, snatch it up and hurry back to the court.

My serve to Brett just nicks the line but he winds up and slogs it back at my feet. I’m trapped and lunge down to scoop the ball with my racquet but it floats over the fence again.

I sigh and leave the court on yet another ball hunt. Maybe if I take longer, I’ll annoy Brett and next time, he won’t hit so hard. He wants to beat his ten year old sister, as if that makes him Roger Federer.

A blast of cold air hits my face as I walk over to the edge of the forest. I can’t see the ball but that’s a good thing. It means I’ll take longer and really annoy Brett. My eyes sweep over the leaf litter beneath the trees.

Crunch! A stick breaks but the sound comes from beyond the pool of light. I hear heavy breathing. My body freezes. I hover in the semi-darkness. Something’s out there but I haven’t retrieved the ball yet and there’s no way I’m admitting to anyone that I’m scared.

Dad calls, “Can you see it?”

I don’t dare speak, so I just wave my arm and peer into the bush.

I lurk in the shadows. The breathing becomes heavier. I swivel to my right. Through the gloom, a figure approaches. My heart thuds. Who would be in the forest, at night, at Christmas? Why can’t they be somewhere else?

The shape approaches, mumbling to itself.

A female voice says, “Wait until I find him!”

I don’t recognize her. Should I run? Or stay?

Before I can decide, a large woman crashes to the ground in front of me. She climbs to her feet, dusts herself off and seems just as startled to see me as I am her. She wears a long coat with a hood; overdressed for the heat.

“Who are you?” I ask.

“Mary.” She extends her hand. “Hi, Tara.”

My eyes pop. How does she know my name?

Her face hardens. “That lazy, good-for-nothing husband of mine didn’t come home last night. Have you seen him?”

“What’s he look like?”

“You’d recognise him. Fat, with a white beard. Always wears a red suit, don’t know why. The colour doesn’t flatter him, just accentuates his size.”

I hesitate. The description sounds familiar.

“You probably know him as Santa Claus.”

My eyes widen. Is this woman mad?

“Like I said, he’s a lazy, good-for-nothing. The elves and I do all the work and he gets the credit. The bludger hasn’t come home. Probably ate too many biscuits and too much Christmas cake. Serves him right if he’s stuck in a chimney somewhere.”

Poor Santa’s in big trouble.

In the distance, Dad calls, “Are you all right, Tara?”

I turn. “Yes, won’t be long.”

The woman stretches out her hand. “Here, use this ball. I’ve sprinkled magic dust on it.”

“Thanks.”

“If you see Nicholas, tell him to get home.” She turns and stomps away.

I return to the court.

“You were a long time,” complains Brett. “Who were you talking to?”

I hesitate. “No one.”

He wouldn’t believe me anyway.

I hand him the magic ball. His first shot goes out. There’s no way he’ll win now.

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Eldoph the Raindeer

Vivienne and Your Heh Tha

Down at the farm everything was going perfectly. The farm animals were busy working together to prepare for a wonderful Christmas celebration.

Sally the cow and Amber the pig had just finished organising the Christmas decorations and everyone else was wrapping presents by the fire.

The only thing missing was a Christmas tree...

So Sally, Amber, Samuel the sheep and Tamir the turtle (who preferred Tam) volunteered to go and find one.

Beatrix the horse, Gabriel the goat and Kernel the chicken stayed, just in case troublemaker Fred the Fox came to ruin the decorations. He was always so mean to the animals!

After searching in the snowy forest for a while, the four friends encountered one tree that stood out the most – the perfect tree! It was tall, with a beautiful chestnut trunk, looming branches and each leaf a striking shade of green. It looked like it had two legs for a stump at the bottom, which made it look even more unique and special.

Amber picked up the farmer's axe, which had been left out in the snow, and turned to face the others.

"Well, let's go and collect it," she smiled, before moving towards the tree.

But suddenly, a shrill voice called out. "NO, WAIT!"

A small reindeer with long, black horns and a little, blue nose came running up, his tail flicking out behind him.

"Wait, don't do that – this is a sacred tree – it's my friend Treeroid!" he explained. "And I'm Eldoph the raindeer, he who guards the tree."

Eldoph drew his name in the thick snow with a stick.

Tam read the writing and noticed a small detail that was wrong.

"But you spelt reindeer wrong," he pointed out the spelling mistake. "It's not 'R-A', it's meant to be 'R-E'."

Eldoph sighed. "No, it's meant to be 'R-A', all right?" There was a hint of sadness in his voice. "Once you become a protector, they change your name to 'R-A' in respect."

"I think that we should get going now," Sally said, looking impatiently at Tam. "We really need to –"

"Hang on, wait!" Tam interrupted. "Eldoph, I noticed that you sounded a little sad when you were talking. Are you okay?"

"Tam!" Sally hissed.

"No, it's okay," Eldoph said. "It's just that being the guardian of the tree can be lonely. You see, Treeroid's branches can heal animals, which is quite valuable. And because of this, I'm not meant to talk to anyone." His voice trailed off.

"You could come with us, we will keep you safe," Tam offered. "If you and Treeroid don't mind?"

"You really wouldn't mind?" Eldoph asked, surprised.

Tam shook his head and so did the others.

"Then, sure!" smiled Eldoph.

Treeroid lifted its two stump-legs out of the snow and began to slowly walk, which was an amazing sight for the animals to see. Although Treeroid had the ability to walk, it was a very difficult task, because it was a very unfit tree. It had simply been too risky for Treeroid to go walking around the forest in case anyone spotted it.

As the group walked back towards the farm, the growing darkness seemed to swallow them up.

The group walked into the barn and were instantly greeted by the others.

They were all surprised – not only to see how beautiful Treeroid was, but to see a walking tree. They were in a trance!

Tam began to decorate Treeroid and everyone gathered around Eldoph, to listen to him tell some amazing stories about being a guardian.

Everything seemed so wonderful and happy – a joyful celebration.

But far in the distance, away from the farm, within shadowy trees, sat Fred the Fox.

Fred was not feeling joyful or happy at all. Instead, warm, fresh tears rolled down his cheeks.

How he wished that he could be part of the happy Christmas celebration. He felt so alone.

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Peter Mouse and the Christmas Quandary

Peter Considine

Peter Mouse lived with his Mum and Dad and his brothers and sisters, in a hole in the wall of the Toy Section of a big department store. The Toy Section was usually busy with lots of human parents buying their children toys for their birthdays or other special occasions. Sometimes, for no special occasion at all.

The mouse family lived a happy life. There was always something going on in the store during the day. At night, when it was quiet, they would make their way to the store cafeteria where they would feast on all the leftovers and thrown out food. The cleaners came in at the same time every night and Mr Mouse and Mrs Mouse would take it in turns standing guard and listening for the squeaky wheels of the cleaning trolley or the zzzhoo-ming of the vacuum cleaner.

At the beginning of December, the whole department store came alive for Christmas.

The Mouse family loved Christmas – especially Peter. Instead of doing his schooling, he would sit just inside the hole entrance and watch as the Toy Staff decorated the Toy Section with sparkly tinsel, shiny balls, jingly bells and flashing lights. There were Christmas Trees and elves and reindeer, and special displays with all the newest Christmas toys.

Peter loved all the new toys.

Every day, the Toy Section would fill with happy children, laughing and giggling and telling their parents what they wanted for Christmas.

There was always lots of leftovers and Mr Mouse made a point of creeping out when it was quiet and going on an expedition where he brought home a tree branch – or piece of one – and some decorations so the Mouse family could have their own Christmas Tree.

At night, when the Mouse family scampered to the cafeteria, they passed through the magical Christmas village. There was Santa’s house and lots of trees, all covered in fake flaky snow. In front of the house, was a big chair for Santa to sit in. A huge path lined with candy canes ran up to the chair. During the day, children queued up along the path, waiting to sit on Santa’s lap, tell him their Christmas list, and have their photo taken by the elf photographer.

*

“Mum,” Peter asked as his mum tucked him into bed one night. “If the parents buy their children all the presents, what’s left for Santa to do?”

Mrs Mouse put a paw to her chin and thought for a moment. “There’d be lots of things,” she finally answered.

“Yes, but what exactly?” Peter persisted.

“Oh, I don’t know,” Mrs Mouse leaned over and kissed his soft forehead. “But I’m sure there’s lots of other things Santa does.”

She smiled, turned the night light off and left the mouse children in darkness.

Peter wasn’t so sure as he lay awake that night. If parents got all the presents, did that mean that Santa...? A horrible chill ran through Peter. If Santa had nothing to do, would Santa even be real any more?

After dinner the following night, the family scampered back to their hole with their bellies all full of Christmassy leftovers. Peter stopped in front of the village and looked at Santa’s chair. He wondered what it would be like to sit on Santa’s lap and tell him what he wanted for Christmas.

Mum had told Peter ever since he was a little pup that, because they lived in the store, Santa always knew what they wanted. And she was right: the Mouse children always got what they wanted for Christmas. Last year, Bella got a pair of pink ballet slippers, Joanie got

a soft mouse doll, Gregory got an exercise wheel, Simon got a huge lump of cheese and Peter got a ball with a tinkly bell inside it.

But if Santa wasn't going to be real... Peter's thoughts drifted back to that horrible chill of last night.

He looked around. The store was silent. Only the tiny scratchings of his family's feet could be heard as they disappeared back to the Toy Section.

Peter sat up on his hind quarters and sniffed the air. His long whiskers wiggled. The smells of the day were slowly fading away. He looked around again and listened for the cleaners. He couldn't see or hear anyone, so he darted across to Santa's chair and climbed up one of the legs until he was on the arm.

The chair was huge and smelled of pine needles and Christmas. Peter closed his eyes and took a deep sniff.

"Hello, little mouse."

Peter jumped, opening his eyes and turning around in surprise. Standing in front of him was a fat, jolly man in a red suit. Peter thought he must be dreaming. He rubbed his eyes and blinked.

The man was still there, waiting for a response.

"My name's –"

"Peter. Yes, I know."

"Wow!" The word came out of Peter's mouth with no sound.

"A little elf told me you have some questions about Christmas."

Peter looked around quickly, wondering where an elf might be and how did it know what he was thinking.

"Well, I'm here," Santa sat in his chair. "Ask me whatever you like."

Peter hesitated. He didn't want to make Santa angry or make him disappear forever. Then he summoned up his courage and spoke.

"My mum and dad always tell us that you deliver Christmas presents to all the good children."

Santa waited for Peter to continue.

"We live in the Toy Section and, every day, parents come in and buy their children Christmas presents. I... I..." Peter's whiskers wiggled nervously. "I was starting to think that you might not be real."

"Ah, there's a secret there," Santa winked. "All the toys in the Toy Section are made by my elves at the North Pole. Every year when I come down and sit in my chair here, I bring the toys with me. The children tell me what they would like and with a bit of magic dust – and a look at my Naughty and Nice list – the parents know exactly what to get them."

Peter scratched his little head in confusion. "But I thought you delivered all the toys on Christmas Eve?"

"The world's a big place," Santa sighed. "There's so many more children than there were ten, twenty or even a hundred years ago. I simply can't get around the world to every child in one night with such a full sleigh. And my poor reindeer were exhausted having to pull all that weight around."

"Does that mean you don't visit every house on Christmas Eve?" Peter's little eyes filled with tears.

"Oh, yes, I still do that. I don't have so many toys in my sleigh now. But I make sure I give every child a special gift."

Peter opened his mouth to say something.

Santa knew what he was going to say and continued, "And every good little mouse too. Now, you need to go back home and I need to get back to the North Pole and pick up some more toys. You won't tell anyone what we talked about?"

“I won’t –” Peter promised, but Santa had gone. “Santa?” He looked around everywhere. “Santa?”

The department store was quiet – apart from the zzzhoo-ming noise that was slowly becoming louder. The cleaners were on their way.

Peter climbed down from Santa’s chair and scampered off to the Toy Section where his mum was frantically looking for him.

“Where have you been?” she asked.

“I –” Peter began, then didn’t know what to say. How could he tell her he’d been talking to Santa? She probably wouldn’t believe him anyway.

“Back inside the hole,” Mum pointed a little paw. “Your brothers and sisters are already in bed.”

Peter bounded past his mum, straight into their hole and straight into bed.

*

The next few days were busy in the Toy Section. All the favourite toys ran out and the Toy Staff patiently explained to frantic parents that there wouldn’t be any more this year.

Peter didn’t know how long it took to make toys, but he figured the elves didn’t have time to make any more of those favourite ones before Christmas.

More toys arrived every day. But they weren’t the toys the parents wanted and they sat on the shelves.

Peter wondered about all the children who would miss out. Then he remembered that Santa had said he would visit every house and make sure every child got a special gift.

But when Peter ditched his lessons and snuck out late one afternoon to visit the village, Santa was in his chair with a long queue of grumpy children waiting to sit on his lap, his “Ho, Ho, Ho’s” didn’t sound very happy and he looked sad – like he wanted to be back at the North Pole.

Peter didn’t stay long. He dodged around all the rapidly moving human feet and back to the Toy Section, slinking along the wall behind the shelves until he reached his mouse hole. He quickly picked up his books and pretended to be reading, avoiding his mum’s eyes and trying not to go all red and hot under her glare.

The rest of his brothers and sisters were too busy in their lessons to notice that he had gone – or that he had come back.

*

Christmas Eve came and the store was the busiest and the noisiest it had ever been. The Toy Section was so full that people could barely get past each other without bumping into someone or something.

Finally, the doors closed and everyone went home.

The whole mouse family breathed a sigh of relief. The cleaners would want to be out early, since it was Christmas Eve, so the mouse family headed to the cafeteria for an early dinner. They feasted on leftover turkey and ham, all sorts of salads full of fresh vegetables and cheeses, splashes of sticky juices and sodas, and finishing off with shortbreads, mince pies, fruit cakes and puddings. All the mouse family were full to the point of exploding.

At the first sound of the zzzhoo-ming vacuum cleaner, the mouse family wobbled and waddled their way back to their hole.

Peter and his brothers and sisters hung their Christmas stockings at the foot of their bed. Then Mrs Mouse bathed them, tucked them into bed and read them some Christmas stories.

“Why do we have to go to bed early?” Peter asked.

“You have to be asleep before Santa comes,” Mum told him.

She kissed the pups goodnight and turned off their light. Peter looked through the dark at his stocking. He was soon fast asleep.

The next morning, Peter was woken by the squeals of delight from his brothers and sisters. Bella was parading around in her new hair ribbon and Joanie was opening the cover of a new book. Gregory was chasing a squeaky toy cat that darted around the room and Simon was chewing on a huge chunk of cheese.

“What did you get, Peter?” Bella asked, bouncing onto his bed.

Peter wasn't sure that he'd have anything. He'd made no special requests for Christmas.

As he pulled his stocking off the foot of his bed, it had a flat shape bulging inside it. It felt like it could have been a book. He pulled out the wrapped gift and read the card attached to it.

To Peter

My special gift for you.

From Santa

Peter quickly tore off the paper. Inside was a framed photo: Santa sitting in his chair and Peter sitting on the arm of it. Both of them had huge smiles on their faces, as though they were sharing a big secret.

“Is that all?” Gregory looked over Peter's shoulder and sneered. “That's a boring present.”

No, Peter shook his head and smiled. It was the perfect present.

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Santa's Spare Tyre

David VJ Elliott

Santa was so jolly, ready to deliver his Christmas cheer.
But he forgot to follow his seasonal diet... and now his belly, oh dear!
Mrs Claus had warned him to stop all the cookies and treats,
Or he might be huffing and puffing with his busy schedule to meet.

Christmas Eve arrived; the sleigh was full of gifts for every child.
The elves had done a brilliant job, but their thoughts were running wild –
How would Santa get down those chimneys with his belly as big as a spare tyre?
And the poor reindeer pulling a heavier load, would they soon tire?

Off they rode into the Christmas night, feeling merry and full of pluck.
But when Santa attempted the first chimney, he found himself stuck!
“Oh, oh!” he moaned, instead of, “Ho, ho.”
Quickly, Santa sent an S.O.S to his chief elves who were ready to help.

The elves were so clever; they had prepared themselves for the worst.
Flying on express sleighs, they brought a useful tool – a very first.
First, they pulled out Santa with a mighty heave-ho,
And removed his big, red coat – soon he would be ready to go!

The elves wrapped a girdle round his waist and pulled it oh so tight.
His face became redder than usual, as he puffed to get it right.
His belly was sucked in, but it was working, so he had a big grin.
Finally, he was ready to gladden children’s hearts.
He bound down the chimney and made the first delivery start.

Every gift was delivered, every truck, book and doll.
Then Santa ho, ho, ho’d all the way back to the North Pole.
He thanked his clever elves for this Christmas to remember,
And with the helpful prompts of Mrs Claus,
He would start his Christmas diet in September!

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Deer Santa

Carole Lander

“Excuse me, can I please pat your dog?”

Jelli stretches out her hand towards a labrador standing patiently with his owner at the entrance to the train station. People rush by, on their way to catch trains and meet friends. The noise of the crowd thunders in Jelli’s ears. The owner of the dog doesn’t hear her quiet voice.

“Excuse me,” she says, louder this time. “Can I please pat your dog?”

The labrador looks up at her with kind eyes. He seems to say, “Of course, you can, little girl. Go ahead.”

So, she does just that. The dog nuzzles joyfully into her tummy. Jelli giggles and finally the owner looks down to see what is happening.

“Look at him, now! My Milo is loving this!” the woman cries. “You have a real way with dogs, young lady.”

Jelli’s insides jiggle with excitement. Not only is she making friends with Milo, but the owner is a kind person. Jelli wants to stay here all morning but soon Daddy calls out, “Come on, kids. Our train is coming in.”

Reluctantly, Jelli says goodbye to Milo and follows her family into the station. She clutches her toy dog close to her. Last time they went on a train, Jelli took her toy rabbit and, somehow, somewhere on the journey, she lost him. She is determined not to lose this dog.

* * *

“Come and see the turtles, Jelli.

Frida has run ahead into a neighbour’s back garden. Jelli races to catch up with her older sister. They stare down at the two strange creatures lumbering across the grass.

“Don’t frighten them,” Mummy says. “You will seem huge to these tiny animals.”

Jelli crouches down to be closer to the turtles. She notices how their beady eyes stare straight ahead. Then, she reaches out her hand to touch their hard shell-houses.

The neighbour arrives with some strawberries to place on the grass. Jelli assumes the turtles will pick up speed so they can get to the delicious fruit but, no, they continue to move at a very slow pace. She has never seen anything like this before.

“Hey, this one’s eating now,” Frida calls out as she bends over one of the turtles.

Jelli leans in closer to watch the creature grasp the strawberry in its claws and take a tiny bite with its sharp teeth.

“Oh, wow, that’s so funny!” Jelli says.

She overhears Mummy saying to the neighbour, “How on earth do you keep them inside your garden? Don’t they wander off?”

As the neighbour describes the barriers she had to put up, Jelli decides that turtles would not make very good pets because they might not stay in her garden. She and Frida continue to watch them eat for a little longer, until Mummy announces that it’s time to leave.

* * *

“When can I have a pet?” Jelli asks her father.

He smiles at her and pats her hair. Perhaps this time, he will give her a promising answer. Unfortunately, as usual, he says, “When you are older.”

Jelli and her dad are sitting in a shed out the back of a friend’s house. She is cuddling one of their guinea pigs and stroking its silky fur. This one is brown. There are others in a cage that are black and white. Their noses twitch and she gives each of them a name.

Snowy, Blackie, Topsy, Turvy.

“Why can’t I have a guinea pig of my own, Daddy,” she moans. She already knows the answer.

“Mummy says they’re dirty and you would forget to clean their cage.”

There is no point in denying this. Jelli knows she probably would not want to clean out the poos and wees.

“Okay. I’ll come and visit our friend’s guinea pigs, instead,” she agrees.

Jelli continues to stroke the little creature while her brain works overtime trying to conjure up new ideas for getting a pet of her own.

* * *

Christmas is only a week away and there’s a flurry of activity in Frida and Jelli’s house. Daddy stands on a chair to put up the fairy lights. Mummy hands out decorations for the girls to put on the fir tree. Then it’s time to write letters to Santa asking – very politely of course – for the presents they would like to receive.

This is easy for Frida. She wants Lego and more Lego! And perhaps a pretty headband or handbag.

Jelli, being younger and not as expert at writing as her sister, finds it more difficult. However, she makes her very best effort.

Dear Santa

Plees can I hav a pet? I no all abowt pets and I will be the best pet keeper ever!

She says she’ll finish it later, when all the decorations are in place.

* * *

On Christmas Eve, as the night sky grows dark outside the girls’ bedroom, the street lights glow dimly and a hush falls over their strip of houses. Everyone is sleeping – everyone except Jelli!

She’s lying very still under her bedclothes – something she finds difficult to do. Occasionally she wriggles with anticipation of Santa’s visit. She ignores the voice in her head that wants to remind her of what Frida has said, “How do you expect Santa to bring a pet down our tiny chimney?”

Jelli stares through the darkness at the chimney. She can just make out the two letters pinned to the mantelpiece. The fireplace is never used and usually it’s boarded up but Daddy has removed this, saying with a wink, “Just for tonight, girls.”

Can Santa come down the chimney, she wonders, and if he sees her eyes open, will he go back up and not leave presents?

Jelli screws her eyelids tight and tries to look as though she’s fast asleep. Eventually, she does fall into a deep slumber with the sheet pulled over her curls so that when Mummy and Daddy peep around the bedroom door, they are sure that Christmas can begin.

* * *

Santa stands at the end of Jelli’s bed. He looks down at her huge collection of soft toys – all of them animals – piled at the end of it, barely leaving room for the child. He reads Jelli’s letter and, despite the unusual spelling, he can make out the message: she wants a pet that can stay in the house while the family are at work and school, that won’t make a mess, and that won’t destroy the garden.

Santa can sense her desperation but he doesn't keep pets on his sleigh. Once upon a time, he did but the cats would hiss and fight, the dogs would chase each other, the rabbits would hide and the guinea pigs would nibble through their boxes. Also, the smell from all these creatures was more than Santa could bear! So, now, he has no pets to bring down the chimney for Jelli.

Frida stirs in her sleep. Santa reads her letter and places a beaded handbag and a box of Lego at the foot of her bed. He scratches his chin under his flowing white beard, and puzzles over what he can do for the other child, the one with the interesting spelling. He adjusts his cap and suddenly he has a brilliant idea.

Jelli wakes easily when Santa touches her shoulder. She smiles up at him and whispers, "Did you read my letter? Can you do it? Please!"

"I hope you have a warm coat, young lady," he whispers back. "Get up and follow me."

* * *

Jelli doesn't remember climbing up the chimney but she will carry the memory of the scene on the roof for the rest of her life. A huge sleigh, laden with boxes, is parked up there. It is pulled by six reindeer who wait patiently for Santa to sort out the presents for children below. Santa is standing beside her as she looks longingly at the reindeer.

"Take your pick," he says with a big smile on his rosy-cheeked face.

"You mean, I can have one of these reindeer?" Jelli asks.

Santa chuckles and says, "We'll see about that, young lady."

Jelli shivers in the night air as she walks past the line of reindeer. She smiles at them all and says "Hello" very sweetly. Their antlers look scary and she hopes none of them will poke those sharp horns into her.

One of the reindeer, a white one, turns his big brown eyes in her direction and seems to smile back at Jelli. She stops in front of the animal and strokes his head so that the ears wiggle in delight.

"I wish I had a carrot or some hay for you," she says.

She doesn't actually know what reindeer eat but they remind her of the horses she once visited at a stable, where she held out a handful of hay and giggled when the horse's lips tickled her hand as it took the food from her. And she remembers how the horse's big teeth chomped into a carrot so that saliva dribbled down its mouth. That was yucky!

"That one is called Star and he obviously likes you," Santa calls out before disappearing down another chimney.

"Hey, Star, you're my new friend," Jelli whispers as she strokes the soft hair behind his ears. This is very soothing for Star, who closes his eyes and pushes his nose into Jelli's neck. She closes her own eyes and makes a wish that Star can be her new pet.

* * *

On Christmas morning, Frida's squealing wakes Jelli.

"Look at my new bag! Santa brought me a beautiful one with pearls. And Lego too," she cries.

Jelli rubs her eyes. She tries to sit up but her right arm has something heavy lying on it – a new soft toy. It's a white reindeer with a brown patch of hair in the middle of its forehead.

"Look at that," Frida says, pointing at the patch of hair. "It looks like a star!"

Jelli cuddles her new toy and kisses its nose. She doesn't remember climbing back down the chimney but she knows she was stroking a real live reindeer up on the roof. She had wanted Star to come down and live in her back garden. Now, though, she tries to imagine a

fully grown reindeer out there. How ridiculous that would be! It would bump into the fences and eat all the grass in one single day.

“This is much better” she tells herself. “A soft toy reindeer that I can take everywhere with me.”

Mummy helps Jelli to crochet a long belt that she ties around Star’s tummy and then around her own waist so that she does take him everywhere with her and he will never get lost.

When the school term begins, Jelli tells her teacher that Star must come to class every day because he is her new pet. He nestles on her lap and, when nobody is looking, Jelli picks him up, kisses his nose and whispers, “You’re my best pet, ever!”

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The Limited Life of a Gingerbread Man

Jakob Hender

It was the morning of Christmas Eve in the small village of Gingerhausen and the delicious smells from the baker's shop were drifting about on the cool morning air. The baker and his wife had been up very early, as they had been for the past month, baking all the cakes and shortbreads and honey cakes and puddings. And especially, all the gingerbread.

Christmas was the only time of year that the baker and his wife made gingerbread, and they made a whole village. In fact, they made the village of Gingerhausen. It had churches and houses, a school and a town square. It had roads and cars and even a train on its track that ran around the village.

Then there were the special Christmas shapes that filled out the village. There were stars. There were bells. There were trees. But the favourite ones were the people. Little bodies with arms and legs and a head; with candy-coated chocolate eyes and nose, and a big smiley mouth. They were clothed in coloured icings that outlined jackets and pants, swirly dresses, or simply made buttons down their middles.

The display filled the entire front window of the bakery.

The spicy smells brought the children to the bakery window. Little faces stared in delight at the display and little mouths drooled dribbles that reached the ground.

While the villagers often made their own gingerbread, they always seemed to miss out on the "secret ingredient" that made the baker's gingerbread so delicious.

As it was Christmas Eve, the bakery was busier than ever. The front door was constantly opening and closing, the little bell on it dinging as customers came and went. The kitchen ovens were constantly going as gingerbread dough went into them and came out in spicy shapes of delicious perfection.

The baker had just taken a batch of freshly baked gingerbread people out of the oven and had left them on a cooling rack on a table in the kitchen before going into the shop front to help with a sudden rush of customers.

In the quiet, a gingerbread man blinked his candy-coated eyes.

From the front of the shop, the cash register chimed and the shop door dinged.

"They're selling very quickly this morning," the baker's wife said. "Lots of hungry customers."

"There's another batch in the kitchen, nearly ready to come out," the baker replied.

The gingerbread man jumped up in alarm.

"Quick!" he urged his brothers and sisters. "Get up! Before they come and eat us!"

But the other gingerbread people seemed unable to move. Their faces twisted into looks of terror as they tried to move.

The gingerbread man grabbed an arm of his sister, lying on the rack beside him, and tried to pull her to her feet. She didn't move.

A dark shadow fell into the kitchen and the gingerbread man looked up to see the baker standing in the doorway.

"Get back on that rack."

The baker didn't seem the slightest bit surprised that the gingerbread man was alive.

"No," the gingerbread man cried. "I don't want to be eaten."

With that, he jumped off the table and ran around the kitchen.

"Come back here, you cheeky pastry," the baker chased him around the kitchen.

"What's going on here?" the baker's wife asked as she came into the kitchen.

The baker bumped into her and they both fell over.

"Ha ha," laughed the gingerbread man. "You won't catch me."

He ran through the shop, dodging around customers' feet, out the open door and into the street.

Even though he was freshly baked and still warm, the gingerbread man shivered in the cold outside, but he had no time to think of that as he ran down the footpath as fast as he could. He dodged around all the busy pedestrians and ran across the traffic-filled street. While he felt threats everywhere, no one noticed the small fleeing pastry. At least, no one human.

The movement and the delicious smell drifted high into the air, attracting the attention of a dove flying above.

“What’s that?” the dove asked herself. She swooped down to have a proper look.

The gingerbread man looked up as he saw a shadow swooping over him. He saw the dove, squealed in panic – his candy-coated eyes widening in fright – and ran faster.

The dove swooped lower, coming closer and closer.

The gingerbread man saw a hole and quickly dived into it. As he rolled over and over and sat up facing the opening, the dove stood outside, reaching in with her beak and pecking and pecking.

“Ha ha,” the gingerbread man laughed. “You can’t catch me.”

Happy with his escape from the dove, the gingerbread man stood up. Brushing himself down, he turned around to see a mouse, licking his lips.

“So nice of you to drop in,” the mouse drooled. “You might be safe from the dove, but you smell so delicious. Please,” he indicated a small table and chair, “do join me for breakfast.”

The gingerbread man’s candy-coated eyes widened even more.

The dove was outside, still pecking through the entrance.

“I don’t need much,” the mouse insisted. “A finger. Or a toe.”

“No!” the gingerbread man cried. He ran round and round the mouse hole so the mouse couldn’t catch him. His eyes darted about looking for another way out. Finally, he saw it. A small opening at the end of the hallway to the far back of the mouse hole where daylight filtered through.

He ran along the hallway to the back of the hole and burst through it. The mouse followed for a little bit.

When the gingerbread man looked over his shoulder, the mouse had slowed.

“Ha, ha,” the gingerbread man laughed. “You can’t catch me.”

“But I can,” a voice in front of him replied.

The gingerbread man stopped in his tracks and turned to see the green eyes and grinning smile of a cat.

“What a delicious treat,” the cat said.

The gingerbread man took off again, closely followed by pounding feet and hot breath.

He didn’t know if it was the cat after him or the mouse. Or both. And he didn’t care. He raced down the street as fast as his legs could carry him.

Eventually, the gingerbread man ran out of the village and into the forest. Even though it was daytime, the forest was dark and full of scary shadows.

The breeze rustled through the trees, the shrubbery flickered with movement and the blotted-out sun cast moving shadows. Everywhere the gingerbread man went, he was confronted by a scary noise and he ran from one scare to another, and then another.

Looking more behind him than in front of him, he ran straight into the soft fur of a fox. He backtracked a few steps in alarm, and was ready to bolt again the moment the fox even looked like moving. But the fox simply sat there with an amused smile on his face.

The gingerbread man found his demeanour strangely comforting.

“Where are you going in such a rush?” asked the fox.

“I’m lost and I’m scared. I was only made this morning and everyone wants to eat me.”

The fox's eyes lit up, but he tried to hide it. "Why would anyone want to eat gingerbread? Why I couldn't think of anything less tasty."

The gingerbread man sighed with relief and began to relax. "What am I going to do?"

The fox had an idea. "You could always come and live with me. I live on the other side of the river. No one would ever find you there."

The gingerbread man's eyes lit up. "Are you sure? I mean, you wouldn't mind?"

"Of course not. And my wife and children would simply love to meet you."

The gingerbread man had never felt so happy. Of course, he had only been alive for a few hours so he no real experience of being happy.

"That sounds wonderful."

"Come on, then." The fox turned and trotted off into the forest. The gingerbread man followed.

The forest still had scary noises and shadows, but the fox wasn't concerned, and the gingerbread man felt safe with him.

After a short while, they reached the river. The gingerbread man looked at the moving water and the huge distance to the other side. He wanted to cry.

"How are we going to get across?" he sobbed.

"We swim," said the fox.

"If I get wet and soggy, I'll crumble away into nothing."

The fox's look turned serious as he thought for a moment. "I know," he suddenly brightened up. "You could hop on my tail."

The gingerbread man thought this was a good idea. The fox lowered his tail, the gingerbread man climbed on, and the fox walked into the river. The water rose past the fox's paws, then past his legs, then up to his tummy, but the gingerbread man felt safe.

As the fox began swimming, the water rose to his tail.

"Your tail is getting wet," the gingerbread man said.

"Hop onto my back," the fox suggested.

Again, the gingerbread man thought this was a good idea and climbed onto the fox's back.

Soon, the fox's back was getting wet.

"Hop onto my head," the fox told him.

The gingerbread man obeyed.

Soon, the fox's head was getting wet.

"We're nearly across the river," the fox said. "Hop onto my nose."

The gingerbread man did so, and the fox quickly tossed him into the air. He fell straight back down into the fox's mouth. He wanted to struggle, but the fox's teeth were so tightly locked around him that any movement would see him cut.

They reached the other side of the river and the gingerbread man thought the fox would put him down now. But, no.

The fox carried the gingerbread man back to his lair where Mrs Fox and three pups were waiting. The pups' eyes lit up and they bounded up and down in excitement.

"What did you bring us, Daddy?" they asked.

"A special treat," the fox mumbled, keeping his grip on the gingerbread man. "A gingerbread man. Baked fresh this morning and ready to be eaten."

"You said you didn't like gingerbread," the gingerbread man protested in horror.

"I'm a fox. I don't always tell the truth," the fox answered. "Especially not to food."

The gingerbread man thought quickly. Then he had an idea.

"I have to go back to the bakery," he pleaded. "The baker and his wife will come looking for me. Please take me back."

He hoped that maybe he could escape from the fox on the way back to the bakery, but the fox wasn't listening.

“Eat up, pups,” the fox said.

The gingerbread man closed his candy-coated eyes and prepared to be devoured. But he felt no pain as Mrs Fox and the pups bit off his arms and legs and gobbled him up. He felt nothing but a brief warm, fuzzy feeling – and then he was gone.

*

Now, children, don't be sad. The purpose of a gingerbread man is to be eaten for Christmas. So you hold onto your gingerbread tightly. And if his candy-coated eyes start to look around or he starts to wriggle in your hand, just pop him into your mouth and eat him up and enjoy him.

And have a Merry Christmas.

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The Christmas Wish

Kerry Gittins

A partridge in a pear tree is a lonely sight to see,
Although the bird can fly away he sits and stares at me.
He watches as I sing about the twelve fine days to come.
But as I keep on singing, the sadder he becomes.
He twists his head from side to side, blinking small black eyes.
“Please,” he chirps, “don’t sing that song. It always makes me cry!”
He ruffles bright green feathers from his head down to his toes,
pruning each one carefully, tweeting as he goes.
Once he’s done he stands up straight and sighs a mournful sigh.
His beak begins to quiver and a tear forms in his eye.
He starts to tell a tale that’s full of misery and woe,
of sorrow and of heartbreak, as he paces to and fro.
“You’ve no idea how hard it is to see the doves and hens
all kissing and canoodling. It seems to never end!
And then there are the calling birds, the geese and all the swans!
They prance and swim and lay their eggs and proudly sing that song.
Do not get me started on the lords and maids and ladies.
The pipers and the drummers wake up all the sleeping babies!”
I listen as he makes a Christmas wish for just one thing:
to find another partridge who will make his sad heart sing.
I beckon him, “Come closer. Do not shed your tears today.
No need to be alone for look who’s flown from far away.”
He turns his head to where I point, his eyes full of surprise.
His little heart now bursts with hope and to her side he flies.
He hops a little nearer, pecks her gently with his beak.
She fluffs her wings and then she lays her head upon his cheek.
Together with their heads entwined, a future bright and fair,
no longer lonely but instead a perfect partridge pair!

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Blizzard

Elizabeth Klein

“Well, folks,” Grandma said as she came into the living room and gazed out the window. A heavy snow covered the backyard and the trees beyond. She shivered from the chill in the room and hunched inside her warm dressing gown. “I guess you’ll just have to stay here for Christmas.”

“Goodie,” Rachel squealed with laughter.

Tom groaned loudly, unimpressed, as he mooched on the couch.

He’d been looking forward to getting home that day, since it was Christmas Eve, but now they were stuck at Grandma’s till the snow stopped falling, whenever that might be.

“What about all our presents under our tree?” he said. “We won’t be able to open them.”

His mother, Susan, walked over to the window and stood beside her mother. She clutched a woollen shawl about her shoulders and stared at the white sky.

“Everything is so white,” she muttered. “You can’t make out the sky from the surroundings. It’s a real white-out.” She looked at her mother’s stoic face. “I’m glad we brought extra food along for the weekend.”

“And I have more than enough to outlast this blizzard for several weeks in my larder,” her mother said. “I’ve been making jams and a whole lot of other preserves which I keep in the cellar. Your turkey, Susan, will come in handy this Christmas with all of you here.”

“But what about our presents?” Tom reminded them again from the lounge.

Grandma wandered over and sat down beside him. “They’ll still be there when you get home, love. And Santa knows where you are for Christmas, so I wouldn’t worry.”

Tom huffed. He knew she said that for Rachel’s sake, who was listening. She was just seven and still believed in Santa, the Tooth Fairy and the Easter Bunny. At eleven, he’d worked out there were no such things but went along with his parents when they spoke of them.

He loved his grandmother very much and suspected she’d supply some gifts for them, probably new socks or jumpers she’d knitted through the year. It wasn’t that he didn’t appreciate them, but he suspected there were a whole lot more exciting presents waiting for them back at home, such as the newest Lego kit he’d told his Mum about since July – so she could layby it for Christmas. Or the science kit with over a hundred experiments and all the board games he’d requested. He was aching to play them all with his cousins who always visited on Boxing Day.

He felt so miserable he almost cried.

Grandma reached over and gave him a big hug. “There, there. Come and have some breakfast. We’ve got those yummy croissants your Mum brought over and I’ve made the jams to make them sing.”

“Croissants don’t sing Grandma,” Rachel said.

“They do if you spread the right toppings on them,” Grandma said. “Then we can eat them in here and drink hot chocolate and tell Christmas stories.”

“What a wonderful idea, Mum,” Susan said. “I used to love the stories we told on Christmas Eve beside the fire. Let me help you in the kitchen.”

Robert, Tom and Rachel’s father, wandered in with an armful of kindling, newspaper and firewood and dumped them near the wood crate. He then started to clean out the hearth and set it for the fire he was going to light. Soon he had a warm, roaring fire burning. He straightened up and warmed his outstretched hands for a minute before he faced Tom.

“I need your help children,” he said and Rachel skipped over to him.

Tom dragged his feet after his father. Rachel skipped as they made their way down the hall and into one of the spare rooms. It was like an ice box in there and Tom wondered what his father wanted them for.

Robert removed a large cardboard box from the cupboard and handed them a bag each.

When Tom peeked inside, it smelled dusty with lots of old baubles and tinsel and other decorations. He huffed and knew what his dad was doing. They were going to decorate Grandma's old plastic silver Christmas tree with the broken wire branches. She never decorated anything for Christmas much other than tossing some tinsel about the curtains.

He sighed and carried his bag into the living room, which was nice and warm now and he dumped it on the floor. He went back to mooching on the lounge, feeling sorry for himself. From there, he watched his father assemble the old tree with Rachel helping. It stood wonky on its tripod and he groaned again as he pictured their Christmas tree back home, which his father had cut from the forest. It was spectacular and he had no qualms about dressing it with their lovely baubles and tinsel.

This one – well, it looked terrible and he wondered why his grandmother even kept it.

At last, his mother and Grandma entered with a large wooden tray filled with breakfast: fresh hot croissants smothered with blueberry and strawberry jams and steaming hot chocolate. They all settled down on the lounge and ate their meal.

"I think I'll start off with a Christmas story," said Grandma, "since I suggested it. Rachel, you'll enjoy this one."

Tom grumped and stared at the snow falling faster outside.

Rachel snuggled up to Grandma to listen.

"This is about a poor tailor who was struggling to make ends meet, even though he worked night and day. He owned a small clothing store but knew he'd have to sell it soon because he couldn't afford to run it. One day, the Mayor came over and asked him to create a waistcoat for a wedding on Christmas Day. As winter approached and his cupboards were bare, the tailor decided to take up the daunting task, with the hope the Mayor would pay him handsomely when he was finished.

"Now, in his workshop, there lived a family of mice who watched the poor tailor worrying and struggling to finish the waistcoat to the Mayor's high standard and they decided to give him a helping hand."

Rachel clapped and squealed. "I knew they were magic mice, Grandma."

Grandma smiled and continued. "The night was as cold as it is today but the mice worked tirelessly throughout the night, stitching and trimming the waistcoat until it looked beautiful. On Christmas morning, when the tailor awoke, he saw the waistcoat was finished and had gold buttons and gold trim. Every stitch was neat and expertly done and his heart was full of joy and gratitude. The Mayor ended up giving him a very generous reward and highly praised his work."

"How much money did he give the tailor?" asked Rachel.

"Quite a lot," Grandma said. "But as the tailor pondered how the waistcoat could have been finished so perfectly, he discovered a tiny gift on the workbench."

"From the mice?" Rachel asked.

Grandma nodded. "You guessed it."

"What was it, Grandma?"

"A tiny gold thimble. The mice had given it to him as their parting gift. The tailor then realised that the mice had saved him and his heart swelled with gratitude for their kindness. You know, Rachel, this is more than just a story about the kindness of the mice. It shows that even the smallest act of kindness can bring hope when you least expect it."

"That's a nice story, Grandma," said Rachel.

"I remember that story," said Susan, sipping her hot chocolate. "Why don't you tell them the story about the magic pen, Mum?"

"Oh, that?" said Grandma with a twinkle in her eye. "I could tell that one, I suppose."

"Yes, please tell us," pleaded Rachel, looking up at Grandma.

“All right. There was once a little girl about your age Rachel, who desperately wanted to see Santa deliver her presents on Christmas morning.”

A grumble came from Tom.

Grandma continued. “As Christmas Eve came around, the little girl did her hardest to stay awake. So, when her ears picked up the sound of boards creaking downstairs under Santa’s heavy boots, she tiptoed out of her bedroom, down the stairs until – who do you think she saw near their Christmas tree with a large sack and a pen and pad in his hands?”

“Santa!” squealed Rachel, who’d been listening very carefully to the tale.

“You betcha,” said Grandma. “In fact, Santa didn’t expect anyone to still be awake and just before he disappeared, he accidently dropped his magic pen.”

“What happened to it?” Rachel asked.

“Well, I... I mean, the little girl picked it up and put it in her pocket. She soon discovered that whenever she wrote anything with it, it came to pass. In fact, all she had to do was think of something and it came to pass if she held the pen in her hand.”

“That’s a good story too,” said Rachel.

“Now, I have a little surprise for you and Tom,” said Grandma.

Rachel’s eyes brightened. “An early Christmas present?”

“Yes, kind of. I know Tom will love his too. You’ll both have to come into the kitchen to see it.”

Even Susan gave her mother a curious look, as if not even she knew what the surprise was.

Rachel hopped off the lounge and Grandma clambered to her feet. Then they all marched into the kitchen.

Tom didn’t understand what he’d love that was in the kitchen of all places and he dragged his feet after them, feeling pretty miserable.

Grandma stopped near the stove and faced them. “This year I have something different for both of you. It’s in the laundry.” She opened the laundry door and six tiny kittens and their mother raced into the warm kitchen. “There’s one each for both of you.”

Tom bent over and picked up a black and white kitten which snuggled up against him with a soft meow. Its soft fur tickled his nose and he giggled.

“Thanks, Grandma,” he said. “I love this present.”

“Yes, thanks, Grandma,” echoed Rachel, hugging hers.

“I don’t know how I didn’t see them earlier. I had no idea you even had a cat, Mum,” said Susan, frowning.

“Sweetheart,” Grandma said with a gleam in her eyes. Her fingers twirled a pen deep inside her dressing gown pocket. “There’s a lot of things you don’t know about me. Now, why don’t we all go into the lounge room and tell some more stories?”

“Okay,” said Tom, grinning as he cuddled his kitten.

Grandma gave him a smile and a wink, as if she knew a secret that no one else knew.

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Where's the Snow?

Jill Barlow

“Where’s the snow? I want snow! We’ve flown halfway across the world so we can have snow for Christmas so where is it?” Annabelle put her hands on her hips and glared at her parents.

“Darling,” her mum began. “We can’t just magically wish for snow and it happens.”

“It depends on the weather,” her dad explained.

“You told me we were going to have a Christmas like when you were little,” Annabelle insisted. “A white Christmas. A snowy Christmas.” She shook her head in disgust. “We could have stayed home.”

Getting Annabelle into bed that night was horrid. She didn’t want her favourite doll or a story. She kept demanding to go home.

Eventually, tiredness won out.

Madge and Brian looked at their little girl. How could they make this a White Christmas like when they were both young?

They were too old to wish for such silly things. Being grownups meant they had stopped wishing for things years ago.

They’d both grown up in England where they remembered Christmases of snow and snowmen and sledding. After marrying and moving to Australia, the Christmases were all hot and dry and usually ended up with a holiday at the beach. This year was going to be different. They’d saved up all year to fly back to England for a White Christmas. The past week had been nothing but cold and rain. Now it was Christmas Eve, and it was just cold. The rain had stopped, but it didn’t look like snow.

Madge looked out the window of their holiday rental. The thick, heavy rainclouds had gone and left behind fluffy white ones covering most of the sky.

“I know it’s silly, but I’m going to make a wish that Annabelle could have a White Christmas like we had. Just once.”

Brian looked out the window, then turned back with a smile on his face as he pointed to the sky. “There’s the first star. A Christmas Star. Make your wish.”

Madge saw the star and made her wish. The chill night air was warmed by Brian’s arm around her waist.

Annabelle woke up as a chilly breeze reached her.

“I wish someone would close that window,” she grumbled and reached to pull the doona up tighter to her chin.

But the doona wasn’t there. She felt around to see where it had slipped to, but all she felt was her nightdress.

“What?” She opened her eyes fully as the sideways tiled floor pressed cold into her cheek. Beyond it, stars twinkled in a dark sky.

Floor? Where was her bed?

She sat bolt upright – and shivered even more. Where was her bed? Where was her room? Why did the tiled floor now look like roof tiles and why was she sitting on a roof? *Why was she sitting on a roof!*

She rubbed her cold bare shoulders as she looked around. Why was she sitting on a roof?

She was dreaming; that was all. She must be dreaming.

“Excuse me,” a deep voice spoke from behind her.

Annabelle looked over her shoulder. She nearly fell off the roof when she saw reindeer harnessed to a sleigh. Standing beside the sleigh, a plump man dressed in a fur-trimmed red coat and with a red cap on his head was waving to her.

Santa? Annabelle’s mouth dropped open.

Then she shut it just as quickly. She was too cold and miserable to believe in such nonsense.

“Excuse me, young lady,” Santa continued, “but you’re in my way.”

“I don’t care.” Annabelle folded her arms across her chest. “And you’re not real, anyway.”

“Oh, I’m not real,” Santa chuckled. “Maybe it’s you who’s not real.”

“I am real and this is all a dream.”

“Right,” Santa nodded. “So I’ll just leave you on the roof here while I go around and deliver all these presents.”

Annabelle simply sneered.

“Oh, and this is for you.” Santa handed Annabelle a roundish present, about the size of her fist.

A present? Annabelle quickly ripped off the ribbon and tore off the paper. Her delight turned to anger. “A lump of coal!”

Santa chuckled, climbed in his sleigh and gathered the reins. He flicked them once and the reindeer took a step and leaped into the sky.

“Wait! You can’t leave me here!”

“If I’m not real, what does it matter?” Santa’s voice reached her from the next house as he landed and disappeared down the chimney with his sack.

“Stupid Santa,” Annabelle grumbled.

Then Santa was back up the chimney again, and onto the next house and down the chimney and back up again. Moving so quickly he was almost like a blur to Annabelle. Which only served to convince her even more that none of this was real.

But she was still sitting on the roof. With no idea how she got there or how she was going to get down.

She shivered. It was cold. England was cold and she wanted to go home. Back to the sunny beach where the sound of rolling waves soothed her off to sleep and she could make sand angels. All she’d be able to make here was mud angels.

She looked at the lump of coal in her hand. If she were inside, she’d put it in the fire and burn it to warm herself.

She looked over at the chimney with its small curl of smoke rising out of it. No, that was a stupid idea, she immediately dismissed the tiny thought. She was not climbing down the chimney to get back inside.

She looked off into the distance where Santa had disappeared into the night.

“Santa, wait,” she mouthed quietly.

“Yes?”

He was back on the roof, standing in front of her with his hands on his hips. No reindeer or sleigh this time, just the plump man in the fur-trimmed red suit.

Annabelle would have jumped in surprise but she was still sitting.

“Get me down from here right now,” she demanded.

“No.”

“What do you mean ‘No’? You’re obviously the reason why I’m up here. It’s not like I sleepwalk or anything.”

“Don’t you mean ‘sleepclimb’?” Santa grinned.

Annabelle’s eyes narrowed. “You get me down from here and back in my bed right now. Before I scream and tell everyone you kidnapped me!”

“I thought you said this was all a dream.”

Annabelle growled to herself.

Santa lifted one hand and stroked his white beard thoughtfully. “It looks like you need a reality check, young lady.”

“A what?”

“A reality check. It means you need to see how things really are and not just what you want them to be. Your parents love you and they brought you here to experience something really wonderful.”

“It’s not wonderful and I want to go home.”

“You really are a misery guts, aren’t you?”

Annabelle glared at Santa.

“You’re miserable and you want to make everyone else miserable. Including the two people who love you the most in the world.”

Annabelle opened her mouth to object.

“I haven’t finished yet,” Santa silenced her before she could speak. “Your mum and dad wanted to do something wonderful for you and all you can do is blame them because it hasn’t turned out the way they would have liked. The way *you* would have liked, if you’d admit the truth. That’s just bad luck. Mums and dads don’t control the weather.”

“I know that,” Annabelle mumbled.

“And I was in Australia only an hour or so ago, and, guess what? It’s raining there too. So you would be having a wet Christmas no matter where in the world you are.”

“Hmmpf.” Annabelle wasn’t comforted in the slightest by that knowledge. Her thoughts were on her immediate problem. “How am I supposed to get down from here?”

“If it’s all a dream, then you’re not really up here. You’re in bed, fast asleep.”

Santa began to fade. Annabelle could see house rooftops and the night sky through his vanishing body.

“Close your eyes...”

Annabelle wasn’t tired, but suddenly opened her eyes to find herself snug and warm in bed.

“It wasn’t real,” she muttered to herself. “It was all a dream. A premonition. Yes, that’s better. I’m psycho. Or psychic. Or whatever the word is.”

She was about to close her eyes and go back to sleep when she remembered that it was Christmas morning. There was a tree in the lounge room and there would be presents. Not a stupid lump of coal. Real presents!

She sneezed, and put on her dressing gown before going downstairs.

Mum and Dad were in the kitchen making French toast – Annabelle’s favourite breakfast. The warm cinnamon smell filled her nostrils and made her feel a little happier. Deep down, she knew her parents loved her and she had been mean to them.

“Mum, Dad, I’m sorry. I know you wanted to make this Christmas special – Aachooo!” she sneezed.

As the sneeze shook through her body, white flakes fell from her hair. Cold flakes; not like dandruff. “What –?” Annabelle frowned before her mum’s concern took over.

“Oh, Annabelle, are you catching a cold?” her mum asked, not even seeing the flakes. “Let me take your temperature.”

“No, I’m fine.”

Annabelle turned away as her mum tried to put the back of one hand on her forehead. Her gaze passed the lounge room doorway. There was something different in there.

She moved away from her mum and into the lounge room, then suddenly screamed. “Mum! Dad!”

Brian and Madge raced into the lounge room. It was still dark. The only lights were the tiny coloured fairy lights glowing on the Christmas Tree. But outside, through the window behind the tree something was softly falling. Too slow and too quiet to be rain.

Annabelle rushed past the tree and the presents and looked out the window. Snow! Real snow!

“Mum! Dad! Look!”

“Annabelle, what –” her mum began before her eyes settled on the window. “Oh, my goodness. Brian, look!”

Brian moved behind Madge and Annabelle, putting an arm around each of them.

“Well, how about that! A White Christmas! Just what we all wanted.”

Annabelle couldn't stop the fuzzy feeling inside her, and she opened her mouth and whispered, “Thanks, Santa.”

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About the Authors

Elizabeth Macintosh

Elizabeth is a former teacher who lives on the North Coast of NSW. Her main interests are writing short stories for children and Young Adults. Her Junior Fiction and Middle Grade tales often contain an element of danger and a humorous twist. Many are inspired by real places or events. Some of her stories have won awards in various competitions such as The Creative Kids Tales Author Competition, the Port Stephens Literature Awards, Scribes (Victoria) Literary Awards and the Rolf Boldrewood Literary Awards.

Many of Elizabeth's stories have been published in *The School Magazine* and several anthologies including *Dark Sky Dreamings: an Inland Skywriters Anthology* (Interactive Press), *The Opposite of Disappearing: Short Stories in Uncertain Times* (Rhiza Edge), *It's a Kind of Magic: Stories and Spells by Second-Rate Sorcerers* (Share Your Story) and *Hot Diggety Dog! Tales from the Bark Side* (SYS). Another anthology, *Tell 'em They're Dreaming: Bedtime Ballads and Tall Tales from the Australian Bush* (SYS), was No.1 on Amazon.

She once climbed Mt Vesuvius with members of her Archaeology class and was delighted to find a shop at the summit.

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Vivienne

Vivienne is a young author, who enjoys illustrating characters and then develops them into written stories.

She has created a fabulous children's book series called "Farm Friends", which is about a group of farmyard animals, who work together to solve problems. She has created this series with her friend, Your Heh Tha.

Vivienne is interested in creating picture books and chapter books in the future, which she would like to either write or illustrate – or both!

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Your Heh Tha

Your Heh Tha is a young author who enjoys creating exciting ideas, which he then creates stories about.

He has written an amazing children's book series called "Farm Friends" which explores the difficulties and adventures that the animals go through. He has created this series with his friend, Vivienne.

Your Heh Tha is interested in writing mystery novels in the future.

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Peter Considine

Peter Considine has completed a course in Creative Writing. He is currently teaching an online Creative Writing course at a Community House where he hopes to fill beginning or struggling writers with positivity and a sense of accomplishment.

Peter's writing is mainly for adults. This is his first children's story. In his spare time, he enjoys badminton, table tennis and cross country hiking.

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David VJ Elliott

David VJ Elliott is an Australian author, who grew up in England. He loves writing children's stories, including short stories and chapter books. He also enjoys writing poetry and novels for older readers.

David was long-listed in the "Pitch it! Competition", 2021, for his Young Adult story, "The Silver Birch." He has had a range of junior fiction stories and children's poems selected and published in Australian anthologies, including: "Hot Diggety Dog" (2023), "It's a Kind of Magic" (2022), "Once Upon a Whoops!" (2021).

Apart from a lifelong love for soccer and athletics, David also loves the magic of Christmas and is thrilled to have his humorous story "Santa's Spare Tyre" published in this year's Christmas anthology.

You can view more of David's writing at: www.instagram.com/davidvjelliott.

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Carole Lander

Carole Lander has invented characters and stories for many years; first, as an actor, then as a Drama teacher, and now as a writer. She finds this creative process very different to the strict rules that must be followed when she copy-edits and proofreads other peoples' work, and very liberating.

Carole draws on real-life situations for her subject matter and characters. *Deer Santa* sprang from her most recent visit to the UK to see her grandchildren in 2024.

Full details of how to purchase Carole's books are at: www.checkword.com.au/writing-for-children/

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Jakob Hender

Jakob began writing stories at a young age. He started with fairy stories and nursery rhymes, putting his own twist on them, until he learned to properly craft a story from start to finish. His teachers said he was wasting his time and should stop daydreaming and work towards getting into university and a full-time career.

Jakob now divides his time between a career in criminal law and writing stories. He's discovered that the real monsters of this world are not necessarily in fiction.

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Kerry Gittins

Kerry Gittins is a writer, book reviewer, podcaster and retired teacher librarian from Newcastle, Australia. Kerry writes picture books, poetry and short stories that focus on community, wellbeing, music and the environment. Her podcast, which she co-hosts with teacher librarian friend Lynette Barker, showcases Australian literature and how it can be used to enhance teaching and learning.

Kerry's work has been published in The School Magazine, Christmas Anthology 7 by Storm Cloud Publishing, The Underground Writer's Zine and on The Australian Children's Poetry website, which she now manages. She is a member of SCBWI, the Hunter Writers Center and is Director for CBCANSW Hunter Region.

You can find out more about Kerry on her website [The Book Tree](#) and follow her on Instagram.

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Elizabeth Klein

Elizabeth Klein grew up in a small village in New South Wales, Australia. She trained as a teacher and taught for almost thirty years. In 2015, she and her husband left Sydney and now travel in a caravan full time. Besides having written many short stories, articles, plays and poems, she's also authored YA and junior fiction books, as well as educational books and has over 70 published works to date.

You can visit Elizabeth at:

<https://www.elizabethkleinauthor.com/>

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Jill Barlow

Jill enjoys reading and writing stories about nature and has written many stories for local magazines. She spends hours prowling the parks and gardens of her local city, admiring the

landscaping, water features and professional displays that have been made. You can quite often find her with a picnic blanket and basket, jotting down notes for her next story and sharing her lunch with the possums and birds.

Jill hasn't gotten around to organising her social media yet. It's one of those things she meant to do, but writing stories keeps getting in the way. She hopes you enjoyed *Where's the Snow?*

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