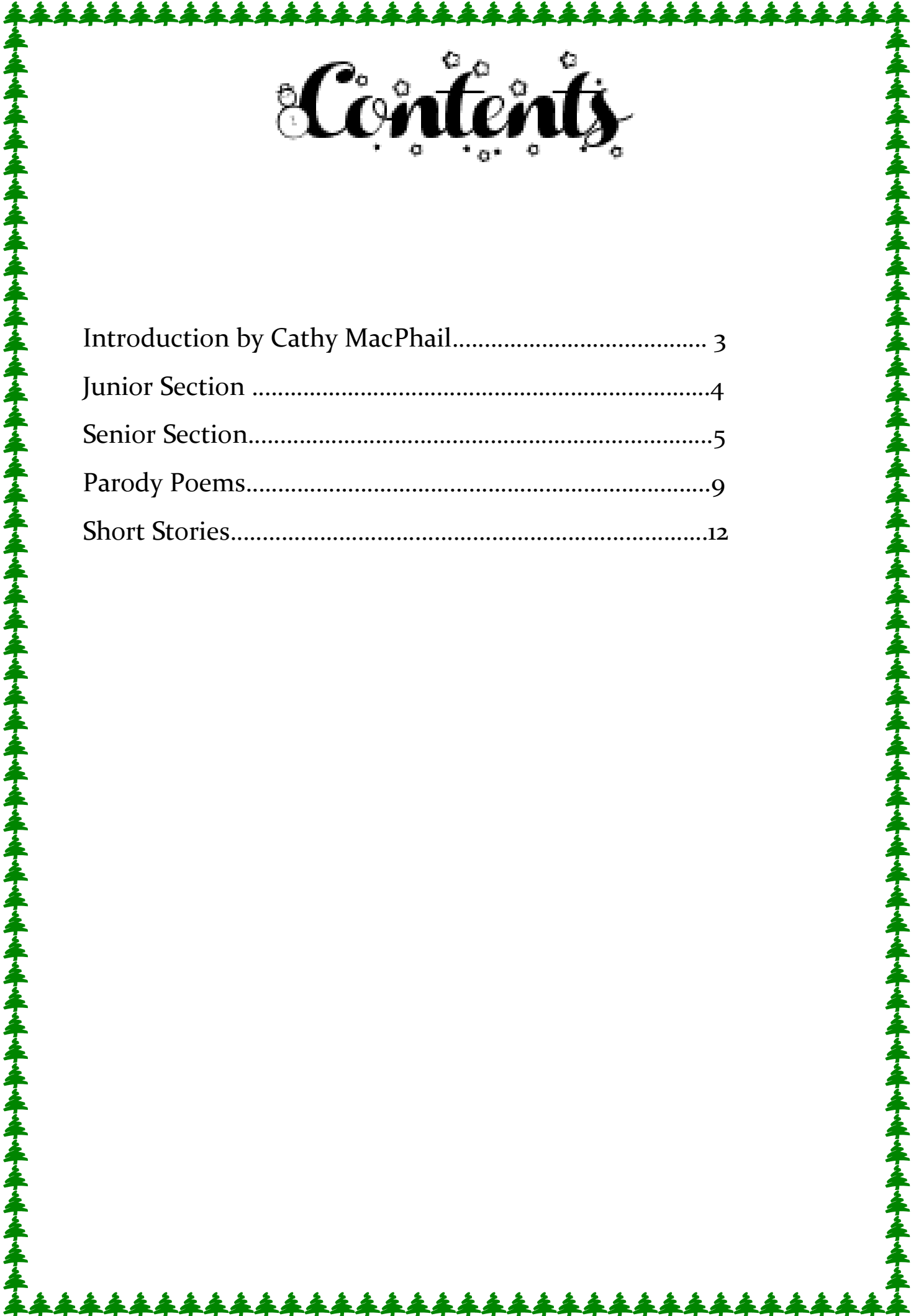


CHRISTMAS EDITION



Mid Term Tales

Falkirk High School's Creative writing



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Foreword

My favourite present at Christmas was always a book. Christmas just wouldn't be Christmas without that book. I remember the excitement of finding a brand new copy of Little Women in my stocking. Or Villette, or Pride and Prejudice, What Katy Did. I can remember all the books I got. Then I would spend a happy Christmas sitting in a corner lost in a book, always dreaming that one day I might write my own.

I thought that dream would never come true because I had to leave school at fifteen to go to work. So I never got to university and I have never gone to a creative writing class. I learned to write by reading. Those Christmases with my nose in a book were all worthwhile.

When you read a book you are automatically learning how that writer drew you into their story. You need a great beginning. How did that writer keep you turning the pages? You need to keep up the suspense, add twists, or cliff hangers. How did that writer make you laugh, or make you cry? What were the words they used that made you shiver with fear, or have your heart hammering in your chest with excitement?

Isn't it wonderful that you can learn so much just by reading? I've always believed reading and writing go hand in hand. I am very proud to be Patron of Reading at Falkirk High, and I am equally proud to be asked to write the foreword for this book written by the creative and versatile talents of the young writers at this wonderful school.

Keep reading, and definitely keep writing.

Cathy MacPhail

Many thanks to Cathy MacPhail For this thoughtful Foreword.

Junior Section

Welcome to the Junior Section of the Christmas Magazine, where we will see stories written by our amazing young authors in S1-S3. From a very large and varied selection of stories we have chosen the two best ones. One boy and one girl. So without further ado, the two best Christmas Stories written by our junior pupils.

On Christmas Eve Santa was sick so he couldn't deliver the presents. Santa phoned for the Elf Crew and a snowman. The first house they went to the snowman was delivering the presents and he melted. All the elves panicked and ran away. Rudolph gave the magic signal to Santa to tell him the news. When Santa arrived with the spare sleigh he went looking for the five elves.

The first elf was hiding in a bin, he said he was caught by the humans. The 2nd and 3rd elves were hiding in a toy shop and were calm because they saw the toys. The 4th elf was hiding in a chimney and had presents for delivery. The final elf was hiding in the old sleigh. The presents were delivered and they brought the snowman's carrot stick and stones to the North Pole where they brought him back to life.

by Connor Martin, S1

The snow was falling in large snowflakes, covering the trees in a delicate layer of sparkle. Carol singers braved the cold armed with their mittens and woolly hats, so they could spread joy and happiness on the best day of the year.

Inside, where it was considerably warmer, Mum worked her magic in the kitchen. As a result, the house smelt of hot chocolate and fresh cinnamon rolls straight from the oven. The tree glowed warmly in the centre of the room, next to the fireplace where the stockings hung. At the foot of the tree were the presents, each was wrapped perfectly with patterned paper and a large velvet ribbon.

Sitting on the coffee table was my gingerbread house. I had spent Christmas Eve busy at work decorating it to the best of my abilities, armed with candy canes and peppermints, jelly tots and chocolate buttons. It was a masterpiece! All these pieces fit together to create my perfect Christmas morning.

by Maddy Smart, S1

Senior Section

Christmas Traditions around the world

Australia

In Australia Christmas is celebrated at the start of the Australian summer holidays (from December to February) and as a result Christmas is a very hot time of the year.

While Australia's original inhabitants (Aboriginals) would not have celebrated Christmas, British Immigrants/ prisoners. Would emigrate/be brought to Australia, many chose to stay permanently. As a result of this, Christian holidays were celebrated in Australia, of course including Christmas on December 25th, Along with other Christmas holidays. Australians often decorate their homes with Wreaths, lights, trees and all sorts of other decorations we would associate with Christmas. With some even having competition to see who has the best decorations. Some people even go door to door singing Carols.

Due to the hot nature of Australia many words in famous carols are changed to remove mention of snow, or cold and are often replaced with Australian words, there are even some original Australian Carols, such as "Six white Boomers" and "White wine in the sun" It is also said that Santa leaves his Reindeers to rest, and instead uses Kangaroos (and changes his clothes) while delivering presents to Australian Children. The use of Kangaroos instead of Reindeers was the inspiration of the song "Six White Boomers" the boomers being the old Kangaroos.

Belarus

- The principal religion in Belarus is the Eastern Orthodox Church.
- This means Christmas is celebrated on the 7th January rather than 25th December.
- Christmas takes place after a 40 day fast which begins on the 15th November to reflect on self-control and healing within.
- Usually on Christmas Eve Orthodox Christians will fast until late evening, when the first star appears they can begin the Christmas supper.
- On Christmas day people partake in Divine Liturgy (a form of public worship) then walk to seas, lakes and rivers to gather for outdoor ceremonies like blessing the water.
- A great feast is also held indoors.

Bolivia

The Bolivian Christmas last from Christmas Eve to the sixth of January, also known as “epiphany”

On Christmas Eve the catholic population of Bolivia attend something called “Misa de Gallo” which means “Mass of the Rooster” they go there with fire crackers and set them off a midnight.

Christmas dinners are normally eaten after “Misa de Gallo” and consist of a dish known as “picana” which is a beef, lamb, chicken and pork that is made into a stew and can also be served with “lechón,” a type of pork, tropical fruits and vegetables.

Sometimes they might give each other gifts after dinner, however gift giving is not very widely done.

Finland

Although Christmas is a very important day of the year, Christmas eve is classed as just as important for families as on Christmas eve, Santa or Joulupukki as he is known in Finland visits the house and asks if there are any children there and if they reply with yes he then asks if they have been good all year. When the children receive their presents they then open them and go to bed instead of waiting until the morning.

In Finland, Christmas is a sacred Christian holiday for not only the living but the dead too. On Christmas the tradition is to go to the cemetery to visit dead friends and relatives, many lanterns and candles are placed around the grave yard which makes the grave yard light up like a winter wonderland. Christmas isn't only for people of the past and present though, as animals receive their own Christmas, farmers usually hang wheat or hay up in trees for animals to find and eat. People also hang up nuts and fruit in trees for birds and other animals as a Christmas present to them.

For a traditional Christmas dinner in Finland salt fish known as Lutefisk for starters, then for the main a leg of pork with mashed swede or casseroles are the most popular choice for mains although turkey is still eaten as well.

France

- -Christmas in French is Noël
- -Many households in France have a nativity crib as decoration.
- -Merry Christmas is Joyeux Noël.
- -Fireplaces are lit with yule logs, which are made out of cherry wood. It is brought in on Christmas Eve and is sprinkled with red wine to give it a nice scent.

- -The log and candles are left burning all night with food and drink left out in case Mary and baby Jesus come through.
- -Santa Claus is known as Pere Noel. In eastern France he is also accompanied by a man dressed in black known as Le Pere Fouettard.
- -The main Christmas meal is known as Reveillon, and it is eaten in the morning after the midnight church service.
- -Along with Pere Noel, another character who is known around France as the Pere fouettard also known as father whipper/spanker, who comes around, spanking naughty children at Christmas.

Israel

Israel is a Jewish state and the large majority of people do not celebrate Christmas. The Jewish population celebrate Hanukkah instead.

There are some small Christian communities who celebrate Christmas especially in Bethlehem and Nazareth. Many people travel to Israel to celebrate this important event in the Christian religion. There are many shops which cater for tourists with Christmas decorations and gifts.

. The Church of the Nativity is also decorated with flags and decorations every Christmas.

The Church of the Nativity is believed to be built on the birth site, there are Steep stairs which lead to a grotto where people can go to find a silver star marking the site of the birthplace of Jesus.

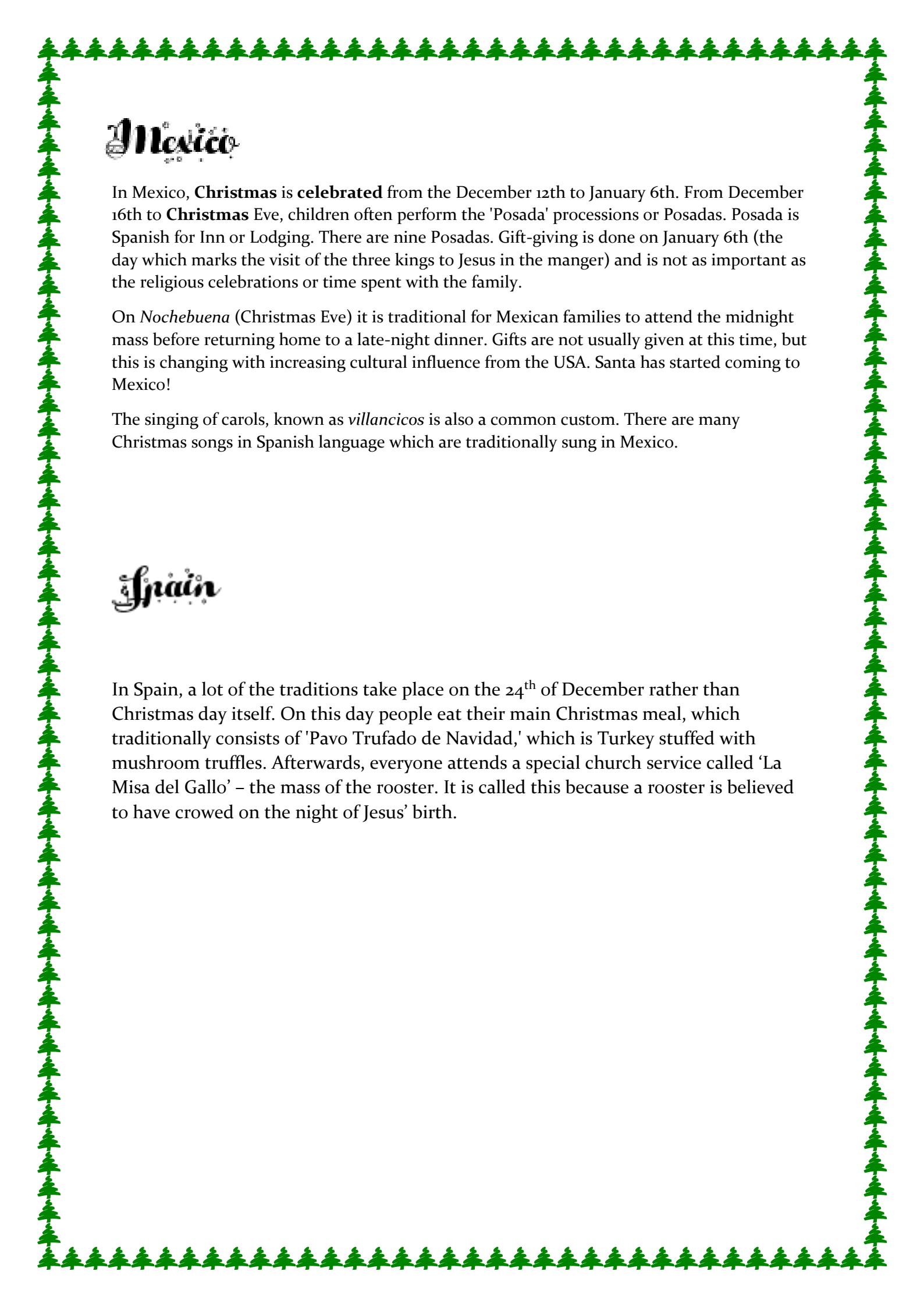
There are huge firework displays in Bethlehem during this time period.

"Mo'adim Lesimkha!" – This means "Merry Christmas" in Israeli.

Santa Claus is the same as the majority of Israelis are Jewish and there is no Santa Claus associated with the Jewish tradition

For dinner Israeli people eat turkey with spiced pepper, nutmeg, and cinnamon and is stuffed with rice and almonds.

In Israel due to the Jewish majority on the 25th of December there is no evidence of it being Christmas as it is like a normal day in Israel.



Mexico

In Mexico, **Christmas** is **celebrated** from the December 12th to January 6th. From December 16th to **Christmas** Eve, children often perform the 'Posada' processions or Posadas. Posada is Spanish for Inn or Lodging. There are nine Posadas. Gift-giving is done on January 6th (the day which marks the visit of the three kings to Jesus in the manger) and is not as important as the religious celebrations or time spent with the family.

On *Nochebuena* (Christmas Eve) it is traditional for Mexican families to attend the midnight mass before returning home to a late-night dinner. Gifts are not usually given at this time, but this is changing with increasing cultural influence from the USA. Santa has started coming to Mexico!

The singing of carols, known as *villancicos* is also a common custom. There are many Christmas songs in Spanish language which are traditionally sung in Mexico.

Spain

In Spain, a lot of the traditions take place on the 24th of December rather than Christmas day itself. On this day people eat their main Christmas meal, which traditionally consists of 'Pavo Trufado de Navidad,' which is Turkey stuffed with mushroom truffles. Afterwards, everyone attends a special church service called 'La Misa del Gallo' – the mass of the rooster. It is called this because a rooster is believed to have crowed on the night of Jesus' birth.

Parody Poems

'Twas the night before Christmas

- Clement Clarke Moore

'Twas the night before Christmas. And all through the house

Nothing was stirring. Not even a mouse

Apart from the kids. Awake they still lay

Unable to contain excitement for the day

Up they got. When the clock struck twelve

All dressed up. Like little elves

Out of their rooms, and down the stairs they crept.

Being careful as they past where the others slept.

They opened the door to the Living room quietly

Rushing into the room excitedly

Yet dropped their faces did, followed by a blank stare.

It seemed that the room sadly lay bare.

Slouching, looking down, defeated.

Until slowly to their rooms they retreated.

Yet as they were on the cusp of sleep.

They heard a noise, a quiet peep.

As they shot up, to listen, to their surprise

Outside the window. They couldn't believe their eyes.

Several Reindeers, a brightly coloured sleigh.

They couldn't believe it. There was truly no way.

Was it him? Was he here? Is it really Saint Nick?

They all ran downstairs, being extremely quick.

They made it down and opened the door.

They could not believe what laid before.

A sea of gifts, some big, some small.
Stockings lined all along the wall.
But most amazingly a Jolly old man very tall.
With his red coat his beard and all.
“Merry Christmas to you, and I’ll see you next year”
All that he said before he disappeared
Up the Chimney, onto the roof.
The Last thing heard, a hearty laugh, the bells and Reindeer hoofs.

Dean Tetlow

T’was the night before Christmas
And for miles around
All the children were sleeping
Not making a sound

All of them dreaming
of Christmas cheer
Filled with jolly St. Nick
And his eight reindeer

But one laid awake
Full of sadness and dread
That he couldn’t go to sleep
But lay with eyes open instead

When somewhere below
He heard a crash and a clang
And he leapt out of bed
And fell with a bang

He crept to his door
And it opened with a squeak
He padded across the floorboards
That under his weight did creak

As silent as a mouse
He slipped down the stairs
Wondering who that could be
Down there

He reached the bottom
And to his surprise
A large man in red stood there

He pulled out a box
And turned back around
And put it under the tree
Placed carefully on the ground

He walked to the chimney
And clambered inside
And faced the boy again
With his eyes very wide

St Nick raised a finger
And tapped on his nose
The boys stood there dumbfounded
As up the chimney St Nick rose

He ran back upstairs
And into his room
And saw light outside
And morning would come soon

But off in the distance
A voice jolly and bright
Called ‘Merry Christmas to all
And to all a good night’

Kieren Davidson

With a twinkle in his eyes

It wis like actual Christmas Eve an there wisnae nuttin goin about, actual. Av got a stockin hung at ma chimney, its gid like, gonnae git some lynx or suhin. A ken Santa's no real, but a like te pretend.

Ma wee sister wis snoring er heed aff, a couldnae actual sleep. Then there wis a lood bang ootside and a wis like wits that? Could it actual be Santa?

So a went doonstair tae check wit wis goin on, a looked outside and a swore I coulda seen some reindeers, like actual flyin ones.

If a squinted ma eyes I could make oot a man in a sledge tae, then a blinked and it wis gone, guttin like. Then a hear another loud noise comin fae the kitchen, whats actual goin on like?

A peek roond tae see, av got a feelin that this is actual gonnae be santa fir real, am buzzin like, but then a see its just ma da, comin in drunk and im actual gutted. A ask him "wit ye dayin" and hes like "nuttin"

So am pretty annoyed that santa didnae come tae ma hoose, maybe I was bad or suhin, anyway have a gid Christmas a guess, a willny. Night!

by Michael Nolan

It was the night before finals

And all through the house,

One creature was stirring,

Clicking their mouse.

All of the wrappers and cans

On the floor without care

In the hopes granny

Wouldn't be there.

Then what to my

Bag ridden eyes should appear

But my old maths teacher

And I quivered with fear

I knew in a moment I'd soon was a goner

And thought "Oh dear..."]

As I ran far from her.

With my lack of exercise and my general exhaustion

I realised just then I'd run out of fortune,

She leapt and bound to my panting state

And I knew in that moment I would meet my fate

With a click of her fingers

The past paper came as I screamed aloud

"Oh come on, this is just lame!"

I'd worked really hard all year I swear

But the work load I had was too much too bear.

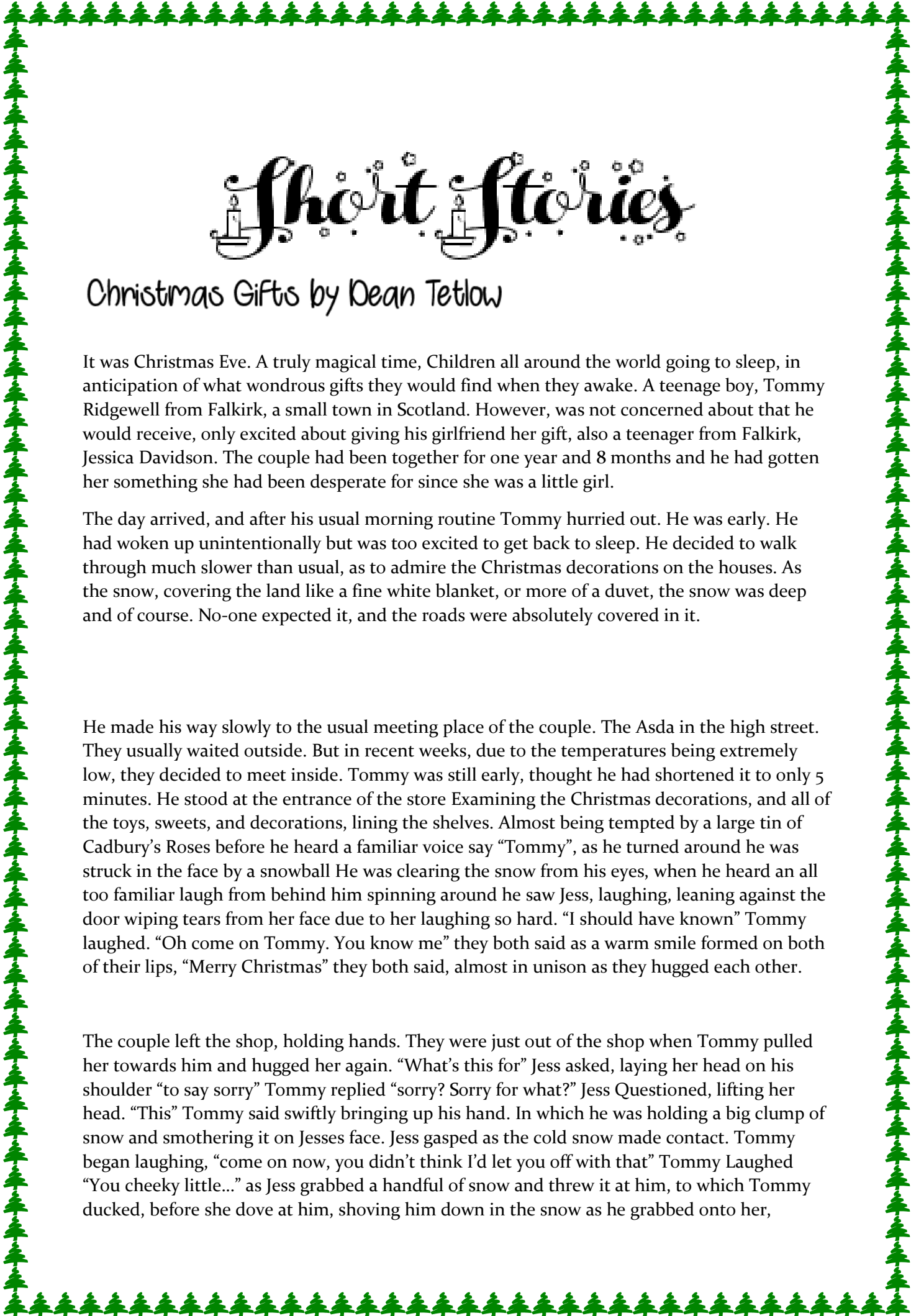
With a grunt and a groan

And a twist and a sigh.

I sat up in bed and rubbed my eye,

"Oh what an awful dream, Oh me, Oh my!"

by Sophie Day



Short Stories

Christmas Gifts by Dean Tetlow

It was Christmas Eve. A truly magical time, Children all around the world going to sleep, in anticipation of what wondrous gifts they would find when they awake. A teenage boy, Tommy Ridgewell from Falkirk, a small town in Scotland. However, was not concerned about that he would receive, only excited about giving his girlfriend her gift, also a teenager from Falkirk, Jessica Davidson. The couple had been together for one year and 8 months and he had gotten her something she had been desperate for since she was a little girl.

The day arrived, and after his usual morning routine Tommy hurried out. He was early. He had woken up unintentionally but was too excited to get back to sleep. He decided to walk through much slower than usual, as to admire the Christmas decorations on the houses. As the snow, covering the land like a fine white blanket, or more of a duvet, the snow was deep and of course. No-one expected it, and the roads were absolutely covered in it.

He made his way slowly to the usual meeting place of the couple. The Asda in the high street. They usually waited outside. But in recent weeks, due to the temperatures being extremely low, they decided to meet inside. Tommy was still early, thought he had shortened it to only 5 minutes. He stood at the entrance of the store Examining the Christmas decorations, and all of the toys, sweets, and decorations, lining the shelves. Almost being tempted by a large tin of Cadbury's Roses before he heard a familiar voice say "Tommy", as he turned around he was struck in the face by a snowball He was clearing the snow from his eyes, when he heard an all too familiar laugh from behind him spinning around he saw Jess, laughing, leaning against the door wiping tears from her face due to her laughing so hard. "I should have known" Tommy laughed. "Oh come on Tommy. You know me" they both said as a warm smile formed on both of their lips, "Merry Christmas" they both said, almost in unison as they hugged each other.

The couple left the shop, holding hands. They were just out of the shop when Tommy pulled her towards him and hugged her again. "What's this for" Jess asked, laying her head on his shoulder "to say sorry" Tommy replied "sorry? Sorry for what?" Jess Questioned, lifting her head. "This" Tommy said swiftly bringing up his hand. In which he was holding a big clump of snow and smothering it on Jesses face. Jess gasped as the cold snow made contact. Tommy began laughing, "come on now, you didn't think I'd let you off with that" Tommy Laughed "You cheeky little..." as Jess grabbed a handful of snow and threw it at him, to which Tommy ducked, before she dove at him, shoving him down in the snow as he grabbed onto her,

dragging her down with him, “even?” Jess said standing back up and brushing off the snow “Yeah, Even” Tommy replied, “now come on, we better get going” he said, offering her his hand “True, yeah, let’s go” she said, taking it. They made their way to Tommy’s house with Tommy stopping them both every so often to show Jessica a particularly well decorated house.

The pair arrived at their destination. They walked in the front door, took off their shoes, and headed into the house, “Merry Christmas Jess” a voice rang out from the kitchen Tommy’s mum. Susan, Lovely woman, Tommy led Jess up the stairs and the pair went into his room. They sat down on the bed, facing each other, they both excitedly unveiled their gifts for each other, swapping and then swiftly tearing into the wrapping paper Jess was first to get into it, her face lit up, tickets to Vid-con she had been desperate to go for so long, and she was finally going to go on April 16th. But then her face dropped, as a sudden realisation hit her, Tommy was looking at her, with a similar expression on his face. They looked at each other, and burst out laughing. “Only we could pull this off” Tommy said, still laughing, “I know right, I mean come on” Jess laughed the pair calmed down Jess Sighed “well, what should we do” “we can decide later, for now, let’s enjoy today” Tommy said smiling at her “I agree” Jess replied, Hugging him

The gifts the couple had gotten was perfect, apart from the fact that both conventions were on the same day. This meant that they now had to choose what one they went to. But they were both very grateful, grateful for each other and grateful that they were able to see each other. They did not care for what gifts they would receive, only for what they were giving. That truly is what Christmas is about.

Story by Toby Wainwright

On the nippy morning of Christmas Eve in Falkirk. Marcus and Maggie Smith were still unsure what to get each other for Christmas, time was running out. Marcus and Maggie have been married for over thirty years and every year since their marriage they both gotten each other Christmas presents that were so thoughtful that they never know what to say to each other when they receive them. But this year was different, this year neither of them knew what to get for each other. They’ve been to every high street shop you could think of and still nothing. They have never had to ask each other what they want because they somehow always know what to get, but Marcus and Maggie were forced to do something neither of them had ever done before. “Marcus Dear, what would you like for Christmas?” said Maggie with a nervous tone. “I don’t know. What would you like for Christmas?” said Marcus with the same nervous tone as his wife. Maggie stopped for a minute to think, however she replied with, “I don’t know either.” But for now they both just shrugged it off and went to work. Marcus worked as an architect while Maggie worked as High School teacher. Marcus asked one of his workmates for some advice. “What do you think I should get the missus for Christmas?” His workmate replied with “I don’t, if you’ve ran out of ideas then get her something you wouldn’t normally get her and see what she thinks.” Marcus thought that was a brilliant idea. Maggie also asked for help at her work.

“What do you think I should get Marcus for Christmas?” she asked one of the other teachers. “Why don’t you think outside the box Maggie, get him something you wouldn’t normally get him.” Maggie was out of options so she decided to take her workmates advice, and their next break Marcus and Maggie both went shopping for a Christmas present. Marcus visited almost every jewellery shop in Falkirk and he still couldn’t find something that Maggie would like, he searched frantically all over town until something caught his eye and there it was. The shiniest wrist watch you could imagine. Without hesitation he grabbed the watch before anyone else could. “That will be two thousand pounds please.” He didn’t care how much money it was he bought it any way. However when he was on his way home he started to take liking to it, so much so that it was actually upsetting him because he knew he had to give it away. It’s Christmas day and Marcus and Maggie were anxiously exchanging their gifts, Marcus revealed his present first. Marcus took one look at the fur coat and immediately didn’t like it. He thought it looked more like a present she would like, in fact he’d remembered she had bought her a coat just like that about 17 years ago. “Thanks, I guess.” he said with I confused look on her face. Marcus then revealed his present. “Just what I always wanted” she said. Marcus decided he had to confess, “I’m sorry dear but I really like this, I just don’t think I could give it away.” said Marcus. “Oh thank goodness, I love this fur coat.” Said Maggie in relief. “Wait a minute then why did you say this what you had always wanted?” said Marcus. “I just lied to make you feel better, I hate that watch, but I’m sure you’ll love it.” And so they both decided keep the presents they bought for each other and enjoy the rest of Christmas. They might not have celebrated Christmas there traditional way, but they celebrated it none the less, Christmas isn’t just about giving each other gifts it’s also about spending time with your family and that’s what’s important

Story by Euan Lemetti

It was a cold day as the snowflakes came down I remember that it was around six o’clock when the sun started to go down. Kids started to leave their snowmen’s, snow angels to go home for tea and all that was left was me sitting in the snow making snowmen. Has the hours go by until I hear the ring from the great bell tower nearby telling everyone that it was eight o’clock. I stood up and started to walk towards the tower it wasn’t that far I thought to myself. Each step I took you could hear the crunch of the snow. When I made to the tower I looked around and saw the shops starting close as the mum and dads take their toys down the street and get into their cars. As the cars pulled away you could hear Christmas carollers carolling and crunches from peopling eating ginger bread men and slurps from the people drinking hot chocolate I started to head toward the Carollers handing out cookies I asked for one. One of them bent down and went “hear you go, now head home it’s late mum will be worrying about you” ok I muttered while stuffing my face with the cookie. I started to walk down the street whistling jingle bells looking at all the Christmas trees at people’s windows some blinking lights and some without. as I go to my front the door to try and open it opened and hear

“there you are I was worried sick were where you, you almost missed your dinner as I sat waiting for tea I thought to myself I should of asked for another cookie that one was incredible. I ate my dinner and went upstairs to bed to go to sleep to try and catch Santa in the morning.

The Greater Gift by Michael Nolan

It is Christmas Eve. In a small apartment in New York. Thomas is helping his wife Ella put the presents under the tree. They had been hiding them from little ben, who would've loved nothing more than to tear them open before Christmas. “Do you think he will like it?” Thomas asked, breaking the silence. “He's going to love it” Ella replies, putting her arms around him.

-It is now Christmas morning. Thomas and Ella are up and getting ready, they hurry to make everything look lovely and magical. Suddenly, the phone starts to ring. Neither of them move for a few seconds, they look let down, as if they know already who is calling. Thomas picks up the phone. “Hello, yes that's me...But the doctor said he could come home for Christmas. Oh, right, I see.” After a brief talk with the hospital, Thomas looks at his wife, who already knows what he is about to say. “They won't let him come home.” “That's unbelievable, they said he could come home for Christmas” Ella replies, with many tears leaving her eyes. Thomas goes over to comfort his wife, but at the same time he forms a plan. “Well if he can't come home for Christmas, then we'll just come to him.” A smile returns to her face “Will they let us in.?” “It's Christmas, I'm sure they'll make an exception.”

Thomas and Ella hurry to pack the presents in the car. They reach the hospital, clutching the gifts. Being as quick as they can, the husband and wife make their way to little bens ward. Suddenly, they are halted by the doctor. “Excuse me, where are you going? Thomas faces the doctor. “We are here to see our son, on Christmas day, to watch him open up his presents and be happy. “Well I'm afraid you can't” Ella, standing beside her husband asks the doctor. “Why shouldn't we be allowed? He can't come home, so we came to him, he will want to open his gifts.” The doctor smiles. “Well I'm afraid you really can't, he's not here, and he's in the middle of an operation. “We were not informed of this!” “Yes well it was decided this morning that ben would be receiving this operation, to fix the valve that wasn't working right, with the proper equipment and the staff present, we didn't want to waste any time. I assure you he will be just fine, maybe he can come home after that, for good.” Thomas and Ella take time talking to the doctor, while Little Ben is having his operation, not too long after, he was able to come home, just as the doctor said. Thomas and Ella may have wanted nothing more than to watch their son open his presents on Christmas day, but instead they were gifted something greater, their son, and back home healthy and happy.

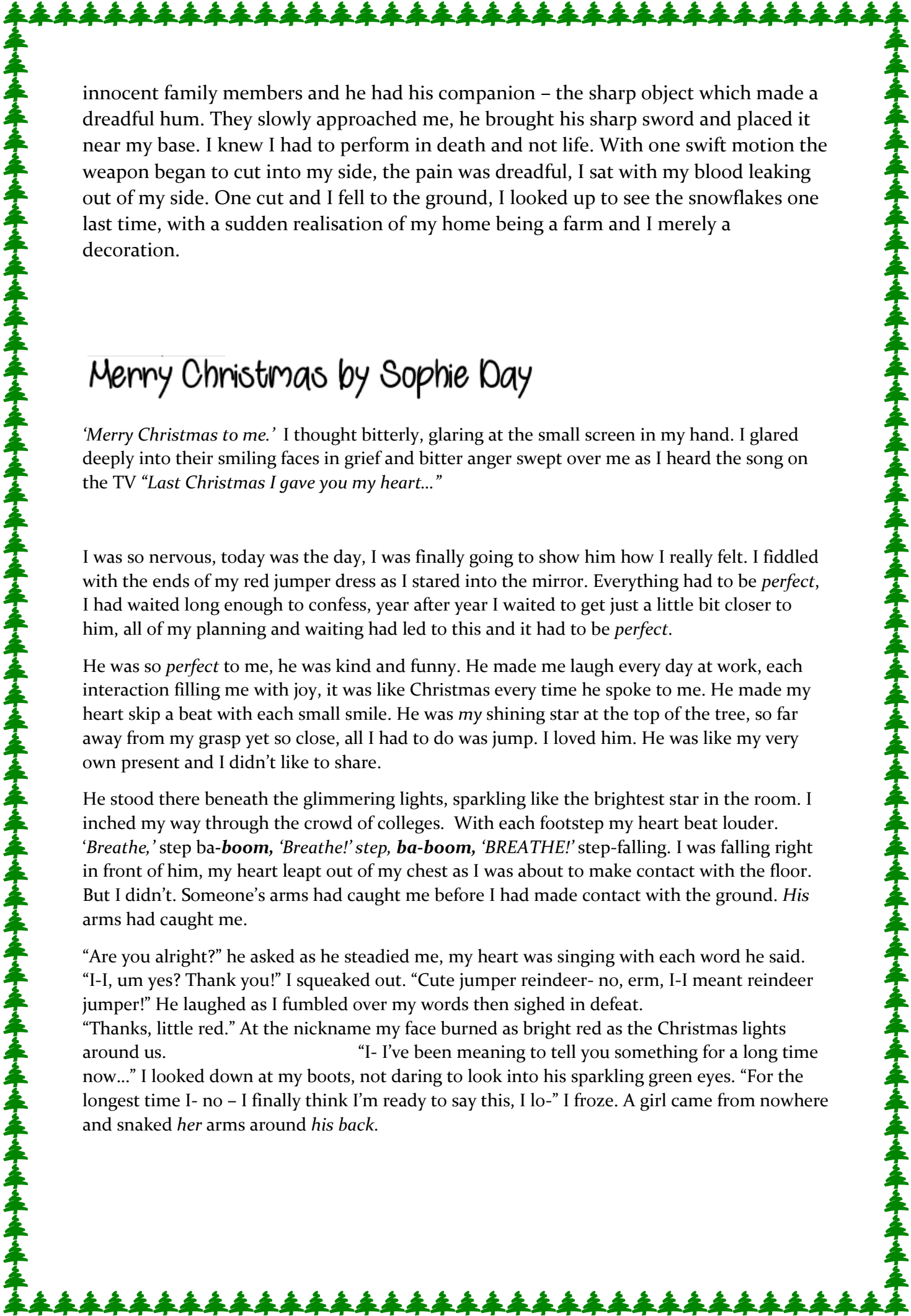


Story by Rohan Turnbull

The snow was swiftly hitting me and my sibling's heads. I always stood entranced and in awe when watching a group of snowflakes. They danced through the air, it was always so fast – perhaps because they wished to perform on their inevitable, final descent in the air which was over in one single heartbeat. I always thought how it must have loomed over them, however, they died for a cause: their performance. I cannot understand how people disregard and stand ignorant to the true beauty of these snowflakes. I have seen the reactions people have to them – sighing at the sign of commencing snow, rushing off and hobbling on the ice to their car while covering their heads, not looking up in any instance. I do spend a lot of time just watching; there is not much more that I can do. When I want to talk and discuss daily events with my siblings, and they don't as they're a silent bunch and do not wish to talk to me the majority of the time, I watch. Watch conversations, watch people interactions and watch nature. I often feel low; as if my family are so different from me.

Christmas is coming soon, I dread it; all of my family do. You see, we don't get to perform in life – unlike the snowflakes, we perform not in life, but in death. That is just how things must be, at least that's what I can say from my past observations.

I've got accustomed to being alone – I have had to, there is so much loss in our family that I have grown numb to the feeling of a new sibling getting shipped off in horrific ways. We are still a huge family, although now it is simply me and my siblings now. Like many before, my parents were once taken away – a long time ago now. What's strange about these incidents is my parents, and brothers alike do not seem scared, anxious or in any way distraught; it's as if they feel a sense of obligation in death. All the members of my family have been taken away once they reach a certain height – a height which I have now reached. I fear it won't be too long until I am shipped off on the shipment of life. I have noticed that people have begun to size me up, I am not stupid, and they walk by me confiding in each other whether I was the "One." To my great peace of mind, the replies have generously been "No." I on-look people taking part in their daily walk by – the time is near, I sense it is that ghastly time, for the red, white and green decorations droop over my very soul, it is nearly time for my untimely execution. At my grand age, I am expected to "perform" for a family who pay for my life away. I spectate a couple with two children who walk my way, it seems as if they are instantly magnetised to me – the children running and pointing at me. At this moment, I hope so deeply that they will not turn to each and confide; they begin to walk away, for one single moment relief flushes over me. I shouldn't be relieved, they walk over to a man asking my price, he replied and the family gleefully looked at each other "We'll take it." This truly was the end, my previous feeling of relief now a sinking dread: I knew my fate, the same feeling I imagined the snowflakes had before their last metre off the ground. Surely not I think in my last final state of ignorance, they must have made a mistake. They hadn't. I wanted to run off and escape, but the fact was I was trapped, trapped to all the earth below me. That awful man who had stolen my



innocent family members and he had his companion – the sharp object which made a dreadful hum. They slowly approached me, he brought his sharp sword and placed it near my base. I knew I had to perform in death and not life. With one swift motion the weapon began to cut into my side, the pain was dreadful, I sat with my blood leaking out of my side. One cut and I fell to the ground, I looked up to see the snowflakes one last time, with a sudden realisation of my home being a farm and I merely a decoration.

Merry Christmas by Sophie Day

'Merry Christmas to me.' I thought bitterly, glaring at the small screen in my hand. I glared deeply into their smiling faces in grief and bitter anger swept over me as I heard the song on the TV *"Last Christmas I gave you my heart..."*

I was so nervous, today was the day, I was finally going to show him how I really felt. I fiddled with the ends of my red jumper dress as I stared into the mirror. Everything had to be *perfect*, I had waited long enough to confess, year after year I waited to get just a little bit closer to him, all of my planning and waiting had led to this and it had to be *perfect*.

He was so *perfect* to me, he was kind and funny. He made me laugh every day at work, each interaction filling me with joy, it was like Christmas every time he spoke to me. He made my heart skip a beat with each small smile. He was *my* shining star at the top of the tree, so far away from my grasp yet so close, all I had to do was jump. I loved him. He was like my very own present and I didn't like to share.

He stood there beneath the glimmering lights, sparkling like the brightest star in the room. I inched my way through the crowd of colleges. With each footstep my heart beat louder. *'Breathe,'* step ba-**boom**, *'Breathe!'* step, **ba-boom**, *'BREATHE!'* step-falling. I was falling right in front of him, my heart leapt out of my chest as I was about to make contact with the floor. But I didn't. Someone's arms had caught me before I had made contact with the ground. *His* arms had caught me.

"Are you alright?" he asked as he steadied me, my heart was singing with each word he said. "I-I, um yes? Thank you!" I squeaked out. "Cute jumper reindeer- no, erm, I-I meant reindeer jumper!" He laughed as I fumbled over my words then sighed in defeat.

"Thanks, little red." At the nickname my face burned as bright red as the Christmas lights around us. "I- I've been meaning to tell you something for a long time now..." I looked down at my boots, not daring to look into his sparkling green eyes. "For the longest time I- no – I finally think I'm ready to say this, I lo-" I froze. A girl came from nowhere and snaked *her* arms around *his* back.

'No'. It wasn't real, it couldn't be. 'No'. It wasn't fair. 'No'. It wasn't right. 'No'. It wasn't *perfect*. I snapped back into the moment grief and anger clouding my judgment as I let out words I regret to this day.

"I loathe you."

'I love you.'

"I hate everything about you,"

'I love everything about you'

"Please just get out of my life,"

'Please, never get out of my life.'

"You mean nothing to m-m-me."

'You mean everything to me.'

From that day on I despised Christmas and all it stood for, it was just a painful reminder that I wasn't brave enough to tell him I loved him, to show him I cared or that he meant everything to me. It was too little too late. He was gone and was with *her*. The one who gets to see his smile every day, laugh as he tells his terrible jokes, cry as he's there to listen. *She stole him from me, gave him the gift of love, making mine into an obsolete double that I couldn't possibly give now. He was gone and yet I couldn't blame her, she managed to do what I couldn't for years.*

I threw the phone to the wall, two beaming faces still shone brightly through the cracks as I broke down sobbing as the regret and bitter loneliness consumed me. *'Merry god damn Christmas to me...'*

Nice List by Jodie Gilbert

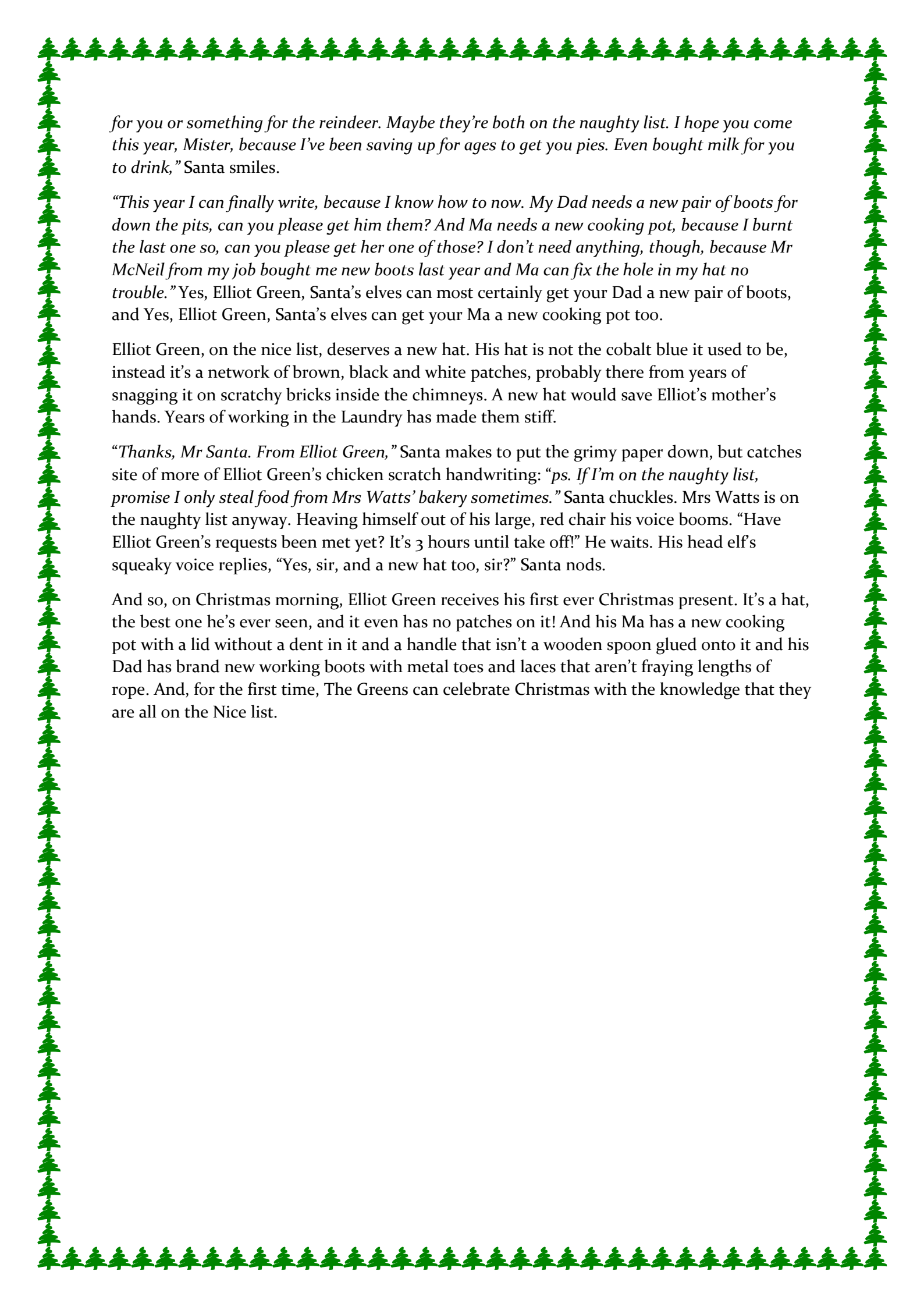
"Dear Mr. Santa,"

The paper is grimy, like it has been pulled from a bin,

"Hello! Name's Elliot Green, I'm 10 years old and I live in London. I know I'm sometimes not a good boy, but I hope I'm on the Nice list!"

Seeing the city's name ignites a spark in Santa's ancient memory. London, the industrial powerhouse, a bustling city. The boy must be poor, he envisaged, or the paper would be much cleaner. London must be terrifying for a poor little boy like Elliot Green, as he watches him climb out of a place that Santa knows only too well, covered in soot and sweat, all the while hollering "Merry Christmas, Mr Booth!" and "Happy Holidays, Mr McNeil!" Yes, Elliot Green is most certainly on the Nice list.

"Using my best writing just for you, Mr Santa. See, I ain't never had a Christmas present before. Ma says they're too expensive and Dad says you never visit 'cause we ain't ever left a mince pie



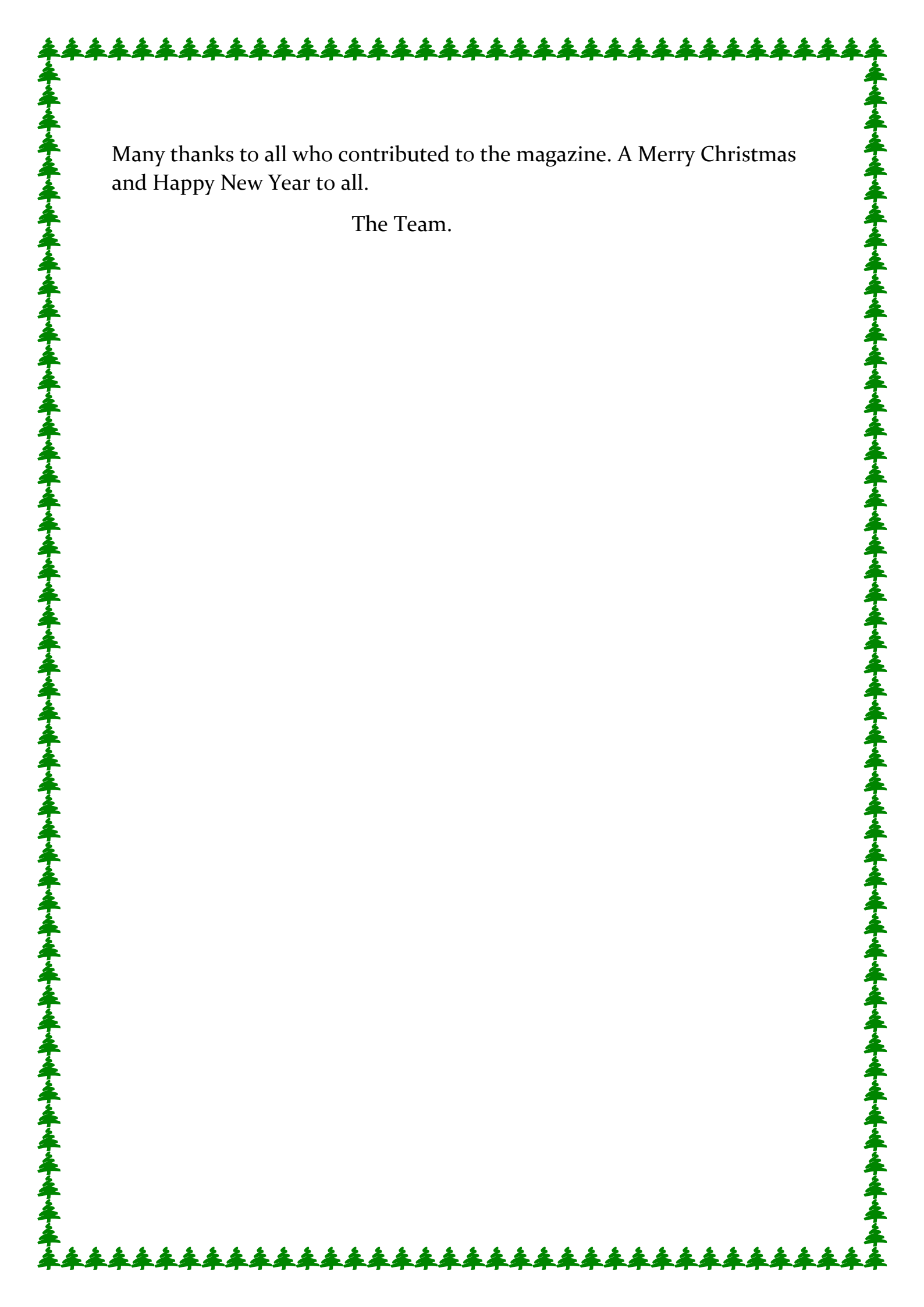
for you or something for the reindeer. Maybe they're both on the naughty list. I hope you come this year, Mister, because I've been saving up for ages to get you pies. Even bought milk for you to drink," Santa smiles.

"This year I can finally write, because I know how to now. My Dad needs a new pair of boots for down the pits, can you please get him them? And Ma needs a new cooking pot, because I burnt the last one so, can you please get her one of those? I don't need anything, though, because Mr McNeil from my job bought me new boots last year and Ma can fix the hole in my hat no trouble." Yes, Elliot Green, Santa's elves can most certainly get your Dad a new pair of boots, and Yes, Elliot Green, Santa's elves can get your Ma a new cooking pot too.

Elliot Green, on the nice list, deserves a new hat. His hat is not the cobalt blue it used to be, instead it's a network of brown, black and white patches, probably there from years of snagging it on scratchy bricks inside the chimneys. A new hat would save Elliot's mother's hands. Years of working in the Laundry has made them stiff.

"Thanks, Mr Santa. From Elliot Green," Santa makes to put the grimy paper down, but catches site of more of Elliot Green's chicken scratch handwriting: *"ps. If I'm on the naughty list, promise I only steal food from Mrs Watts' bakery sometimes."* Santa chuckles. Mrs Watts is on the naughty list anyway. Heaving himself out of his large, red chair his voice booms. "Have Elliot Green's requests been met yet? It's 3 hours until take off!" He waits. His head elf's squeaky voice replies, "Yes, sir, and a new hat too, sir?" Santa nods.

And so, on Christmas morning, Elliot Green receives his first ever Christmas present. It's a hat, the best one he's ever seen, and it even has no patches on it! And his Ma has a new cooking pot with a lid without a dent in it and a handle that isn't a wooden spoon glued onto it and his Dad has brand new working boots with metal toes and laces that aren't fraying lengths of rope. And, for the first time, The Greens can celebrate Christmas with the knowledge that they are all on the Nice list.



Many thanks to all who contributed to the magazine. A Merry Christmas
and Happy New Year to all.

The Team.