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CHRISTMAS STORY Teller



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Says StoryTeller,
(Funny fella),
"I don't want you to miss a thing.
I'll ring my bell, so you can tell
When one page ends–and the next begins!"

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DING DONG MERRILY ON HIGH!

Ding dong! Merrily on high
In heaven the bells are ringing.
Ding dong! Verily the sky
Is riven with angel singing.
(Ding dong! . . . Ding dong!)
Gloria, Hosanna in excelsis!

E'en so there below, below,
Let steeple bells be swungen.
And i-o, i-o, i-o,
By priest and people sungen.
(Ding dong! . . . Ding dong!)
Gloria, Hosanna in excelsis!

Pray you, dutifully prime
Your matin chime, ye ringers:
May you beautifully rhyme
Your evening song, ye singers.
(Ding dong! . . . Ding dong!)
Gloria, Hosanna in excelsis!

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Bertie's Escapade



It was eleven o'clock on a winter's night. The fields, the hedges and the trees were white with snow. From over Quarry Woods floated the sound of church bells, practising for Christmas. In the paddock the only black spot visible was Bertie's sty, and the only thing blacker than the sty was Bertie the pig, sitting in the front courtyard and yawning. In the windows of the big house the lights were out, and the countryside was sunk in slumber.

"This is very dull," yawned Bertie. "Why shouldn't I *do* something?"





Bertie was a pig of action. "Deeds not grunts" was his motto. Retreating as far back as he could, he took a sharp run, gave a mighty jump, and cleared the railings round his sty.

"The rabbits shall come too," he said. "Do them good." He went to the rabbit-hutch, and unfastened the door. "Peter! Benjie!" he called. "Wake up!"

"Whatever are you up to, Bertie?" said Peter sleepily.

"Hurry up!" said Bertie. "We're going carol singing. Bring Benjie, too!"

Peter hopped out at once, in great delight. But Benjie grumbled and burrowed down in his straw. So they hauled him out by his ears.

Cautiously they crept down the paddock, past the house, and out at the front gate. Down the hill they went, took the turning by the pillar-box, and arrived at the foot of Chalkpit Hill. Then Benjie came to a halt.

"Hang it all," he said. "I'm not going to slog all the way up that hill tonight for anyone!"



"Then I'll bite you," said Bertie. "Choose which you please."

"It's all right, Bertie," said Peter. "We're none of us going to slog up that hill. I know a much easier way. You just follow me."

He led them into the chalk-pit until they stood at the foot of a cliff.

Peter pulled out a large lump of chalk and disclosed the entrance to a long, dark, little tunnel. "Come on!" he said, and dived in; and the others followed.



They felt their way along the tunnel for a considerable time in darkness and silence, till at last they saw a glimmer of light. The tunnel ended suddenly in a neat little lift, lit up with electric light, with a seat running round three sides of it. A mole was standing by the door.

"Come along there, please, if you're going up!" called the mole sharply.

They hurried in and sat down. "Just in time!" said Peter.

"Any more for the lift?" cried the mole, looking down the tunnel. Then he stepped inside smartly, slammed the door, pulled the rope, and they shot upwards.

"Well, I never!" gasped Bertie. "Peter, you do know a thing or two!

"Where?...

"What?...

"How?..."



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The lift stopped with a jerk. The mole flung the door open, saying, "Pass out quickly, please!" and slammed it behind them. They found themselves standing on the fresh snow, under the open starlit sky.

They turned round to ask the mole where they were, but the lift had vanished. Where it had been, there was a square patch of grass free from snow, and in the middle of the patch was a buttony white mushroom.

"Why, we're in Spring Lane!" cried Bertie. "There's the well!"

"And here's Mr Stone's house, just in front of us!" cried Peter.

"Splendid!" said Bertie. "Now we'll go right up to the house, and sing our carols under the drawing-room windows. And soon Mr Stone will come out, and praise us, and pat our heads, and say we're clever animals, and ask us in. And that will mean supper in the dining-room, and champagne with it, and a good time for everyone."





They hurried up the drive, and planted themselves under the windows. Then Bertie said, "First we'll give them 'Good King Wenceslas'."

"But I can't sing!" said Benjie.

"Well, you must both do the best you can," said Bertie. "Try and follow me. I'll sing very slowly."

Peter followed him, as best he could, singing a note or two behind: and Benjie, who could not sing, imitated various musical instruments. He did his best, but he sounded terrible.

kennels, and LET — LOOSE — ALL — THE — DOGS."

"Dogs, oh my!" said Bertie.

"Dogs, ow, ow!" said Benjie.

They turned tail and ran for their lives. Peter had already started, some ten seconds previously: they saw him sprinting down the carriage-drive ahead of them. Bertie ran and ran, and Benjie ran and ran: while behind them, and coming nearer, they could hear plainly:

"Wow — Wow — Wow — Wow — Wow Wow!"

Peter was the first to reach the mushroom. He flung himself on it and pressed it; and click! the little lift was there! The door was flung open, and the mole, stepping out, said sharply: "Now then! Hurry up, please, if you're going down! Any more for the lift?"

Hurry up indeed! There was no need to say that. They flung themselves on the seat, breathless and exhausted. The mole slammed the door and pulled the rope, and they sank downwards.

Presently they heard Mrs Stone's voice saying, "What on earth is that horrible caterwauling?"

Then they heard Mr Stone replying, "It sounds like animals, horrid little animals, under the windows, squealing and grunting. I'll go out with a big stick, and drive them away."

"Stick! Oh my!" said Bertie.

"Stick! Ow, ow!" said Benjie.

Then they heard Mrs Stone again, saying, "Oh no, don't trouble to go out, dear. Go through the stable-yard to the



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Then the mole looked them over and grinned. "Had a pleasant evening?" he inquired.

Bertie would not answer, he was too sulky: but Peter replied sarcastically: "Oh yes, first-rate. My friend here's a popular carol singer. They make him welcome wherever he goes, and give him the best of everything."

"Now don't you start pulling my leg, Peter," said Bertie, "for I won't stand it. I've been a failure tonight, and I admit it: and I'll tell you what I will do to make up for it. You two come back to my sty, and I'll give you a first-rate supper, the best you ever had!"

"Oh yes, first-rate cabbage stalks," said Benjie. "We know your suppers!"

"Not at all," said Bertie earnestly. "On the contrary. There's a window in the big house that I can get in by, at any time. And I know where the owner keeps his keys. Put your trust in me, and you shall have cold chicken, pressed beef, jellies, trifle, *and* champagne — at least: perhaps more, but that's the least you'll have!"

Here the lift stopped with a jerk. "Tumble out, all of you," said the mole, flinging the door open. "And look sharp, for it's closing time, and I'm going home."



"No you're not, old man," said Bertie affectionately. "You're coming along to have supper with us."

The mole protested it was much too late: but in the end they persuaded him. When they got back to the big house, the rabbits took the mole off to wash his hands and brush his hair; while Bertie disappeared cautiously round a corner of the house. In about ten minutes he appeared at the pigsty, staggering under the weight of two large baskets. One of them contained all the eatables he had already mentioned, as well as apples, oranges, chocolates and ginger-beer.

The supper was laid in the inner pigsty. They were all very hungry, naturally: and when everything was ready they sat down, and stuffed themselves, and drank, and told stories, and all talked at once: and when they had stuffed enough, they proposed toasts, and drank healths: "The King," "Our host Bertie," "A Happy Christmas." Then there were speeches, and songs, and then more speeches, and more songs: and it was three o'clock in the morning before the mole slipped through the railings round the pigsty and made his way back to his own home.

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Next morning, when the farmer and his wife went to call on the rabbits, they found a disgraceful state of things. The hutch was in a most untidy mess, clothes flung about anyhow, and Peter and Benjie were sprawled on the floor, fast asleep and snoring frightfully. They tried to wake them, but the rabbits only murmured something about, "Jolly good fellows," and fell asleep again.

"Well, I never!" said the farmer's wife.

When the farmer went to take Bertie his dinner, you cannot imagine the state he found the pigsty in, and Bertie in the midst of it all, fast asleep.



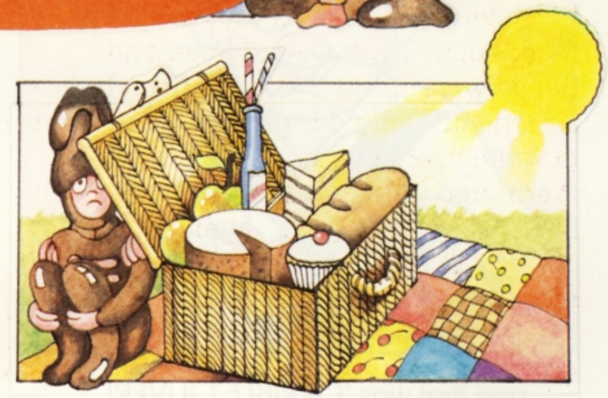
The farmer poked the pig with a stick, and said, "Dinner, Bertie!" But even then he did not wake. He only grunted something that sounded like, "God save King Wenceslas!"

"*Well!*" said the farmer. "Of all the animals!"

THE CHOCOLATE SOLDIER



Hector the chocolate soldier was very unlucky.



He lived in constant fear of melting. At picnics he could never sit in the sun.



He had to sit squashed under ladies' large hats —



or in the shade of trees.

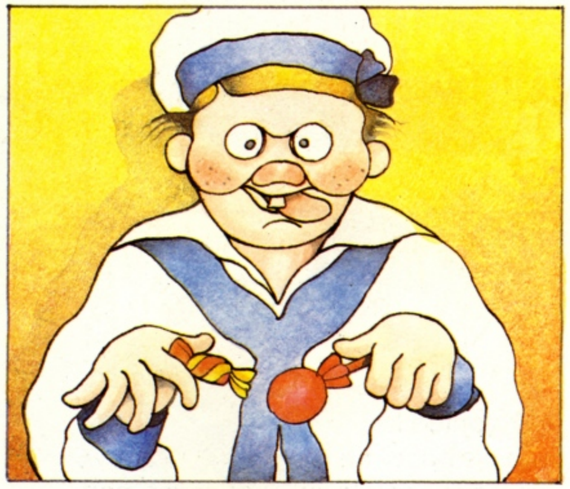


He could never join the other toys at Christmas as they sat around the fire.



The fear of melting away was bad enough, but there was an even greater danger . . .

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. . . and that was 'ORRIBLE OLIVER!
'Orrible Oliver was fat and lazy.



He loved eating all kinds of chocolate —
like chocolate eggs . . .



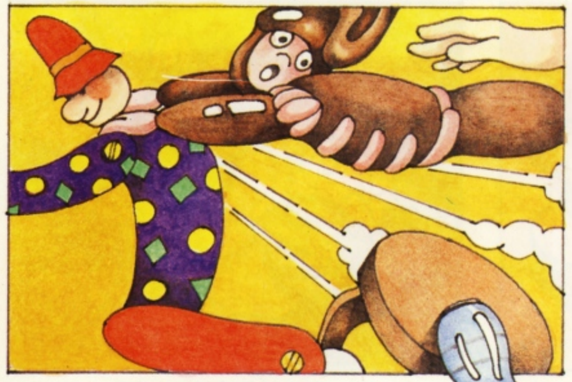
. . . and chocolate bunnies. But best of all,



he loved eating chocolate soldiers.



"I have to spend most of the day hiding
from 'Orrible Oliver," sighed Hector
to his friends, Edwina the Edwardian
doll and Pogo Woodenlegs.



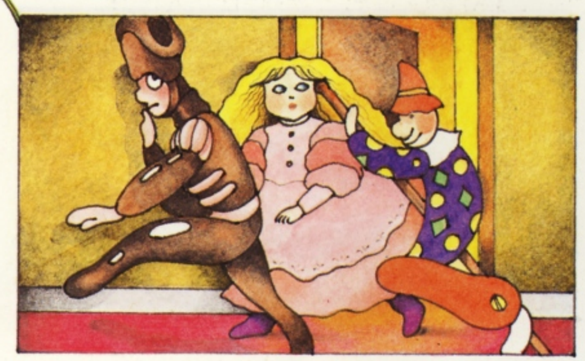
With the help of Edwina
and Pogo, Hector always
managed to escape.



He wanted to
join his battalion in the land of snow,
where chocolate soldiers never melt.



"I'm going tonight," he whispered to
Edwina and Pogo Woodenlegs. "I'm
going to escape tonight!"



His friends said they would go with him.
So, at midnight, they all crept past
'Orrible Oliver's door.



They slid down the bannister and
through the cat door, and were soon
well clear of the house.



Then Edwina, the cleverest of the three,
said, "We must find the sugar mice.
They know the way to the land of snow."

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They found the sugar mice on a stall in the fairground. "We're awfully fed up with being hoop-la prizes," they said.



"Can you help Hector find his battalion in the land of snow?" "Certainly! Climb on our backs!



"We'll fly you there — but watch out for the wicked snow giants!"



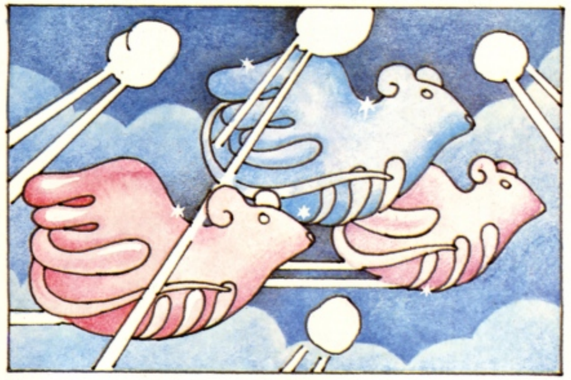
Suddenly a big snowball hit Hector and knocked him off his mouse's back.



"It's the snow giants!" More snowballs hit Edwina and Pogo Woodenlegs.



The friends lay in a crumpled heap. Slowly, the snow giants moved in . . .



But the sugar mice flew on, through volley after volley of snowballs, to fetch help.



"Halt! Who goes there?" "Quick! Quick! A chocolate soldier is in danger. So are Edwina and Pogo!"



"To the rescue! Sound the bugle!" The battalion moved out . . .

They arrived just in time, and when the snow giants saw them coming, they fled.



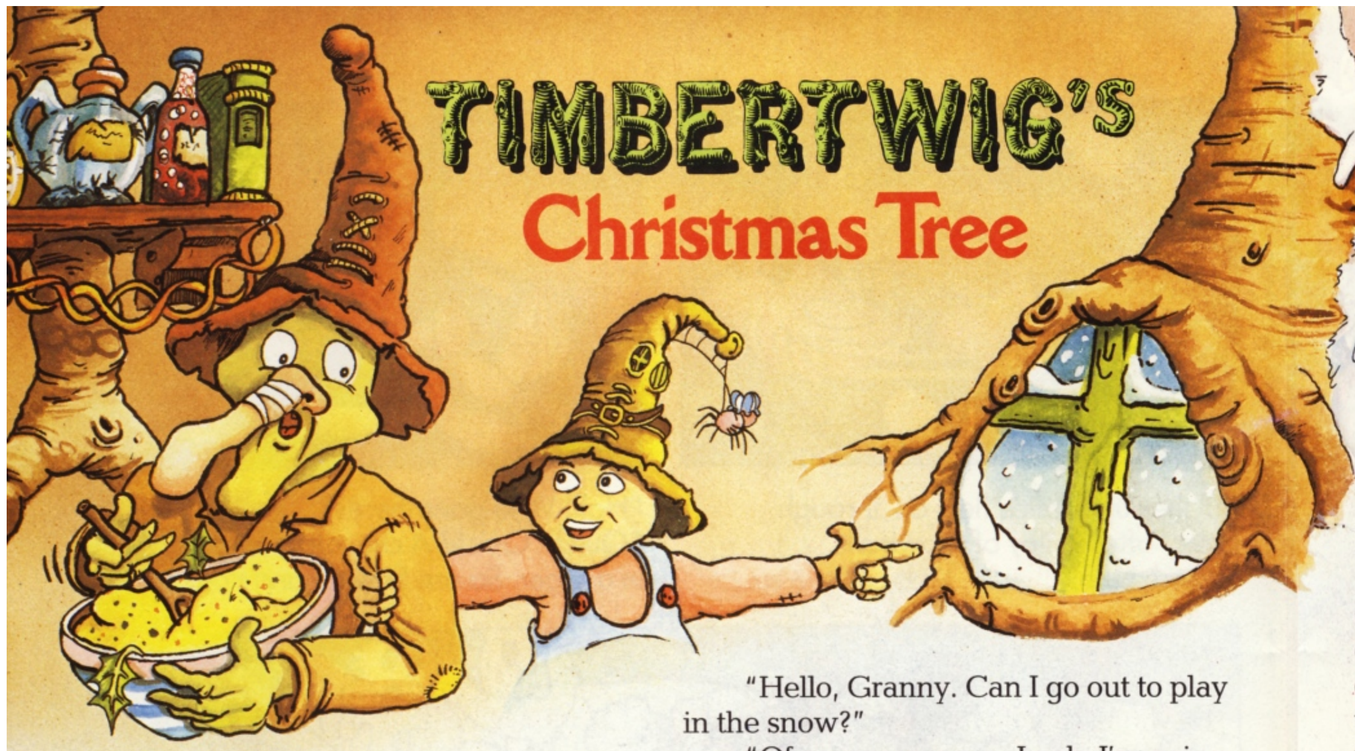
So Hector was back with his battalion in the land where soldiers never melt.



And when his friends said they would visit him, his happiness was complete.

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TIMBERTWIG'S Christmas Tree



Early one cold winter's morning Timbertwig woke up to find Wiggly Wood magically transformed by a blanket of sparkling white snow.

"Look Abigail!" he called as he picked up his hat. "It's been snowing!" Abigail the magic spider appeared at her little door wrapped in a rug and clutching a tiny hot water bottle.

"D-d-don't I know," she shivered, her eight knees knocking together. "Your hat's like a fridge."

Timbertwig ran downstairs to find Granny Knot mixing the Christmas pudding in a large bowl.

"Now let me see," she mumbled. "A drop of beetleroot, a sprinkling of worms, and . . . oh, hello Timbertwig."

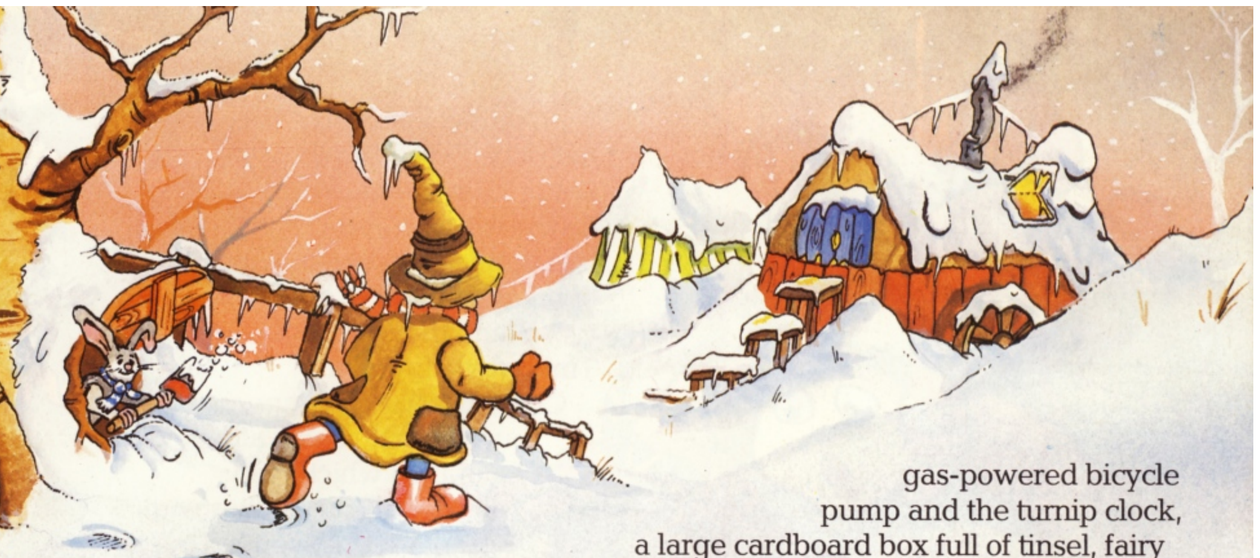


"Hello, Granny. Can I go out to play in the snow?"

"Of course you can. Look, I'm going out to find a nice Christmas tree for the front room. Why don't you pop over to see Mr Misfit and buy the decorations for it?"

Timbertwig didn't need to be asked twice. He grabbed his coat and scarf and ran excitedly through Wiggly Wood. He had a marvellous time scuffing through the snow, sliding down the hills and even stopping for a quick snowball fight with the Tickling Trees.





Eventually he reached Mr Misfit's Caravan of Surprises, settled in the corner of a snow-covered field. The rest of the travelling market had closed for the winter, but it was business as usual for Mr Misfit. Timbertwig entered the caravan and found him toasting muffins by his open stove.

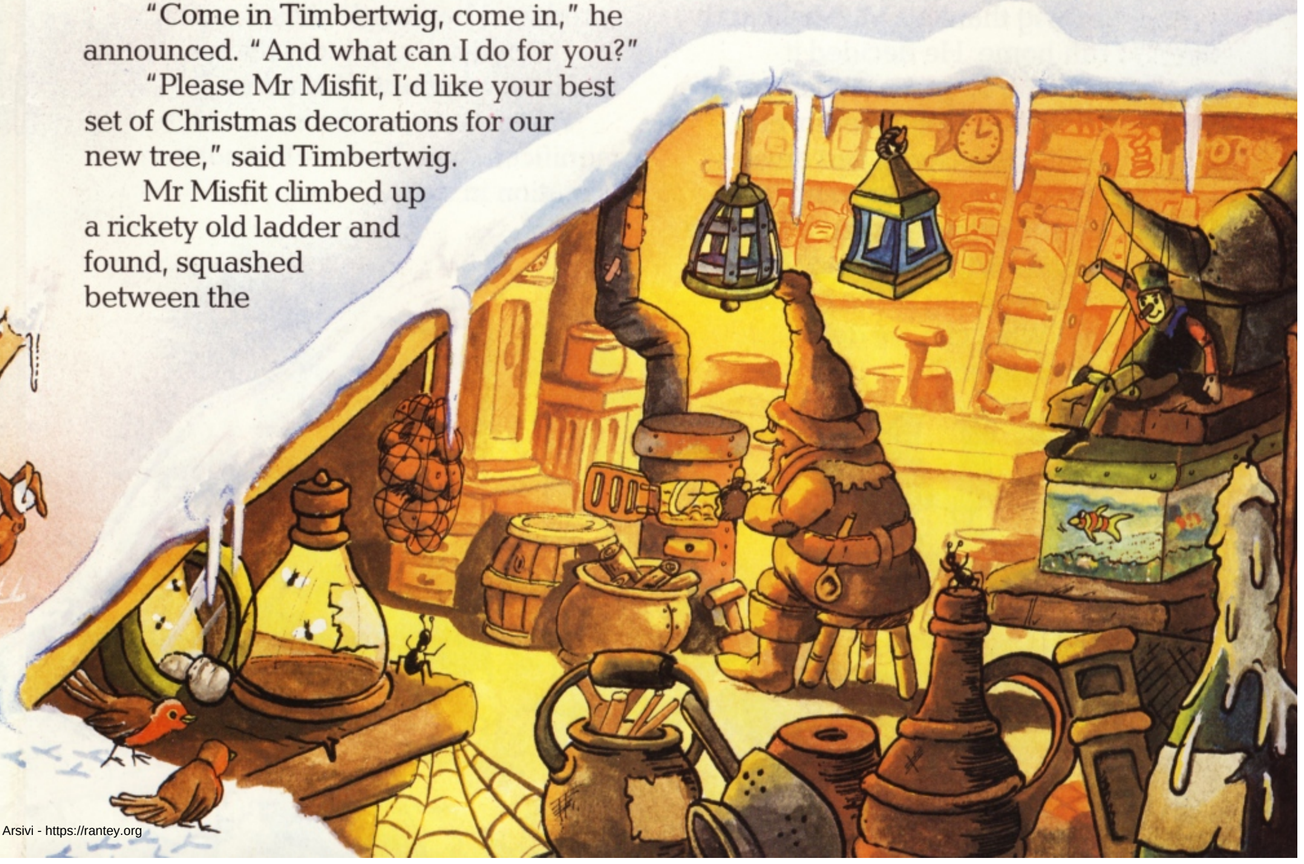
"Come in Timbertwig, come in," he announced. "And what can I do for you?"

"Please Mr Misfit, I'd like your best set of Christmas decorations for our new tree," said Timbertwig.

Mr Misfit climbed up a rickety old ladder and found, squashed between the gas-powered bicycle pump and the turnip clock, a large cardboard box full of tinsel, fairy lights and brightly coloured glass balls. Timbertwig's eyes lit up when he saw them all.

"Aah! How much do I owe you?"

"Och, no, they're a present from me to you," smiled Mr Misfit. "And you can give your wicked old Granny a wee Christmas kiss from me as well!"



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Abigail looked out from her door. "Well, we'd better hurry home. You do the running and I'll leaf through my book of magic spells."

When they got back, Timbertwig found the Christmas tree standing in a bucket, with a note attached to a branch which read:

"Dear Timbertwig,
I've just popped out to collect some firewood. I hope you can have the tree decorated by the time I get back.
Love Granny."

Timbertwig sank into a chair and sighed.

"Don't despair," announced Abigail. "I've just found the spell!" And she produced her magic stick.

"Wippity woppity zippity zee,
Let decorations fill the tree."

There was a terrific bang and a magnificent blue flash — but not a decoration in sight.

Timbertwig thanked Mr Misfit and began to run home. He decided it would be quicker to go via Bilberry Brook, as the water would be frozen. Unfortunately, Timbertwig had never tried running on ice, and as soon as his feet touched the slippery surface his legs slid two different ways, sending the box of decorations crashing to the ground.

"Oh, no! What can we do? Everything is broken!"



"Oh Timbertwig, I'm so sorry," said Abigail. "I thought just for once my spell would work out all right, especially as it's Christmas."

Just then Granny Knot came running into the kitchen, her face beaming. "Oh, what a marvellous surprise!" she cried, wiping an icicle from the end of her nose. "When I said decorate the tree, I didn't mean you to go to all this trouble."

Timbertwig was confused at first, but when he stepped outside he soon discovered what had happened. The whole of the tree house was covered, from top to roots, with sparkling decorations.

"Oh Abigail, it *did* work," he laughed, hugging the little spider. "It really did!"

Just then Mr Misfit appeared, carrying a large hamper. "Oh, what a splendid job you've done there, laddie," he said.

"Ooh! what's in the hamper?" asked Timbertwig as they entered the kitchen. "Och, it's just a wee Christmas dinner. I couldn't stand to eat it alone." And they all sat down to the best Christmas feast they had ever had.

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KING JOHN'S CHRISTMAS



King John was not a good man —
He had his little ways.
And sometimes no-one spoke to him
For days and days and days.
And men who came across him,
When walking in the town,
Gave him a supercilious stare,
Or passed with noses in the air —
And bad King John stood dumbly there,
Blushing beneath his crown.

King John was not a good man,
And no good friends had he.
He stayed in every afternoon . . .
But no-one came to tea.
And, round about December,
The cards upon his shelf
Which wished him lots of Christmas cheer,
And fortune in the coming year,
Were never from his near and dear.
But only from himself.

King John was not a good man,
Yet had his hopes and fears.
They'd given him no present now
For years and years and years.
But every year at Christmas,
While minstrels stood about,
Collecting tribute from the young
For all the songs they might have sung,
He stole away upstairs and hung
A hopeful stocking out.

King John was not a good man,
He lived his life aloof;
Alone he thought a message out
While climbing up the roof.
He wrote it down and propped it
Against the chimney stack:
"TO ALL AND SUNDRY — NEAR AND FAR —
F. CHRISTMAS IN PARTICULAR."
And signed it not "Johannes R."
But very humbly, "JACK."

"I want some crackers,
And I want some candy;
I think a box of chocolates
Would come in handy;
I don't mind oranges,
I do like nuts!
And I SHOULD like a pocket-knife
That *really* cuts.
And, oh! Father Christmas, if you love me at all,
Bring me a big, red india-rubber ball!"

King John was not a good man —
He wrote this message out,
And gat him to his room again,
Descending by the spout.
And all that night he lay there,
A prey to hopes and fears.
"I think that's him a-coming now,"
(Anxiety bedewed his brow.)
"He'll bring one present, anyhow —
The first I've had for years."

"Forget about the crackers,
And forget about the candy;
I'm sure a box of chocolates
Would *never* come in handy;
I don't *like* oranges,
I don't *want* nuts,
And I HAVE got a pocket-knife
That *almost* cuts.
But, oh! Father Christmas, if you love me at all,
Bring me a big, red india-rubber ball!"

King John was not a good man —
Next morning when the sun
Rose up to tell a waiting world
That Christmas had begun,
And people seized their stockings,
And opened them with glee,
And crackers, toys and games appeared,
And lips with sticky sweets were smeared,
King John said grimly: "As I feared,
Nothing again for me!"

"I did want crackers,
And I did want candy;
I know a box of chocolates
Would come in handy;
I do love oranges,
I did want nuts.
I haven't got a pocket-knife —
Not one that cuts.
And, oh! if Father Christmas had loved me at all,
He would have brought a big, red india-rubber ball!"

King John stood by the window,
And frowned to see below
The happy bands of boys and girls
All playing in the snow.
A while he stood there watching,
And envying them all . . .
When through the window big and red
There hurtled by his royal head,
And bounced and fell upon the bed,
An india-rubber ball!

AND OH, FATHER CHRISTMAS,
MY BLESSINGS ON YOU FALL
FOR BRINGING HIM
A BIG, RED,
INDIA-RUBBER
BALL!

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SNOW WHITE
and the seven dwarfs





A beautiful queen sat sewing by her window in the middle of winter, when the snowflakes were falling like feathers. She pricked her finger as she worked, and three red drops of blood fell on the black ebony wood of the window frame and on the white snow below.

"I wish for a daughter with skin as white as snow, lips as red as blood and hair as black as ebony," she sighed.

And so it happened. She had a little girl with skin as white as snow, with lips as red as blood and with hair as black as ebony. Her parents called her Snow White. But only a few days after her birth, her mother died.

Her father, the king, had truly loved his queen, but he needed a mother for Snow White, so he searched for a second wife.

He married a princess whose face was lovely as summer, but her heart was cold as ice and she worked dark magic. She was so vain she could not bear to think that anyone could be more beautiful than she was. When she came to the palace, the only thing she brought was a mirror in a golden frame. Each night, she whispered:

"Mirror, mirror, on the wall,
Who is the fairest one of all?"

And the mirror would answer:

"You, O Queen, are the fairest one by far!"

This made the new queen very happy, for she knew that the mirror could not lie. She preened herself in front of the glass and smiled in satisfaction.

But Snow White grew more and more beautiful every year until, one day, when she was seven, her wicked stepmother asked her usual question:

"Mirror, mirror, on the wall,
Who is the fairest one of all?"

This time the mirror replied:



"You, O Queen, are fair, and lovely too,
But Snow White is more fair than you!"

The queen was furious, and her lovely face turned ugly with rage. She called for her huntsman. "Take Snow White into the forest and kill her!" she screamed. "Cut out her heart and bring it to me as proof that you have done as I have ordered!"

Pale and trembling, the royal huntsman found Snow White playing in the garden, and grabbed her by the hand. Not once did he look at her. Not once did he speak.

Deep in the forest, he drew his dagger and held it to Snow White's heart. "Now you must die!"

But when she looked up at him, her red lips trembled and her black hair spilled around her shoulders.

"Let the wild beasts kill you," cried the huntsman. "I cannot!" And he ran off, leaving her alone in the forest.

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On his way back to the palace, he killed a small fallow deer and cut out its heart. When he gave it to the cruel queen, he told her it was Snow White's heart. She gave a wild laugh and threw it to her dogs. "So much for Snow White!" she cried.

Snow White wandered lonely through the forest, frightened at shadows and fearful of strange sounds. But when the trees and bushes saw how lovely and afraid she was, they turned aside their thorns, and the sharp stones refused to cut her feet.

At dusk, she found a tiny house among the trees. There was no answer to her knock, so she pushed the door and went in.

What a funny little place it was! Everything was very neat. There was a checked cloth spread on the table, with seven loaves, and seven plates, seven knives, forks, spoons and goblets of wine, all laid out ready for supper. By the wall, there were seven beds, all in a row.

"I'm very hungry," thought Snow White, and she took a small bite from each piece of bread and then a sip of wine from each goblet. Then she tried each bed in turn.

"This bed is too long," she said, " . . . and this one is too short." But when she reached the seventh bed, it was just right. Soon, she was fast asleep.

The seven dwarfs who lived in the cottage returned at nightfall. They had been digging for gold in the mountains and were tired after their long day's work. They lit their candles and looked around the room.

"Who's been sitting on my stool?" said the first dwarf.

"And touching my plate?"

"And eating my bread?"

"And licking my spoon?"

"And using my fork?"

"And moving my knife?"

"And drinking my wine?" said the seventh and last dwarf.

The first dwarf went over to the bed by the wall. "Someone has been lying in my bed," he cried.

"And mine! And mine!" said the others.

"There is someone still sleeping in my bed," said the seventh and last dwarf.

They crowded round the bed to look.

"Less noise!" said the first dwarf.

"Keep those lights down!" said the second.

"Be careful not to wake her!" said the third.

So the last dwarf slept the night with the others, an hour in each bed.



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Snow White was very frightened when she woke up next morning and saw the dwarfs, but they listened to her story and were delighted she had come to stay.

"You can cook, can't you?" asked the first dwarf.

"And wash? And clean, and knit and spin?" asked the others.

"Then of course you must live with us," they chorused. "But remember — don't let anyone into the house while we are away."

For months, the queen thought that Snow White was dead, and she did not ask the mirror her question again until late one evening, when the king was away.

"Mirror, mirror, on the wall,
Who is the fairest one of all?"

The mirror replied:

"You, O Queen, are fair, and lovely too,
But Snow White's still more fair than you."

The queen's face turned black with rage, and she screamed in fury as she demanded where Snow White could be found.

The mirror sighed heavily and told her.

Disguising herself as a pedlar, the wicked queen searched the forest until she found the cottage.

"Fine wares to sell!" she cried, as she knocked at the little door.

"Good morning," said Snow White. "Do you have some pretty things for me to buy?"

"I have laces, bobbins and ribbons of every colour of the rainbow," said the queen.

Snow White quite forgot the dwarfs' solemn warning as she let the visitor in.

"Gracious, child," the queen exclaimed. "How badly your bodice is laced! Let me do it," and she took a ribbon from her tray.

The pedlar threaded the ribbon, then pulled it tighter and tighter until the breath was squeezed out of Snow White's body and she fell down in a faint.



"So much for your beauty!" cackled the cruel queen. "Now you will die!"

"We're home!" called the dwarfs. But no-one answered. Snow White was as pale as death when they found her.

"Loosen her lace!" the dwarfs shouted in panic. When the first dwarf cut it, the life-giving air rushed into her lungs and Snow White quickly recovered.

"The queen will find out you're alive," they warned. "You mustn't let her in."

Of course, the queen soon found out that Snow White was not dead. Using all her magic powers, she prepared a very special apple. One side was green and safe to eat, the other side was red — and deadly poisonous.

"Apples!" she called, knocking at the cottage door. "Crisp, juicy apples!"

"Please go away," Snow White said, as she peeped through the window. "I'm not allowed to open the door to strangers."



"Wise girl," replied the queen as she took the poisoned apple from her basket and turned the green side to her lips to bite into it. "Here," she said. "Take the rest and enjoy it."

The apple did look extremely good. Snow White leaned out of the window and took the half which was red and juicy. She took one bite . . . and fell down dead.

"That's the end of you!" chortled the queen as she returned home in triumph.

At nightfall, the dwarfs came back from the mountain. "No!" cried the first dwarf, when he found Snow White.

"How empty our lives will be without her," they all said sorrowfully.

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The dwarfs could not bury her in the cold dark earth, so they made a coffin of glass so that they could still see her. Then they made a golden plaque and wrote on it:

"Here lies Snow White, the daughter of a king."

They set the coffin on a green hill and guarded it day and night. Birds came to sing there. And animals came to sit there. The squirrels came first, then the rabbits and last a young fallow deer.

Snow White lay in her coffin for many years, and never once did the dwarfs leave her alone. Slowly she grew into a young woman, more beautiful than she had ever been.

At last a prince rode past and saw the coffin and the words written on the golden plaque.

"I would like to take her away with me," he said, but the dwarfs would not part with her.

"Will you take money?" he asked.

"She was worth more to us than all the gold in the world," the dwarfs replied.

"Then for sheer pity, let me kiss her once!" begged the prince. "For if she were alive, I would have loved her more than life itself!"

The dwarfs talked among themselves. "All right, just one kiss," they said, and opened the glass coffin.





But as the prince's lips touched the lips of Snow White, a piece of apple fell from her mouth and she opened her eyes.

"Where am I?"

"Safe," said the prince. And when Snow White looked into his face she could hardly believe what she saw.

"Your eyes are the colour of the sea. Your hair is as golden as the sun!"

The prince was overjoyed as he lifted her from the coffin. "I love you more than all the world. Marry me, and come with me to my father's kingdom."

And so Snow White said goodbye to the seven dwarfs, who had loved her so much. She thanked them, and promised that she would visit them often. Then she went with the prince to his father's castle where a great feast was prepared for their wedding.

Meanwhile the wicked queen preened herself in front of the magic mirror.

"Mirror, mirror, on the wall,
Who is the fairest one of all?"

The mirror gave a triumphant laugh:

"Your loathsome face is black as night,
Compared to the beauty of Snow White!"

"Aaargh!" screamed the queen, and tore the mirror off the wall and dashed it against the window sill. It shattered into a thousand pieces. A sliver of glass, as sharp as an icicle, pierced the queen's wicked heart and she fell down dead among the glittering fragments.

So the wicked queen never lived to see Snow White at her loveliest — riding at her father's side to her wedding in the palace chapel where her handsome prince awaited her.

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Silent Night

Silent night, holy night,
All is calm, all is bright.
'Round yon virgin mother and child,
Holy infant so tender and mild,
Sleep in heavenly peace,
Sleep in heavenly peace.

Silent night, holy night,
Shepherds quake at the sight;
Glories stream from heaven afar,
Heavenly hosts sing Alleluia!
Christ the saviour is born!
Christ the saviour is born!

Silent night, holy night,
Son of God, love's pure light;
Radiance beams from thy holy face,
With the dawn of redeeming grace,
Jesus, Lord, at thy birth,
Jesus, Lord, at thy birth.



It was on Christmas Eve, of all the days of the year, that Rudolph found Santa crying.

"I'm sorry. It's silly of me," said Santa. "Pretend you didn't see." And he blew his nose with a giant handkerchief.

"Ah, you've been overdoing it," said Rudolph gently. "Next week you must put your feet up and have a good rest."

"Yes, yes. I expect that's it." Santa sniffed and tried to put on a brave smile. "Ho ho ho . . ." he tried to chuckle, but it soon slithered into a "boo hoo hoo" and he rested his head on his arms and cried. "Oh Rudolph! I know I am a silly, selfish old man, but if only I could see it just once . . . just *once!*"

"See what? What's the matter? You can tell me. See what?"

"*Christmas,* of course!" Santa shook his head and attempted another laugh. But it was no good. "Ho ho ho, boo hoo! All night long on Christmas Eve, creeping about on slippery roofs, being careful not to wake babies, always trying to remember what children have asked for. I suppose they like what I take them. I mean, they go on asking for things, year in, year out. I hear rumours that people enjoy Christmas. But how would I know? I come straight back here, have a large turkey sandwich with you and the other reindeer, and then fall into bed totally exhausted."

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Rudolph stood in front of Santa's fire thinking, and the snow on his thick coat dripped meltingly into the rug. "It won't be the same *this* year, Santa," he said at last. "You'll have a *proper* Christmas this year, you wait and see. What we need is a couple of good disguises. There are lots of old clothes in your cupboard under the stairs. If we dress up as skiers or clowns — angels even — we can visit lots of families, play with the children, and join in all the fun."

So that night, after Santa had made his Christmas deliveries, he changed his usual route. Instead of turning towards the North Pole and home, he parked the sleigh in a little back street beside the park. While all the other reindeer had an early Christmas dinner of some delicious leaves, Rudolph and Santa changed their clothes in the bushes.

Early next morning they wandered through the snowy streets wearing bobble hats and goggles, with skis slung over their shoulders. People were just beginning to stir. From behind upstairs windows came the rustle of wrapping paper and squeals of delight as children opened their presents. "Look! Look what I've got!" "That's fantastic!" "Can I play with it now?"

Rudolph glanced sideways at Santa and saw him grinning.

"They *do* seem pleased," said Santa, smiling shyly.





When they knocked at number 14, and Mrs Smith opened the door, they could see past her to where her six daughters were opening presents around the Christmas tree. They all looked so happy with the gifts Santa had delivered the night before that his ski goggles became quite misty with pleasure as he watched them with their toys.

"Hello!" said Santa warmly. "We were just passing and we thought we would knock on your door and wish you all 'A Happy Christmas'. You can ask us in if you like."

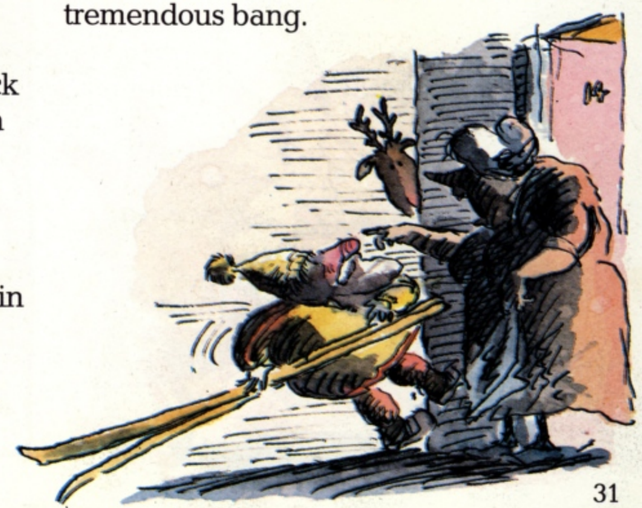
"I don't know you. It's Christmas and anyway I'm far too busy. Come back next week." And she shut the door with a bang.

"Oh dear," said Rudolph, disappointed. They went back to the park and changed into their clown costumes and knocked at another door in the street.

"I've got the dinner to cook," said Mrs Jones at number 32. "What do you want?" Behind her, her four sons were playing with an electric train set. This had been the most difficult present of all for Santa to fit down a chimney. But it seemed worthwhile, now that he could see just how much pleasure the electric train set gave them.

"We thought you and your family might enjoy a few jokes, tricks, stories," Rudolph was saying. "So if you'd just invite us in . . ."

"Strangers? At Christmas? Christmas is a family time. Sorry." And Mrs Jones slammed the door sharply, with the most tremendous bang.



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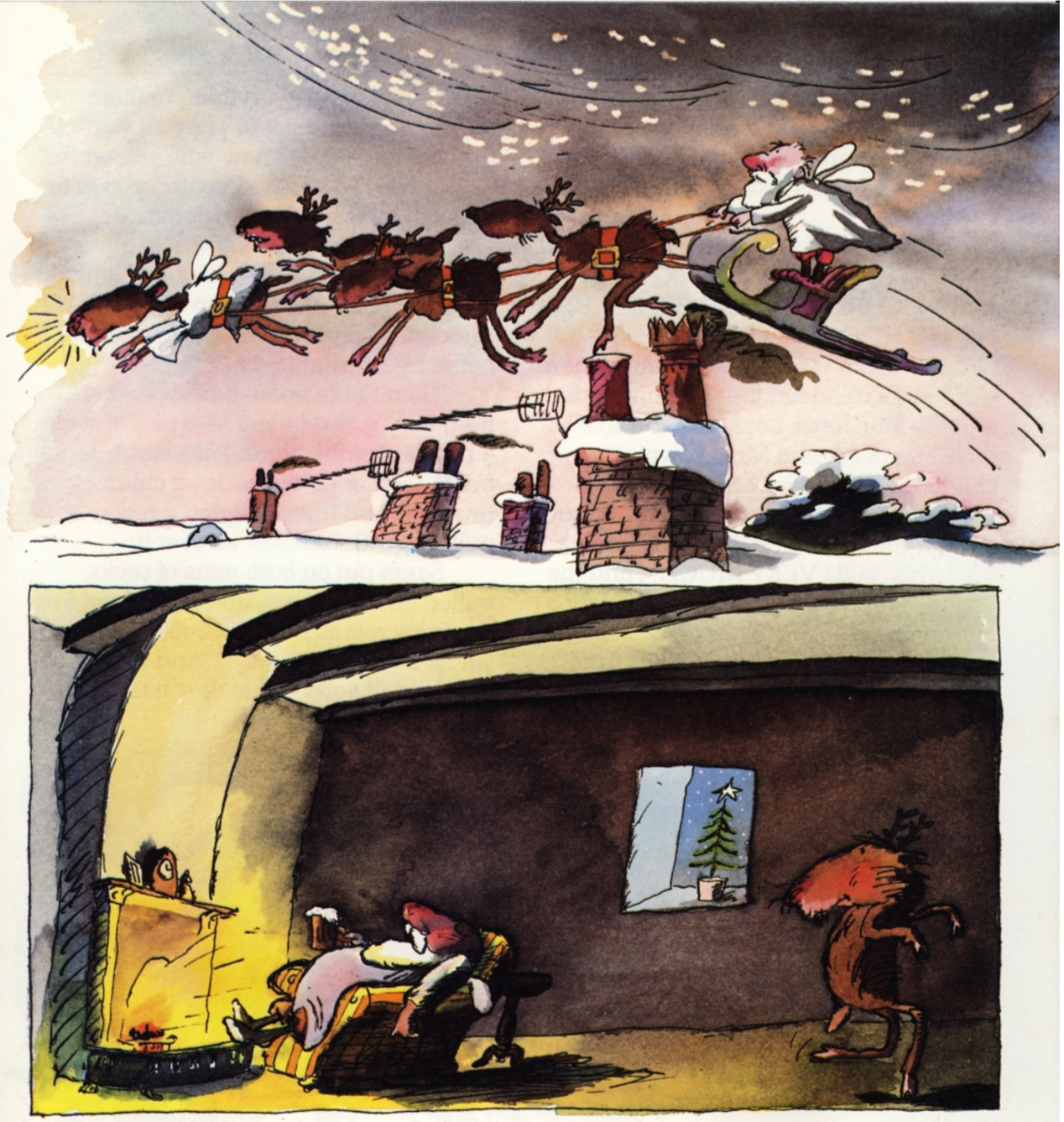
Rudolph glanced at Santa and saw his lip was trembling. They changed into their angel costumes and sang carols outside number 48 where children were playing the whistles Santa had delivered the night before.

"Clear off, or I'll set the dogs on you!" shouted Mr Brown from the bedroom window. "Isn't it bad enough to have the kids playing those wretched whistles without listening to you?"

Santa hitched up his angel's skirts and ran all the way back to the sleigh. Rudolph could hardly keep up. They galloped to the North Pole, without a word spoken between them.







When they finally got home Rudolph said: "Come inside and have a turkey sandwich. You must be exhausted. You haven't been to bed for two days."

Santa nodded. He was too weary to make a fuss. "But at least they *liked* their presents, didn't they?" he asked sadly.

The reindeer pulled off Santa's boots, tucked him up in the armchair beside the fire with a specially big sandwich and some beer, and left him alone with just the firelight for company. Santa made himself extremely comfortable and was asleep in no time.

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When he woke up and went to put on his boots, he found them standing beside the grate, with eight neatly wrapped presents inside them. "What on earth . . .?"

Suddenly all the lights came on, and there was a great shout of "BOO! HAPPY CHRISTMAS SANTA CLAUS! HO HO HO!"

The room was full to bursting. There were eight reindeer, the six Smith girls and the four Jones boys, and a whole orchestra of Mr and Mrs Brown's children playing 'For he's a jolly good fellow' on their penny whistles. A banner hung from window to door which read: "THANK YOU VERY MUCH", and the table was spread with enough food for a banquet.

"We all brought leftover bits from Christmas lunch and Christmas tea," explained Ann Smith. "There's always far too much food at Christmas."

Santa blew his nose noisily. "Rudolph, this is all your doing. How did these children get here?"

"I explained everything to them while you were asleep. They all wanted to come once they knew who you were."

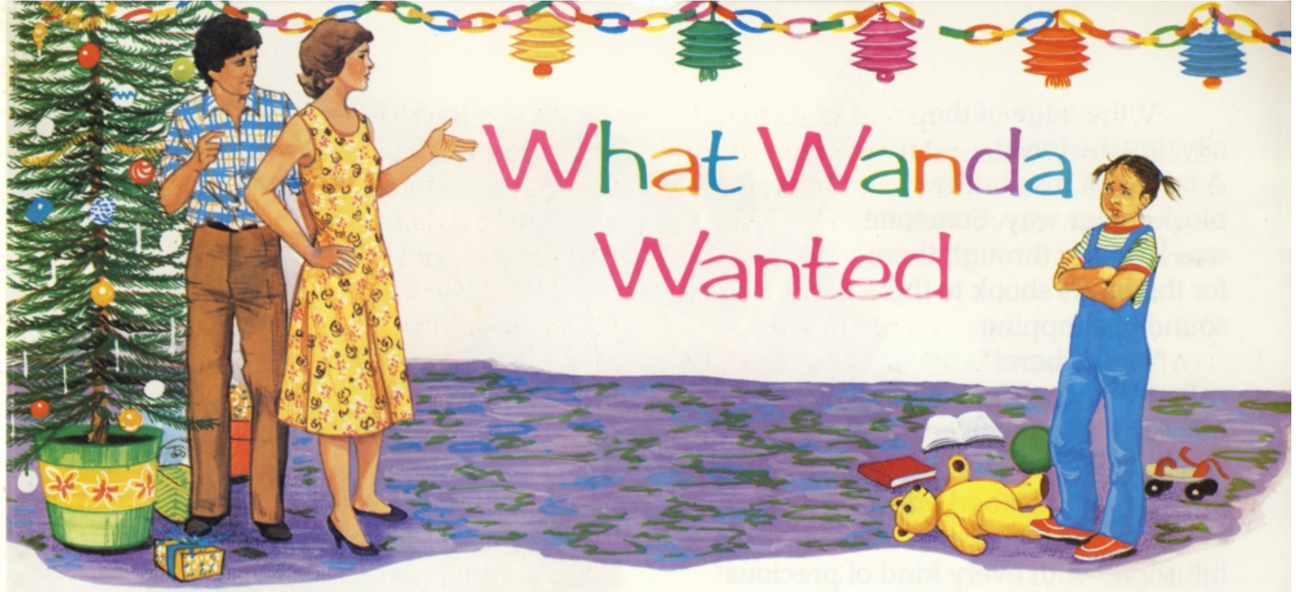
"I wish Mama had invited you in for Christmas," said Edward Jones.

"Well, we've got the whole of Christmas night!" cried Santa, beaming. "I'm not a bit tired if you're not. And with Rudolph's help, I promise to get you all home by morning!"

Then Santa opened his presents from the other reindeer — a pair of socks, a postcard of the North Pole, some jingle bells, another pair of socks, a chimney brush . . . and from Rudolph a red pullover with reindeer all over it.

Santa put on both pairs of socks, pulled on his jumper, and rushed out into the snow roaring: "Isn't Christmas lovely! Isn't it absolutely *lovely!*" And the reindeer all agreed that they had never seen him look so happy.





What Wanda Wanted

On her way to bed one Christmas Eve, Wanda said: "I want a gold and silver dress, and I want lots of pretty jewels and I want long golden ringlets. I want it to be always Christmas, with people giving me things, and I want to know everything without ever going to school."



Her father sighed. "Your mother and I just can't afford all the things you want, Wanda." His daughter stamped her foot.

So that night Wanda set off on a journey across the world. She walked and walked until she passed a tall house. There was a glass coach with six white horses waiting in front of it. And beside the coach stood an elderly lady.

Down the steps came the prettiest girl Wanda had ever seen, wearing a beautiful dress of gold and silver lace.

At once Wanda said: "Oh how I want that dress."

The old lady looked from Wanda to the pretty girl and back again. Then she sighed and said: "Oh. Go indoors Cinderella. What Wanda wants, Wanda must have."

So the girl went back and took off the dress. Wanda put it on — it fitted perfectly.



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At the edge of the city, lay the forest. A tangle of rose briars blocked her way. Someone was hacking through them, for the briars shook to the sound of chopping.

"Hello there!" called Wanda. The most handsome prince she had ever seen emerged and leaned on his sword to catch his breath. The sword's hilt shone with every kind of precious gem. "Good evening, maiden. I don't know how long it will take me to cut through these roses to rescue Sleeping Beauty. You had better go another way."

Wanda was not listening. "Oh! If only I could have the beautiful jewels in your sword!"

The prince turned a little pale, and his smile faltered. "What Wanda wants, Wanda must have." He bowed low, presented her with his sword, then mounted his horse and rode away.

With the jewelled sword through her sash, Wanda danced off across the desert to where the sea pounded on a rocky shore. There, in the window of a high tower, sat Rapunzel, the happiest woman Wanda had ever seen. Her golden hair trickled down the wall, twining amongst trembling passion flowers. She whispered to Wanda: "I hope you are as happy as I am, little girl."

"I would be if I had hair like yours," said Wanda, her voice sour with jealousy.

Rapunzel's smile melted away. "What Wanda wants, Wanda must have."

She withdrew from the window and returned with a pair of gold scissors. "Take whatever you want." So Wanda climbed and snipped, climbed and snipped — every last ringlet of hair. She fastened it to her own with tendrils of passion flowers, and went on her way.

On top of the world, she came to a dreadful place where the cog-wheel stands which turns the Earth. And there, straining with all his might to hold the wheel still, stood the Man-Who-Knows.

"Ooh it's so cold here," said Wanda.

"Wanda wants it to be always Christmas," explained the Man. "So *this* side of the world must always be winter."

Wanda wasn't listening.

"I want to know everything, without having to go to school."

"I'll tell you just four things," he said.

"Far away, in a big town, Cinderella is crying. Wanda wanted her dress so now Cinderella cannot go to the ball.

"Deep in the forest, Sleeping Beauty lies spellbound for ever. The prince who should have woken her has no sword to cut through the briars.

"High in a tower, Rapunzel sits crying. Her prince came back to marry her. But he did not know his love without her golden hair, so he rode away for ever."

"Stop! Stop!" cried Wanda. "Is everyone in the world unhappy because of me?" And she covered her ears in shame.

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"Oh no, my dear. I know for a fact that your Mother and Father are glad you went away. Even now they're saying: 'What a mercy not to have to keep buying Wanda what she wants.'"

"I don't want to know. I don't want it to be true! I don't want any of it to have happened!"

"Well! To make that so," said the Man-Who-Knows, "I'd have to turn the world back to yesterday. I've never done that before."

"Oh turn it!" begged Wanda. "Let me help. Oh I do so WANT to undo today!"

"What Wanda wants, Wanda must have," laughed the Man. And with one gigantic push they rolled the world back one whole day.

It spun so fast that Wanda fell dizzily to the ground. When she came to, she was lying in bed at home — just as she had been on Christmas Eve. "Mother! *Mother!*" she called. "What day is it? I want to know what day it is . . ."

"Why, it's Christmas morning," said her mother.

"Oh thank goodness," said Wanda. "I think I must have been dreaming. I do so want to give you and Daddy these presents so that we can have a happy Christmas together."



ALADDIN

and his magic lamp



Where *is* that lazy boy?" Aladdin's mother yelled as she looked up from her spinning. "There's not a scrap of food in the house, and here I am, working all day long to keep a roof over our heads."

Aladdin was in the bazaar on the other side of the town, drinking mint tea and chatting to his friends. Of all the boys in Baghdad, Aladdin was the naughtiest and the laziest. He never helped his widowed mother as he should, but spent his time getting up to mischief.

"Hey, Aladdin!" called a friend. "It's your turn to buy the tea. Hurry up!"

From his hiding place across the street, a dark stranger muttered to himself in triumph. "Ah hah! If that boy really is Aladdin my long search is over."

Standing in the shadows, he watched and waited. At last the merry band broke up, and as Aladdin rushed past, the stranger stepped out in front of him.

"Aladdin!" he cried, with false tears of joy in his eyes. "I'm your uncle Abanazar, home in Baghdad after many years of travelling. How pleased I am to see you!"

Now this man was not Aladdin's uncle at all — he was really an evil magician. Long ago while casting spells, he had learned that, hidden in a cave near Baghdad, was a lamp which could unleash the magic power of the mightiest genie in all the world. Unfortunately for Abanazar, only a very special boy could find the lamp. A boy called Aladdin.

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Aladdin was very excited when he took the magician home. He had never heard of an uncle but the man was very convincing. Abanazar certainly hoodwinked Aladdin's mother and his gifts of gold and pearls made her ready to believe *anything!*

Next morning, Aladdin went for a walk with his uncle. Soon they left the city and wandered into the desert beyond.

"Look here, my boy," said Abanazar gravely. "Your mother's getting old. It's time you learned a trade to support her."

Aladdin's face fell. What? Work all day? *That* was no fun.

"I'll open a shop for you and stock it with the finest silks of the orient," his uncle went on.

Now this idea *did* appeal to Aladdin. He could just imagine how rich he would become. "You're right, uncle," he said smiling. "I *must* settle down."

Abanazar tried to hide his excitement. "If I'm going to help you, you must help me," he said. "Fetch some wood and light me a fire — just here!" And he marked a cross on the ground.

When the fire was ready, the magician threw incense on the leaping flames. There was an enormous bang and the whole earth trembled and opened at their feet. A huge stone, like a trap-door, lay revealed.



"Now lift the stone," said Abanazar. "Beneath it, you will find a treasure cave, lit by a simple brass lamp. Touch nothing: just bring me the lamp. Do this for me, and I will give you everything I've promised!"

Aladdin took a deep breath and seized the stone. To his surprise, it moved easily and he found himself looking into the dark entrance of the cave. With a last look at the magician, Aladdin disappeared through the opening, and made his way straight to the lamp, as his uncle had told him. Not a sound could be heard in the eerie cavern, not a breath of life flickered in the gloom. Aladdin took the lamp and hurried back to the entrance where Abanazar was waiting. "Give it to me!" yelled the magician excitedly. "Quickly, boy! Or take what's coming to you!"

When Aladdin didn't answer, the magician threw more incense onto the fire. The ground heaved, and the stone rolled back, leaving Aladdin trapped in the cave.

He looked at the lamp in despair. Then he took his sleeve to rub away the grime . . . There was a tremendous flash and an enormous genie stood before him.

"I am the slave of the lamp, and of all who hold it. What is your will, O master?"

"Take me home, O genie, to my mother and my friends . . . Please!"



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"Your wish is my command!" boomed the genie, his voice echoing around the cavern.

Before he knew where he was, Aladdin heard his mother's voice:

"Is that you, son — where have you been? You're never in when I need you . . ."

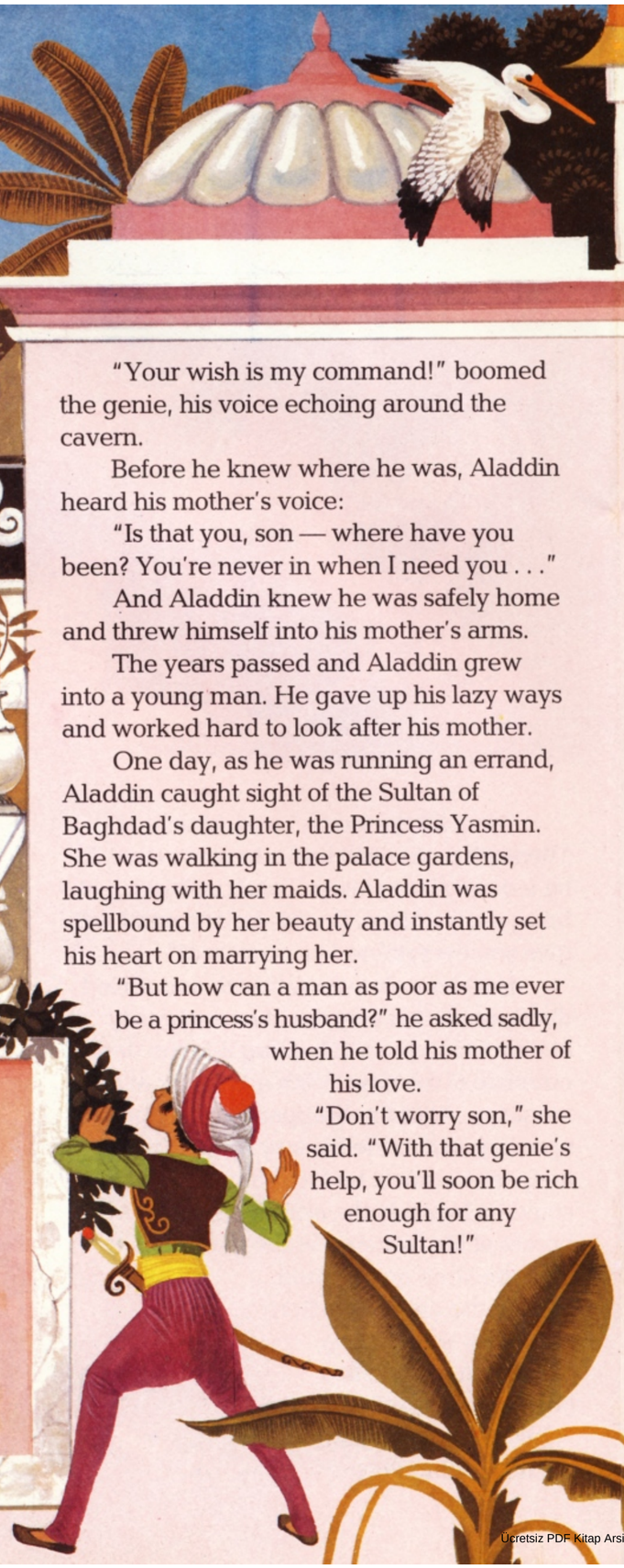
And Aladdin knew he was safely home and threw himself into his mother's arms.

The years passed and Aladdin grew into a young man. He gave up his lazy ways and worked hard to look after his mother.

One day, as he was running an errand, Aladdin caught sight of the Sultan of Baghdad's daughter, the Princess Yasmin. She was walking in the palace gardens, laughing with her maids. Aladdin was spellbound by her beauty and instantly set his heart on marrying her.

"But how can a man as poor as me ever be a princess's husband?" he asked sadly, when he told his mother of his love.

"Don't worry son," she said. "With that genie's help, you'll soon be rich enough for any Sultan!"



With one brisk rub of the lamp Aladdin's mother called up the genie . . . and he did everything she asked immediately.

The next day, Aladdin presented himself to the Sultan looking like the finest young prince in the land. When he met Yasmin, he answered her questions with such wit and grace that she fell deeply in love with him.

Soon they were married, and lived for a year and a day in perfect happiness. Then one morning, when Aladdin was out hunting, Yasmin heard a pedlar's cry:

"New lamps for old, new lamps for old!"

She rushed to her windows, looked down and saw a tall, dark man standing by the palace gates. It was the evil magician Abanazar! Yasmin didn't know who he was, but immediately thought of the ugly old lamp in her husband's apartments.

"Take this to the pedlar," she told her servant. "I want to surprise Aladdin with a fine new lamp."

The girl took the old lamp and made her way to the palace gates where Abanazar was waiting. He could hardly stop his hands trembling as he grabbed it and hurried to his house in triumph.



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"You are mine at last!" he gloated as he rubbed the lamp.

"I am the slave of the lamp, and of all who hold it. What is your will, O master?"

"Find Yasmin and bring her here. Then we will leave Baghdad for ever!"

When Aladdin returned home, he found the whole city weeping. "Princess Yasmin has gone, and no-one can find her!"

Aladdin scoured the city for the pedlar and his lamps, but he was nowhere to be found. Summoning his servants, Aladdin prepared for a long journey. He knew that Abanazar had duped his wife and he vowed that he would search the world to find Yasmin!



At last, in the midst of a lonely desert, he heard tell of a magician's lair. Aladdin had never seen such a dismal castle and he almost wept to think of his wife as a prisoner there.

Disguising himself as a holy man, he persuaded the servants to let him in. He asked to see Yasmin and found her crying in a dark and gloomy room.

"Oh Aladdin," she said, embracing him and smiling through her tears. "I began to think I would never see you again."

Aladdin took his beloved in his arms and comforted her. Then he hid and waited for the magician. He knew that he must kill this evil man to be rid of him for ever.

At last Abanazar appeared. Aladdin stepped forward to block his path, sword in hand.

"Prepare to defend yourself," the young man challenged. "Your hour has come!"

With a shout of fury, Abanazar drew his sword and leaped at Aladdin. The clash of steel rang out as the two men fought desperately. Abanazar had the strength of a bull, but Aladdin was as quick as a cat. He saw his chance, and plunged his sword deep into the magician's heart. The wicked man staggered and fell down dead.

Aladdin searched the castle and found the lamp. Rubbing it gently, he summoned the genie.

"I am the slave of the lamp, and of all who hold it. What is your will, O master?"

"Take us home, O genie!" said Aladdin, with a heartfelt cry.

"Your wish is my command!" And the next moment, Aladdin and his beloved Yasmin were safely back in Baghdad, standing in their garden, the marble turrets of their palace rose-pink in the setting sun.

Aladdin's mother was waiting to welcome them. "Oh, you look after that lamp, Aladdin," she said. "You never know when it might come in handy."

The next morning, Aladdin followed her advice, and locked the lamp away for ever, safe and sound. His beloved wife lived happily with him her whole life long, and had no desire to surprise Aladdin with *anything* ever again!



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The Great Sleigh Robbery



On top of the tallest building in the city, the most successful robbers in the world planned their greatest robbery. Santa Claus was to be their victim.

They had a clever plan in which their disguise expert had made exact copies of Santa's costume so that no-one would be able to tell Santa and the robbers apart.

Just before Christmas Eve the robbers were ready. They boarded a special rocket and headed for their destination.

At last they heard the sound of sleigh-bells. Swiftly, twenty-four robbers climbed into twelve helicopters. Doors opened at the back of the rocket and out they flew.

Swooping down, they surrounded Santa Claus and pointed pistols at him.

"Do as you're told, Santa," said one robber, "and you won't be hurt."



They forced Santa to drive his sleigh inside the rocket and the helicopters followed. The doors closed and the rocket soared high into the sky.

But the robbers had made one mistake. They had forgotten that at Christmas time children lie awake listening for sleigh-bells and watching for a glimpse of Santa Claus. And so millions of children *saw* what happened. Dressing quickly, they all ran from their homes.

Quick as a flash, word of the kidnapping spread all over the world.

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The robbers flew high and south over the sea until they were near their hide-out. They tried to land, but just before the rocket touched down, hundreds of children ran from the bushes, shouting angrily. The rocket climbed up into the sky again and flew farther away over another sea.

Now the robbers looked down on a wide flat desert. But here, too, crowds of angry children were arriving.

Again the rocket could not land.

Next the rocket flew over dark jungles. The trees were so close together that there was no room for the rocket to land, but even so the jungle was full of children.

The robbers tried flying east.

They flew high over mountains.

And low over wide plains and rice fields.

They flew high above the Pacific Ocean, over big cities, farmlands, and tall pine forests.

But wherever they went they saw below them angry children pointing to the sky.

Even the vast ice-fields of the North Pole were alive with their cries.

"This is hopeless," moaned the robber pilot, "we'll have to give up. There's nowhere for us to land."





"Yeah," said another robber, untying Santa Claus, "but we'll have our revenge, Mr Claus. There'll be another chance next year."

"All I fear at the moment," said Santa Claus, "is disappointing the children. You have made me late delivering their presents. Now you must help me make up for lost time."

The robbers realised that they had no choice, and so they agreed to help. Back they flew, over the North Pole, the cities, deserts, jungles, oceans and mountains, still with angry shouts ringing in their ears.

But all along the way Santa stopped the rocket, the helicopters flew out, and the robbers, laden with presents, slid down chimneys.

Then a surprising thing happened.







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The children's angry shouts turned to cheers! The robbers were amazed, and they began to enjoy themselves. This was far more fun than stealing!

At last the work was finished. The robbers were tired and Santa's cups of tea were very welcome. "Can we help you again, Mr Claus?" said one. "We've had such a good time."

Three of the toughest robbers groaned. Once was enough for them! Stuffing their pockets with Santa's best silver teaspoons, they rushed off through the snow.

The remaining robbers finished their tea. "Can't we help you make the toys for next year?" they asked. "We've got lots of good ideas."

In fact, the robbers are still working for Santa Claus.

They are very good at inventing new toys. They have probably made some of your favourites. The robbers are happy and have no wish to leave and never go on strike, because they are surrounded by gifts and tinsel and bright wrapping paper, so every day is like Christmas Day to the Great Sleigh Robbers.



The First Christmas

The story of Jesus began in Palestine nearly two thousand years ago. In the town of Nazareth there lived a young girl called Mary who was engaged to be married to Joseph,the carpenter.

Early one evening, when Mary was alone in her room saying her prayers, the angel Gabriel appeared before her out of the twilight.

"Don't be afraid," he said. "I have come to you as a messenger from God. I am to tell you that you have been chosen to be the mother of Jesus, and that all the world will know the child as the Son of God."

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Meanwhile, far away in Rome, the Emperor Caesar Augustus ordered that the whole of his great empire should be taxed. Everyone in Palestine had to return to the place their family came from, in order to be registered.

Joseph was of the family of King David, so he and his new wife Mary had to travel to Bethlehem, King David's ancient city. It was a long journey through dry and barren countryside. Mary rode on a donkey, and Joseph walked ahead to lead the way. Mile after mile they walked, and all the time the sun beat down on them.

At last they reached their journey's end. It was nightfall, and the town was thronged with people who had come to be registered. Joseph led the donkey through the narrow, crowded streets, searching for somewhere to rest for the night. But every inn and every lodging house was full.

Tired and hungry, Joseph and Mary were beginning to despair when a friendly innkeeper took pity on them. "I'm afraid I can't offer you a proper bed," he said. "There's no room at the inn. But you could spend the night in the stable. The roof is good and the straw is warm and dry."

Mary and Joseph thanked him for his kindness, and the innkeeper led the way to his stable.

In Chaldea, a country far from Palestine, were three wise and learned men who studied the stars as they moved across the heavens.

One evening, as the three wise men were looking towards the east, they noticed a star they had never seen before, and realising it heralded the birth of a great king decided to follow where it led.

The star lit the way towards Jerusalem. When at last they arrived, they went straight to King Herod's palace and asked to see him.

"Where is the child who is born to be Christ the King?" they asked. "We saw his star rise in the east and we have come to pay homage to him."

Herod was furious when he heard this news, but he hid his feelings from the three wise men. "What do the ancient prophets tell us?" he asked the chief priests.

"They say that Christ the King will be born in Bethlehem!"

Then Herod ordered the three wise men to go and search for the child. "When you have found him, report back to me," he said, "so that I may go and worship him."

The three wise men left Jerusalem and still the bright star guided them on their way. Sheltering from the heat by day they travelled by night so as to follow where it led.

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In the fields outside Bethlehem, some shepherds were minding their sheep. The night air was chill, and the sky was full of stars.

Suddenly a dazzling light shone down on them from the heavens, and a strange figure appeared.

"Don't be frightened," said the angel Gabriel. "I am God's messenger, and I have come to bring you joyful news for the whole world to share. Jesus, the Son of God, will be born tonight in the city of David. You will find the new born baby in a stable, lying in a manger."

And as the shepherds stood on the hillside, the whole sky was suddenly filled with light. Where there had been one angel, now there were thousands, all singing: "Glory be to God in heaven, and on earth peace and goodwill to all men."

At last the light faded, and the heavenly music came to an end. The shepherds stood in silence as the last notes lingered in the air.

Then one of them spoke. "Let us go to Bethlehem," he said, "to welcome Jesus, who is Christ the Lord." So they left their sheep in the fields and hurried down from the hills towards the town.

In Bethlehem, Mary lay down to sleep on the bed of straw that the innkeeper had made for her. Suddenly, she cried out and Joseph took her in his arms to comfort her.



"God's child is coming," she said.

And so it was that Mary gave birth to her son in the stable. She held him close while Joseph took his cloak and made blankets for the baby. Mary wrapped her son in the warm, woollen cloth and laid him in the manger.

When the shepherds arrived in Bethlehem, they found their way to the innkeeper's stable. In the dim light they saw the donkey, an ox and some cattle all staring gently at the new born baby. Thus it was that the first people to pay their respects to the Son of God were not kings, or princes, or men of power, but simple shepherds.

After them came the three wise men, following their guiding star. When they saw Jesus they were overjoyed, because they knew that he was the king that the prophecies had foretold. Bowing low, they offered him kingly gifts of gold and frankincense and myrrh.

Mary and Joseph kept the baby safe until he grew into a young man. But, as the years passed, they never forgot the wondrous day Jesus was born — the very first Christmas Day.

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We Three Kings

We three Kings of Orient are,
Bearing gifts we traverse afar.
Field and fountain,
Moor and mountain,
Following yonder star.

O . . . Star of wonder! Star of night!
Star with royal beauty bright!
Westward leading,
Still proceeding,
Guide us to thy perfect light.

Born a king on Bethlehem plain,
Gold I bring to crown him again:
King for ever,
Ceasing never
Over us all to reign.

Frankincense to offer have I,
Incense owns a deity nigh;
Prayer and praising,
All men raising,
Worship him God on high.

Myrrh is mine; its bitter perfume
Breathes a life of gathering gloom;
Sorrowing, sighing,
Bleeding, dying,
Sealed in the stone-cold tomb.

O . . . Star of wonder! Star of night!
Star with royal beauty bright!
Westward leading,
Still proceeding,
Guide us to thy perfect light.

Glorious now, behold him arise,
King, and God, and sacrifice;
Heaven sings Alleluia:
Alleluia the earth replies.

O . . . Star of wonder! Star of night!
Star with royal beauty bright!
Westward leading,
Still proceeding,
Guide us to thy perfect light.

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