

THE CHRISTMAS CHRONICLES



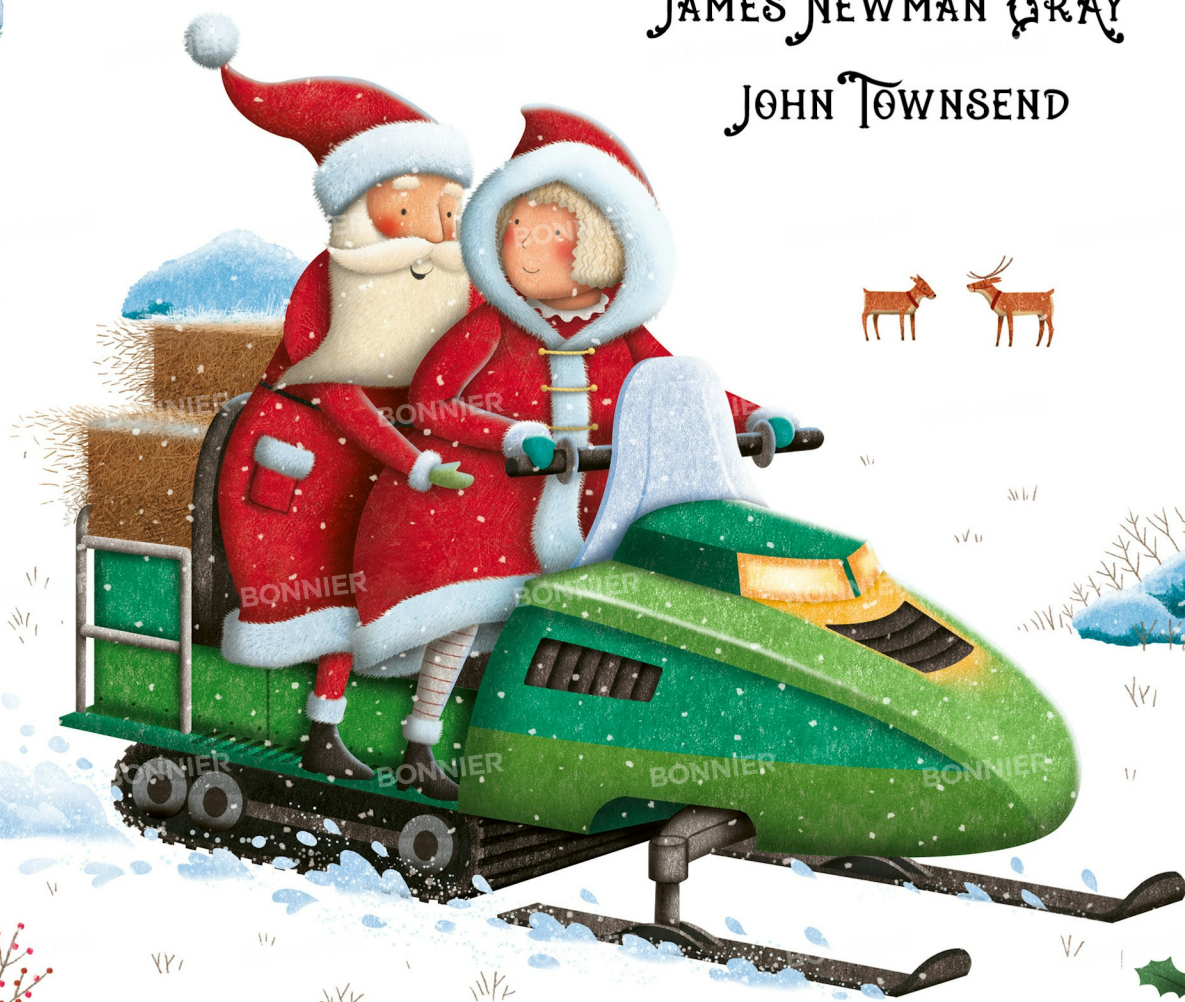
JAMES NEWMAN GRAY

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Dedicated to all children in
hospital at Christmas. JT

A TEMPLAR BOOK

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How to use this book

This festive collection contains 24 stories – one for each day from the 1st to the 24th of December – and is designed to be read in the same way that you might use an advent calendar: lift each flap on the cover in the order of the dates (from 1 to 24) and then turn to the page number written underneath to read the next story in the series. Ho-ho-happy reading!



December
11

MAGIC IN THE AIR

Not many people know this, but the wind at the North Pole can be strong enough to make a penguin fly. It's just as well that there are no penguins in the Arctic. Maybe they all blew away! On windy days, Santa never hangs out his washing to dry... in case his pants end up at the South Pole.

Today is windier than ever at the North Pole. When Santa goes to work at Elf House, he carries Tinsel and Sparkle inside his coat to stop them blowing away. In fact, they nearly all blow away when an icy gust throws them into a snowdrift.



Covered in snow, Santa arrives at the front door of Elf House. Before the door opens, all the elves throw themselves on anything that isn't weighted down. Even though the front door only opens a little to let Santa, Tinsel and Sparkle squeeze indoors, the wind whistles in, too. In a swirl of flying letters and labels, wrapping paper and shiny ribbons, a snowy gale sneaks in and blasts through the house.

'Phew, it's blowy out there today,' puffs Santa as he takes off his thick coat.

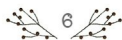
'Phew, it's blowy in here too when the door opens,' giggles the elf Mr Magic.

Soon everyone is back to packing sacks of parcels, stacking shelves and sorting yet more presents and labels. All the elves sing merrily as they go about their work.

'We're the team of Santa's elves,
Busy stacking Santa's shelves.'

Tinsel and Sparkle help out, too. Can you see where they are?

Not many people know this, but reindeer can't normally fly. The secret is in Mr Magic's pouffe-wouffe dust. The sparkly magic powders in his hundreds of twinkling jars can make anything fly. One jar is marked 'Magic Reindeer Fuel'. Mr Magic will sprinkle it on carrots which the reindeer eat shortly before take-off. Another jar is marked 'Magic Sleigh Powder'. Mr Magic will shake it over the sleigh just before it's time to fly. Then it will soar in the sky even when full of parcels and a heavy Santa.



'I've added some extra twinkle to the mix this year,' says Mr Magic as he unscrews a jar of the magic flying powder. He takes the lid off just as Tinsel pops outside through the cat flap. As soon as the flap swings open, a howling blast of wind rips through and zips all over the house. Magic powder blows everywhere and in seconds everyone is flying up to the attic ceiling.

It takes an hour for the magic to wear off – but what a fun hour it is. The elves, Santa and Sparkle giggle as they float off the ground, swooping and hovering. When Tinsel returns indoors, she is amazed to see all the flying fun and frolics.

'Tonight we will dream about flying,' Santa chuckles. 'After all, Christmas Day is now only two weeks away.'

'Christmas spells, Christmas spells, Christmas all the way...
Oh what fun it is to sleep and wake up the next day!
I wonder what tomorrow will bring...'

And yes, tomorrow you will find out, too.



PROBLEMS

That's funny,' Mrs Claus says at breakfast. 'I just heard a rattle and a jangle with a clink and a tinkle at the window.'

Santa goes to the front door and peers outside. 'Ooh, it's chilly. It's so cold even the icicles' icicles' icicles' icicles have got icicles. I don't believe it! The reindeer is back, with bits of chain in her antlers. She's broken out again.'

The postman chugs up in his van, opens the doors and takes out his sacks of letters. 'Morning, Santa. You've got a letter that says "special delivery – urgent". I see your reindeer is back with chains in her antlers. She must think you've got more treats for her. I must dash – see you tomorrow!'





He closes the van doors and chugs off through the snow.

Talking to the reindeer, Santa sighs. 'What are we going to do with you, eh? You mustn't keep escaping to come here for breakfast.'

'Leave it with me, dear,' Mrs Claus says. 'I'll sort things out while you read that special letter.' With her basket of hot MINTS pies, she leads the reindeer back to the stable and into her stall. All the reindeer look up, sniffing the air and dribbling.

'The only way to stop you coming to the house for treats is for me to leave some hidden in your bales of hay. Now there'll be no need for you to escape.'

After hiding mints pies in the hay around the stable, Mrs Claus trudges back home through the snow. The reindeer can't wait to start their mints pie hunt.

Already the tyre tracks from the postman's van are disappearing under fresh snow. 'That's funny,' Mrs Claus looks puzzled as she stares at the ground. 'How odd...'

Santa sits reading a letter, with Sparkle the dog at his feet. 'Oh dear, Sparkle - I'm in trouble. This letter is from my sister Maud. She's not very happy...'

Dear Santa,

How silly of you to send that picture of those funny little elves and that daft dog of yours. As for the cat, you know I don't like cats. Anyway, I've been trying to phone you and sending many texts but YOU ARE NOT ANSWERING. That's very rude of you, Santa. I am worried about you.

Older sisters always worry about their little brothers. So I'm packing my bags and I'm coming to stay. Please keep that cat locked away.

Love from Maud

Santa puts his head in his hands. 'Oh no, that's all we need!' Sparkle yelps and hides behind the sofa. Tinsel is nowhere to be seen. Perhaps she already senses someone scary is on her way. 'I know Maud is my big sister and I love her to bits... but she's so bossy.'

By bedtime Santa is even more worried. His grumpy sister could arrive at any time and Tinsel is missing. It's a cold night out there and she's not snuggling up cosily on his bed.

'Christmas spells, Christmas spells, Christmas all the way...
Oh what fun it is to sleep and wake up the next day!
Oh dear, I wonder what tomorrow brings...'

And yes, tomorrow you will find out, too.



December

17

MANY WORDS

Not many people know this, but elves can sometimes get up to mischief. They like to play tricks. Although Santa's elves love him too much to cause trouble, they do like a good laugh. That can sometimes mean being just a bit naughty. Now and again they might change a teddy bear's little growly voice box to one from a toy cockerel or a frog. How naughty is that? Whenever elves are up to mischief at the toy factory, they start to sing:

'We sew the ears on teddy bears,
Then stick on arms and legs in pairs.
Now and then we have a joke
And give a bear a loud frog-croak!'



Mrs Claus sips from a teacup and says, 'How about something more Christmassy? Something that gives a day-by-day record of what you do. What's another word for diary?'

Santa continues watching the dancing snowflakes through the window. 'Chronicle,' he smiles. 'Why not call my book "The Christmas Chronicles?"'

'Ooh, that sounds posh,' Mrs Claus giggles. 'It's got a ring to it. Go for it, love!'

Santa looks back at his desk where Tinsel is playing with Akua's letter by tapping it with her paw. 'And I shall mention Akua in it, too,' he says. 'In fact, I shall dedicate my book to all children in hospital this Christmas.'

At bedtime, Santa sits up in bed with his notebook and scratchy pen. Sparkle and Tinsel watch more words appear on the paper, as if by magic. Santa giggles, 'Shall I read you the first page? I told you both you would be in my book so here goes...' 'Not many people know this, but if you go to the North Pole and face one way, you will see a house with many windows, green shutters and a snowy roof. That's where Santa Claus lives with his wife Carol, their cat Tinsel and their dog Sparkle.' Santa turns off the light with a sigh.

'Christmas spells, Christmas spells, Christmas all the way...
Oh what fun it is to sleep and wake up the next day!
Nightie night, my sweetie-pies. Only one week to my big night. Just you wait till you see what tomorrow brings...'

And yes, tomorrow you will find out, too.

Sometimes elf Crackerjack will tie one of his jokes around a teddy bear's neck: What do you call an elf who never went to school as a child? Elf-taught.

What do you call an elf who wins a lot of money? Welfy.
What are elves' favourite types of photos? Elfies.

Santa has been sitting at his desk all day. There are pages of words in sparkly ink from his special pen. Beside him is the letter from Africa that started him writing his story. He has underlined Akua's words: 'I am learning to read and would like to have a book about you. Can you write one for me?'

Mrs Claus brings a tray of mince pies. 'Have you decided what to call your book, dear? After all, every book must have a title.'

Santa ponders for a while, staring out of the window at the falling snow. 'I could call it "The Fun of Being Santa Claus" or maybe "Santa's December Story"?'



December

22

IT'S GETTING CLOSE

Not many people know this, but reindeer don't normally eat carrots. Santa gives two reindeer just a few carrots sprinkled with poufle-wouffle dust from a jar marked MRF (Magic Reindeer Fuel). He tells them, 'I'll only put a few sacks in the sleigh and we'll go on a test flight just to check that everything is tickety-boo.'

The reindeer are so excited. They haven't flown all year and they know that they are about to trot across the snow, leap into the air and soar into the sky.



16



Santa chuckles. 'Maybe those carrots will help you to see in the dark, too.'

As soon as the reindeer are harnessed to the sleigh, Santa sits inside and calls, 'We're ready!'

Sparkle and Tinsel scamper over the snow and jump onto Santa's lap. This is their big treat of the year. With a shake of the reins and a 'Yeehaw', Santa sits back as the wind blows through his beard. The reindeer gallop off, getting faster and faster, before suddenly leaping over the treetops. The sleigh smoothly lifts off the ground and glides magically into the sky.



17

'This is more than tickety-boo,' Santa chortles with delight, 'it's SANTASTIC!'

Sweeping high over the North Pole in the moonlight, the sleigh turns to swoop down over Elf House. All the elves rush outside, stare up and wave. Santa gives the reigns a tweak and they slide over his house, where Mrs Claus waves up at him from a window. Then, as they bank round to skim over the toy factory, they look down to see a polar bear with a cub on her back waving up at them. 'Hello, little Akua,' Santa calls. Yes, he has named the cub after his new friend in Africa.

As the sleigh comes down to land beside the stable, Santa pulls on the reigns with a 'Woooooaaah'. They glide gently to a halt after making a perfect landing.

'I can safely say that was a superb flight, my sweetie-pies. Well done. That was double tickety-boo.'

Much later, as Santa rolls into bed with a mug of cocoa and a jar of pickled onions, he chuckles like never before. 'I can honestly say today has been absolutely magic,' he laughs.

'Christmas spells, Christmas spells, Christmas all the way...
Oh what fun it is to sleep and wake up the next day!
Close those eyes and drift away...
Just three more sleeps till Christmas Day!
Nightingale night, my sweetie-pies. Just you wait till you see what tomorrow brings...'

And yes, tomorrow you will find out, too.



ELF AND SAFETY

Ean you see the little round attic window in Elf House? It can get so icy on the inside that once an elf called Crackerjack peered out and his nose froze to the glass. He was stuck there until Santa splashed warm water on his face. It was a good result: unstuck nose, clean window and clean face!

All the elves call Crackerjack 'Crackerjoke' because he sits in the attic and writes jokes for Christmas crackers. Sometimes he tries them out on Sparkle the dog.

'What do you think of this one, Sparkle? Which Christmas carol do they sing in the desert? Answer: O camel ye faithful!'

Sparkle wags his tail – but only once.

'What do you think of this one, Sparkle? How does Good King Wenceslas like his pizzas? Answer: Deep pan, crisp and even!'

Sparkle wags his tail – but only twice.

'What do you think of this one, Sparkle? What do Santa's little helpers learn at school? Answer: The elf-abet!'

Sparkle wags his tail madly, yelps and jumps around. It looks like that's his favourite.

Santa has called at Elf House to ask for everyone's help. 'Christmas is whizzing towards us and I'm all behind,' he says. 'Can you help me find my wife's gold ring? It's disappeared. And can you help me find my phone? That's disappeared, too.'

'I don't like to tell you this, Santa, but something else has disappeared,' says elf Crackerjack. 'And I'm afraid this is not just one of my jokes. When I went to feed the reindeer this morning, one of them had gone. Her pen in the stable is empty. She must have got out but there are no footprints to follow as they're covered by new snow.'

Santa looks shocked. 'Oh no, this will never do. I shall need all my reindeer soon. Without all of them to pull my heavy sleigh, we'll never get off the ground. We have to find that reindeer soon! I can't

phone for Reindeer Rescue because I've lost my phone. Bother, bother, bother!

Not many people know this, but there aren't any hairdressers at the North Pole. It's just as well Mrs Claus is a dab hand with a pair of scissors. Even though her hands are all floury from another long and tiring day of making mince pies, she gives Santa's hair and beard a trim at bedtime.

'Calm down, dear,' she says. 'All these things going missing is making you stressy. Just a minute, what's this glinting in your beard?'

With a quick flick of her comb, out pops her gold ring. 'Well I never, my ring was hidden in your beard, my dear,' she giggles.

'Keep looking, Carol – you might find my phone and a reindeer hidden in there, too!'

Despite all his worries, Santa rolls into bed with a chuckle and his favourite song:

'Christmas spells, Christmas spells, Christmas all the way...
Oh what fun it is to sleep and wake up the next day!
Nightie night, my sweetie-pies. Just you wait till you see what tomorrow brings...'

And yes, tomorrow you will find out, too.



MINT SPIES

That's funny,' Mrs Claus says at breakfast. 'I just saw a face at the window.'

Santa goes to the front door and peers outside. 'Ooh, it's chilly. It's so cold even the icicles' icicles' icicles have got icicles. It looks like a couple of spies on the doorstep, smelling of mints.'

Standing there as large as life is the postman with a reindeer. 'Good morning, Santa. Your reindeer has got out again and it's after my mints. Here are another twenty sacks of letters. Look out for the special one!'

Whistling a minty Jingle Bells while sucking three mints at once, the postman hops in his van and chugs off through the snow.



Mrs Claus gives Santa a bag of minty sugar lumps. ‘Take these to coax the reindeer back to the stable. She must have chewed through the string you tied on the door latch. I’ll do the job properly later – with a chain.’

Santa leads the reindeer back, stopping every so often to give her a delicious sugar lump. ‘Once you’re back in your stable, I’m going to do some baking to give Carol a rest.’

Later on, Mrs Claus looks at the pile of washing up in the kitchen. Through clouds of steam, flour and the odd puff of smoke, she can only laugh. ‘It looks as if a herd of reindeer with fireworks has galloped through, dear. So what have you baked this time?’

With a proud grin, Santa sings...

‘In our steamy Christmas kitchen, I’ve just baked all of these:
Twelve Christmas puddings,
Eleven stollen slices,
Ten chocolate brownies,
Nine ginger biscuits,
Eight spicy shortbreads,
Seven cherry cheesecakes,
Six Santa cupcakes,
Five mince pies,
Four sausage rolls,
Three Christmas cakes,
Two apple pies,
And a cheese scone with extra strong cheese.’

Mrs Claus sighs. ‘Maybe you should go and read all those letters now, dear.’

Not many people know this, but Santa gets letters from all kinds of places. One has an unusual postmark and no stamp.

‘Ooh, this looks like posh paper and unusual writing, let me read it to you, Carol...’

Dear Santa,

I can’t wait for Christmas when I can spend all day pretending I’m a Christmas fairy with a magic money tree. I hope you will bring me something really nice, like a magic wand that makes spells and lots of money because we haven’t got any left. I would also like you to make everyone be kind to me and stop calling me names. Oh yes, and can you bring me the gift of being able to tell the truth at all times? That would be so awesome.

Yours sincerely,

The Prime Minister

At bedtime, Santa chuckles as he rolls into bed, with a tickle for Tinsel and Sparkle.

‘I wonder what I can take the Prime Minister. I’m sure everyone will want to tell me!’

‘Christmas spells, Christmas spells, Christmas all the way...
Oh what fun it is to sleep and wake up the next day!
Nightingale, my sweetie-pies. Just you wait till you see what tomorrow brings...’

And yes, tomorrow you will find out, too.



December
16

A PRESENT FOR SANTA

‘That’s funny,’ Mrs Claus says at breakfast. ‘I just saw two black noses at the window.’

Santa goes to the front door and peers outside. ‘Ooh, it’s chilly. It’s so cold even the icicles are wearing vests. Oh my word, something fishy is going on. There’s a fish on the doorstep.’

Sure enough, a little fish no bigger than a sardine lies in the snow, surrounded by polar bear footprints. Nearby the little polar bear cub gives a friendly snort before running to join his mother further down the snowy track.

'Well fancy that,' Santa gasps. 'That little polar bear cub wanted to pay me back for my sardine sandwiches. His mum sent him over with a thank you present!'

The polar bear and her cub give a final little wave before heading off into the snow.

Then it's off to work at the toy factory. As Santa passes the room where elves pack toys into boxes, he hears giggling and peers inside. Two elves have dressed teddy bears in hats and are singing,

*'Listen to our happy noise
When we dress up cuddly toys!'*

'That's given me a great idea,' Santa says. 'I shall dress one of our lovely polar bear cub toys in a Santa outfit for the little girl in Africa. And I will ask Ojas to add something else.'

Ojas is busy working on a computer when Santa asks, 'I want to make one of our cuddly toys talk. Can I record myself saying something so that when you press the bear's nose it plays my message? I want to say something to Akua in Africa.'

Ojas has a little think. 'Yes, I can do that for you. I'll just have to fit a few bits and pieces inside the toy and record you talking. What do you want to say?'

Santa replies, 'I shall read a few pages of my new book.'

Ojas looks puzzled. 'I didn't know you had written a book, Santa.'



'Ah well, not many people know I'm a writer. That might be because I haven't written anything yet. But I've got stories to tell and that's what I'm going to do.'

'Then you'd better get cracking,' Ojas laughs. 'Books don't write themselves, you know.'

Santa chuckles, 'They might with a little puff of poufle-woufle dust. I shall ask Mr Magic to make a special mixture of magic powders and sparkly words. Before you know it, I'll have a brand new book – all about us at the North Pole – available at all good bookstores!'

At bedtime, Santa sits up in bed with a notebook and a scratchy pen. Sparkle and Tinsel follow every word as it appears on the paper. Santa giggles and says, 'You two will appear in my book. The magic ink is already flowing..'

'Christmas spells, Christmas spells, Christmas all the way...
Oh what fun it is to sleep and wake up the next day!
Nightie night, my sweetie-pies. Just you wait till you see what tomorrow brings...'

And yes, tomorrow you will find out, too.



December
19

SANTA'S BIG SECRET

Not many people know this, but Santa keeps a special picture on his phone. It was taken from his bathroom window on Christmas Eve a few years ago. It shows his sleigh flying over the reindeer stable, off on its way around the world.

So how could Santa take that picture of himself from the bathroom window? Get ready for a big shock. One Christmas Eve he got stuck in his bath so Mrs Claus had to take his place and fly the sleigh. There wasn't time to get him unstuck so she had to act fast.



She quickly grabbed his hat, coat and a false beard and off she went. While she was away travelling the world, an elf managed to get Santa's stuck toe out of the plughole. It was a big panic at the time but Santa and Mrs Claus laugh about it now.

As Santa gets into bed at night, he looks at that picture on his phone and chuckles merrily to himself.

'Do you remember that night, Sparkle? You tried to lick my toe better, Tinsel. It's just as well Carol got her reindeer pilot's licence the week before. It was the night that Carol saved Christmas. That could be a good title for the book she's writing. She's just written the bit about me jamming my foot down the plughole and the door handle falling off. No one could get me out for three hours!'

Santa flicks through his wife's notebook and begins reading.

'You won't believe this, but Santa Claus (my jolly husband) and I have got stories to tell. We have a big secret, too. Not many people know this... in fact, no one knows apart from Santa, me, an elf, Sparkle and Tinsel. You may remember your Christmas presents from a few years ago. You may have thought that Santa Claus left them for you in the night. Well, here's the surprise: Santa didn't bring them. I did. It was me on his sleigh that Christmas. I did the



job for him and even though I say it myself, it all went very well. In fact, the elves said it was all done in the fastest time ever.

'This is what happened. Santa's sleigh was loaded up and ready to go. He always has a quick bath before take-off because he gets a bit smelly getting all the reindeer ready. He forgot about the faulty bathroom door and it jammed shut. Not only that, his big toe got wedged down the plughole and he was firmly stuck. Luckily he had his phone. I got the call giving the code for me to take over: Operation Christmas Carol. So off I went.'

Santa chuckles and the whole bed wobbles. 'My big toe hasn't been the same since. It only came unstuck eventually with a good sprinkle of pouffe-wouffe dust.

'Christmas spells, Christmas spells, Christmas all the way...
Oh what fun it is to sleep and wake up the next day!
Nightie night, my sweetie-pies. Just you wait till you see what tomorrow brings...'

And yes, tomorrow you will find out, too.



December
24

THIS IS THE NIGHT

S hhhh, the night has come. Not many people know this, but Santa is about to fly through the clouds. His sleigh is loaded with presents and eight reindeer are pulling him over the snow. They are on their way.

Santa checks an envelope in his coat pocket. His first stop will be at his sister Maud's house. She will be fast asleep when he secretly places a teddy bear holding the envelope on her pillow. In the envelope is a special ticket that says 'You have won a Secret Prize – a return air ticket to New York on Boxing Day for a two-week stay in a luxury hotel. Includes a cookery course with a top cake chef!'

Santa chuckles as he thinks of what his sister will make of the mystery gift. Then he chuckles as he thinks of the thousands of wonderful presents in his sleigh – including yours! One present is carefully hidden under his seat. It is the very last delivery. With his signed copy of *The Christmas Chronicles*, he has a beautiful polar bear cuddly toy, wearing a collar saying Akua. When she presses its nose it will listen to what she says and talk back to her. Santa can't wait to see Akua's face when he meets her tomorrow.

As his sleigh lifts into the sky, Santa looks back to wave at Tinsel watching from the window. 'We're off, my sweetie-pies. Everything is tickety-boo. We're on our way!'

Mrs Claus, Sparkle and all the elves run outside, waving to Santa soaring silently overhead. Soon the faint tinkle of jingle bells drifts through the evening sky.

A few miles away the postman looks up through binoculars from his attic... and cheers. Below the rising sleigh he can see two little black noses in the snow. The polar bear cub and its mother are reaching up with waving paws as the reindeer turn and head southwards.

Climbing high into the sky, Santa peers down at their shadow moving across the moonlit snow. They glide over hills, sweep over forests and soar over rivers and seas. He sees the twinkling lights in little villages far below, then towns with street lights and then sprawling cities.

The sleigh flies on, over mountains and plains, jungles and deserts. Santa is lost for words as he looks down on the sleeping world below on this special night of the year.



There is wonder in the air tonight. Santa feels it with a tingle of excitement. The reindeer feel it, too. Children around the world feel the special joy on this most magical night of the year.

Santa's sleigh swoops over rooftops sprinkled with starlight...

'Christmas spells, Christmas spells, Christmas all the way..
Oh what fun it is to sleep and wake up the next day – and what a day it will be!'

Santa knows children are being tucked-up snugly in their beds right now, as he whispers into the night:

'Close those eyes and drift away..
Soon you'll wake on Christmas Day,
Never fear, we're on our way!'

Sweet dreams and Happy Christmas!



December

1

DECEMBER
IS HERE!

Not many people know this, but if you go to the North Pole and face one way, you will see a house with many windows, green shutters and a snowy roof. That's where Santa Claus lives with his wife Carol, their cat Tinsel and their dog Sparkle. If you face the other way, you will see a smaller house with a red door and red window shutters. That's where Santa's elves live. Right now they are all very busy.

Not many people know this, but December at the North Pole is frantic. All the elves at Number 2 North Pole are up to their ears (which are smaller than your ears but much pointier) in magic

dust. They need a lot of it to get everyone's Christmas presents extra-super-special.

Not many people know this, but Santa is up to his ears in letters from children (not that you can see his ears under his white hair and beard). He is always chuckling as he reads them. 'Ho, ho, ho, this is a good one, Carol. Listen to this:'

Dear Santa,

My little brother and I have been trying our best to be good. I have been better than him because he made a rude noise on grandma's lap. The thing is, and let's get to the point, we both want to fly like your reindeer. Can you grant our wish please? If not, a paddling pool will do.

'I do get some funny letters, don't I Carol? Carol? Carol?'

Not many people know this, but Mrs Claus is often nowhere to be seen. That's because she is always up to her ears (which are often covered in flour) in mince pies. If you have seen a mince pie lately, the chances are it's one she made. No one makes them quite like Mrs Claus.

Not many people know this, but it's snowy, blowy, chilly, icy and absolutely freezing at the North Pole. In fact, Santa is already getting ready for bed, where he has twelve blankets, eleven hot water bottles...

Ten chunky duvets,
Nine knitted nightcaps,
Eight furry mittens,
Seven quilted covers,
Six feather pillows,

Five pairs of socks,
Four woolly vests,
Three underpants,
Two overcoats
And a nightshirt that's quite a tight squeeze!

Before Santa gets into bed, he always drinks a cup of cocoa and gives a bowl of reindeer milk to Tinsel and Sparkle. Then he looks out of the window to check the weather. It's snowing, as usual. Next he checks the date on the calendar and says, as usual, 'Oh my word, Christmas is coming and I've so much to do!'

Not many people know this, but Santa always rolls into bed singing a little song to the tune of Jingle Bells:

'Christmas spells, Christmas spells, Christmas all the way..
Oh what fun it is to sleep and wake up the next day!'

Tinsel and Sparkle jump on the bed, snuggle up and Santa switches off the light.

'Nightie night, my sweetie-pies. See you in the morning. Just you wait till you see what tomorrow brings...'

And yes, tomorrow you will find out, too.



December
12

WHERE IS SPARKLE?

Not many people know this, but Santa dreams a lot about Christmassy things.

How many Christmassy things can you think of? Of course, the elves dream in elf-abetical order like this: angels, bells, candles and carols, decorations, elves, fruitcake, gifts, hugs, icicles, jingle bells, kisses, lights, mistletoe, nutcrackers, 'olly (that's how Santa says 'holly'), presents, quiz games, reindeer, sleigh, tinsel and tree and turkey, unwrapping parcels, visits from relatives like Maud, wonderland, Xmas signs, Yule logs, and then zzzzzzzzzzz back to sleep!

When Santa wakes up, he is puzzled. Sparkle is nowhere to be seen.

‘Ooh, where is he, Tinsel?’ he asks as he scratches his head. Tinsel looks at the door, which is just open.

‘Maybe he drank too much reindeer milk and has popped out to the toilet before we go to work?’

At breakfast, Santa asks Mrs Claus. ‘Have you seen Sparkle? He’s nowhere about.’

‘No, love,’ she answers. ‘I’ve not seen him anywhere. The last I saw of him was last night when we decorated the Christmas tree.’

Santa peers outside through the window. ‘I can’t see any paw prints out there. At least the wind has dropped. In fact it’s all very still and quiet outside, Carol.’

‘Then why don’t we go for a spin and look for Sparkle on the way? Do you fancy hopping on the back of my snowmobile and having some fun?’ she chuckles.

‘Tally-ho, Carol – lead the way. Yeehaw!’

The elves at Elf House can’t believe their eyes when they look out of the window. The sight of Mr and Mrs Claus whizzing through the snow, hurtling through drifts, squealing with delight and shouting ‘Sparkle, Sparkle!’ leaves everyone open-mouthed.

‘They’re just like a couple of kids,’ elf Crackerjack laughs. ‘And that’s why we love them!’



He watches Santa drag out his sleigh and hitch it to the back of Mrs Claus' snowmobile.

'She's giving him a tow – how tow-tally awesome,' Crackerjack jokes. 'In fact, I've just got an idea for another cracker joke. What's the difference between a knight and Santa Claus? One slays a dragon, the other drags a sleigh on!'

After their ride in the snow, Santa and his wife go indoors with very rosy cheeks. There is no sign of Sparkle anywhere. Then they see Tinsel scratching at the cupboard door where they put away the spare Christmas tree decorations last night. Opening the cupboard, Santa peeps inside to see Sparkle curled up and fast asleep among all the tinsel and baubles.

'Bless him, I must have locked him in the cupboard!' Mrs Claus says, giving Sparkle a big cuddle. 'Come on my lovely, I'm going to bake you something special as a treat.'

At bedtime the house is full of Christmassy cooking smells wafting up from the kitchen. Santa chuckles as Sparkle and Tinsel snuggle up on his bed, sniffing the air.

'Christmas SMELLS, Christmas SMELLS, Christmas all the way... Oh what fun it is to sleep and wake up the next day! Nightie night, my sweetie-pies. Just you wait till you see what tomorrow brings...'

And yes, tomorrow you will find out, too.



BUSY, BUSY, BUSY

There's so much to do by Christmas Eve,' Santa yawns as he gets up in the morning. Sparkle the dog is already running downstairs and Tinsel the cat jumps off the bed with a cheery 'meow'.

'Now I've found my phone, the first thing I must do is read the latest text from my sister Maud. Here goes...'

Dear Santa,

I have sent you 32 texts and you haven't replied to any of them. You can't be that busy. After all, you only work one night a year. I am coming to stay so I can sort you out. It will be good to spend Christmas with

you for once – I don't suppose you have much else on and could do with my company. I'm booking a flight but you will need to pick me up from the airport. I will have a lot of luggage so make sure you are there in good time. As soon as you reply, I will buy my air ticket. Get back to me IMMEDIATELY.

Your loving sister, Maud x

PS Don't bother giving me a Christmas present as I know you don't know much about them.

PPS Make sure you get rid of that ghastly cat of yours before I arrive.

Santa doesn't often scream, but today he does – big time!

'Oh dear, Tinsel – what am I going to do? Maud never takes no for an answer. Sisters can be wonderful, but not right now. And certainly not here. I'm just too busy and, of course, I would never dream of hiding you away, Tinsel. I think this will call for DRASTIC ACTION.'

Meanwhile, Santa gets back to work. Mrs Claus and Sparkle whizz up to the stables on her snowmobile. With another basket of her special mints pies, she hides more of them in hay bales for the reindeer to find. Her idea has done the trick perfectly. None of them has tried to escape to get breakfast at the house since.

Just before bedtime, Santa tells Mrs Claus all about his messages from Maud. She smiles and says, 'I don't think Maud quite understands what we do, dear. She could come and help, if she likes. Or maybe she can come and stay once you've recovered from your travels, love? You decide, dear.'

When getting ready for bed, Santa can't help making up a song:

'December brings such great delights,
The excitement can't be ignored.
It's kiss-us-time, Christmas-time, big-sisters-miss-us-time...
And the arrival of big sister Maud!'

Once in bed, he sends her a text:

Dear Maud,

Sorry I didn't answer your messages but I lost my phone. Of course it would be lovely to see you but I have to check something first. I'll get back to you first thing tomorrow.

Love from Santa, Carol, Sparkle and especially Tinsel xxxxx

With a little chuckle, Santa puts out the light.

'Christmas spells, Christmas spells, Christmas all the way..
Oh what fun it is to sleep and wake up the next day!
Nightingale, my sweetie-pies. Just you wait till you see what tomorrow brings...'

And yes, tomorrow you will find out, too.



December
20
CARROT
CAKE

That's funny,' Mrs Claus says at breakfast. 'I just saw two eyes at the window.'

Santa goes to the front door and peers outside. 'Ooh, it's so chilly. It's so cold even the icicles have got frostbite. Well I never, the reindeer is back and she's chasing the poor postman.'

The postman is trying to get away from a reindeer nibbling his sack of letters. 'There's a parcel in here for you,' he calls, 'and your reindeer is determined to eat it.'



Santa goes to his rescue, gives the reindeer a sugar lump and manages to get the sack indoors. The postman laughs, 'Phew, that was close, Santa. I hope you enjoy that parcel before the reindeer gets to it.'

Santa hands him a letter. 'Can you make sure this reaches Akua in Africa by Christmas Eve? It's telling her I shall be popping in to see her. Look after it carefully.'

The postman takes his letter. 'I certainly will. I must dash now. Have a nice day.'

While Mrs Claus takes the reindeer back to the stables, Santa looks at the parcel it was trying to eat. A label says 'To Santa and Carol from Maud. Open immediately. It's my own recipe so you had better like it.'

'Well, fancy,' Santa gasps. 'It's Maud's carrot cake and it's so heavy. In fact...' he can't believe his eyes as he unwraps the cake, 'it's full of solid carrots. No wonder the reindeer wanted it!' He sniffs it and pulls a face. 'It smells of peanut butter, sprouts and bananas!'

It isn't until bedtime that Santa decides to try a piece of the carrot cake with his cocoa. Just minutes after cutting a slice, he hears a loud clumping on the stairs and his bedroom door pushes open. In walks a reindeer, making straight for his cake. Santa chuckles and offers a slice with a whole carrot sticking out of it.

'I'm glad you've come,' he sniggers. 'We would never eat this ourselves. At least I can now tell Maud truthfully that her cake has been eaten and enjoyed.' The reindeer eats the lot and gives Santa a thank you kiss.

After taking the reindeer back to the stable, Santa finally gets into bed. Sparkle and Tinsel watch him write more words in his notebook as he talks to them. 'My sister never liked healthy eating and ate far too many cakes and puddings. Here is my warning:

'On her pudding plate one Christmas, my sister asked for these:

Twelve jelly trifles,
Eleven lemon cheesecakes,
Ten chocolate truffles,
Nine toffee puddings,
Eight pear pavlovas,
Seven rhubarb custards,
Six apple crumbles,
Five ice creams,
Four pumpkin pies,
Three caramels,
Two cream meringues
And a coffee with biscuits and cheese.'

Santa smiles, 'Needless to say, Maud had hiccups all through January. Please don't try this at home!'

He turns off the light and sings, 'Christmas spells, Christmas spells, Christmas all the way..

Oh what fun it is to sleep and wake up the next day!

Close those eyes and drift away.

Just five more sleeps till Christmas Day.

Nightie night, my sweetie-pies. Just you wait till you see what tomorrow brings..'

And yes, tomorrow you will find out, too.



THE MISSING REINDEER

Mrs Claus claps her hands in a huge puff of flour, with a mighty chuckle.

'My new MINTS pies have turned out a treat. They taste just like Christmas but minty and spicy and fruity and yummy and tinselly – that's all because Tinsel the cat gave one a purry sniff!'

The lovely smell wafts all through Santa's house, drifts past Elf House, swirls around the busy toy factory and floats past the reindeer stables.



'My word, Carol, you have done wonders, my dear. They smell SANTASTIC! The whole North Pole is drenched in minty, spicy, fruity, yummy, Christmassy scrumminess!'

Suddenly the front door rattles, the windows shake and the walls wobble.

'Oh my word, Carol, your magic pies are making everything tremble!'

'No, Santa – look out the window. All the reindeer are trying to get in. They're after my pies.'

Santa opens the front door with a big gasp. 'Oh my word! There's a queue of reindeer. Our missing one has returned, along with a bunch of wild reindeer. How did all the other reindeer get out of the stables?'

Not many people know this, but reindeer grow amazing antlers with lots of knobbly bits on the ends. These are just right for lifting door latches and picking locks. If reindeer want to escape, they will always find a way.

After the reindeer have a good nibble at the MINTS pies, Santa chuckles. 'I'm so glad to have my missing reindeer back. As a special treat, I shall lead her to the stable and show



her the sleigh. That will get her all excited and ready for Christmas. Perhaps the elves could manage to take the rest of the reindeer back?

Mrs Claus is already in her wellies and off to the shed. 'Don't be silly, dear – they've got work to do. I'll round up the reindeer on my snowmobile. I'll put a few of my pies in the basket and they'll soon follow me back to the stable.'

Hopping on her snowmobile, she revs it up with a puff of smoke and a spray of snow. Whizzing through snowdrifts and hurtling over dips, she roars towards the stables, pies flying in all directions. The reindeer run along close behind, gobbling up bits of minty pastry on the way. Soon they are all safely back in their stalls.

The once-missing reindeer looks at the sleigh with a tingle of excitement. It won't be long before they're all off for their Christmas ride. Santa leads her into the stable, gives her a friendly pat and a juicy dollop of hay. He ties up the door latches to stop any more breakouts.

With Tinsel and Sparkle close on his heels, Santa heads for home. 'It's hard to see in the dark without my phone torch,' he sighs. 'I do hope my phone turns up soon.' But there is still no sign of his phone when he rolls into bed.

'Christmas spells, Christmas spells, Christmas all the way...
Oh what fun it is to sleep and wake up the next day!
Nightie night, my sweetie-pies. Just you wait till you see what tomorrow brings...'

And yes, tomorrow you will find out, too.



December
18
NAUGHTY
SANTA
AGAIN!

Santa wakes with a sniff, a snort, a snuffle and a splutter. His phone is rattling by his bed. It's another text from Santa's sister Maud. 'Oh no, what is it this time?' Santa grunts.

Dear Santa,

I am VERY CROSS. The airports were only closed for a few hours so I could have come to see you after all. Now it's too late to get a ticket.

I shall write a strong letter of complaint to the person in charge of aeroplanes and the Head of Snow. It just isn't good enough.

I've sent you a present. It should be with you soon. I don't suppose Carol does much in the kitchen so I thought you might like one of my special Christmas carrot cakes. You always had a sweet tooth. So did I before mine fell out – all of my teeth, in fact. I wrote a STRONG LETTER OF COMPLAINT to the dentist and the tooth fairy but I didn't even get a reply. What is the world coming to?

Love from Maud

Santa has an idea as he sets off to work at the toy factory. He remembers an old song his mother used to sing to him and his sister Maud when they were little about someone wanting teeth for Christmas. So he asks elf Ojas if he can make a teddy bear that can sing the song when you press its nose.

'I can do that for you, Santa,' says Ojas. 'I can also make the teddy bear tell a joke when you press its tummy.'

'Perfect,' giggles Santa. 'I'll ask elf Crackerjack to record a joke about teeth. I had better ask elf Magic to use a little poufle-woufle dust to make sure Maud finds it funny. Otherwise she'll be sending us a strong letter of complaint.'

Soon the three elves start making teddy bears that sing and tell jokes. As they work, the elves sing:

'We polish eyes, stick on each nose,
Then sprinkle all the paws and toes.
We put a song inside, and riddle
That teddy plays – just press his middle!



Knock, knock.
Who's there?
Dishes.
Dishes, who?
Dishes how I talk since I lost my teef!

At bedtime, Santa sits up in bed with his notebook and scratchy pen. Sparkle and Tinsel watch more and more words appear on the paper, as if by magic. Santa giggles, 'My book is coming along a treat. I'm just writing the bit about my sister Maud and how she didn't get to call on us this year. I'll have to make sure she doesn't read it or she'll send me a STRONG LETTER OF COMPLAINT. So shhhh, it's a secret.'

Santa chuckles so much the whole bed wobbles. 'Let's hope a good sprinkle of poufle-woufle dust on Maud's teddy bear and my book will keep away all grumpy grumbles.'

'Christmas spells, Christmas spells, Christmas all the way...
Oh what fun it is to sleep and wake up the next day!
Nightie night, my sweetie-pies. Just you wait till you see what
tomorrow brings...'

And yes, tomorrow you will find out, too.



December
2

HURRY UP, SANTA

Not many people know this, but Santa sometimes wakes up late in the morning. He has just slept through three alarm clocks, Tinsel licking his nose, Sparkle barking in his ear and Mrs Claus calling, 'Up you get, dear – it's December and we're falling behind. Time to get up and visit the Elf House to help with their jobs.'

Santa sits up, stretches, strokes his beard and says, 'Good morning, all.' He wipes the window and peers outside. 'It looks like snow today, Carol.'

'Yes, dear. That's because we're at the North Pole, it's December and there's a whopping blizzard outside. By the way, have you seen my ring? I seem to have lost it.'

'Your wedding ring, dear? That's made of gold and diamonds. You can't lose that. Where did you see it last?'

'On my finger, dear. If I knew where exactly, I wouldn't have lost it, would I, love? I hope it hasn't fallen into a mince pie. Can you ask the elves to help me find it?'

Santa pokes his head out of the front door. 'Ooh, it's chilly. It's so cold even the icicles have got icicles. Come on, Tinsel and Sparkle, we're off to see the elves.'

The post van arrives and out steps the postman. 'Only twenty today, Santa,' he grins, as he opens the van doors.

'Only twenty children's letters? I could have stayed in bed a bit longer, then.'

'No, Santa. Twenty sacks of them. Thousands of letters today. You're going to be busy. It's already December, you know. Only another three weeks and you'll be on your way around the world on your sleigh.'

'That's only another twenty or so sleeps! I'm not ready yet to go slipping down chimneys, popping through windows and whizzing over rooftops. How time flies.'

'Just like you, Santa. See you tomorrow. Have a nice day!'



The van chugs off through the snow.

Not many people know this, but it's dark all day at the North Pole in winter. So, using his phone torch to shine through the snow, Santa heads off to Number 2 North Pole. Tinsel and Sparkle run beside him, stopping now and again to shake their snowy paws.

'I shall take a picture of you two and send it as a Christmas card to my sister Maud,' Santa chuckles as they arrive at Elf House. Some of the elves come out to wave hello on the doorstep. 'Hello Santa Claus. Hello Maud Claus. Hello everyone!'

They quickly get to work. There's lots to do: reading letters, sweeping snow, making toys, sweeping snow, wrapping presents, sweeping snow, packing sacks, sweeping snow, sprinkling magic, sweeping snow, feeding reindeer, sweeping snow, tying ribbons, sweeping snow, eating mince pies, sweeping snow, looking for a ring and sweeping snow. Tinsel and Sparkle help, too – mainly with eating mince pies.

By bedtime Santa is very sleepy. Mrs Claus says, 'Goodnight, dear. I still haven't found my ring.'

'I'm sure it will turn up, Carol. I've lost something, too. My phone is missing. Bother!'

'Christmas spells, Christmas spells, Christmas all the way...
Oh what fun it is to sleep and wake up the next day!
Nightie night, my sweetie-pies. Just you wait till you see what tomorrow brings...'

And yes, tomorrow you will find out, too.



HURRY, HURRY, HURRY

'That's funny,' Mrs Claus says at breakfast. 'I just heard a growly noise at the window.'

Santa goes to the front door and peers outside. 'Ooh, it's chilly. It's so cold even the icicles are shivering. Oh my word, there's a huge polar bear in the garden. She must be the cub's mother. I'd better go and fetch it from Elf House.'

The polar bear runs off as the postman's van chugs up to the house. 'Morning, Santa. You've still got lots of letters and it's only ten days



till your big night. You've got a letter all the way from Africa with a fancy stamp. I must dash, see you tomorrow. Have a nice day.'

He closes the van doors and chugs off through the snow. Santa puts the letter from Africa in his pocket. 'I'll read that later. First, I must pop to Elf House and take the bear cub to its mother. I must get a move on, there's so much to do. What a rush... hurry, hurry, hurry...'

There is a buzz of busy-ness and a hum of hard work at Elf House. Elves are running all over the place mumbling, 'Busy, busy, busy, hurry, hurry, hurry, lots to do, lots to do, even more to do...'

In another room they sing as they work,
'We pile the parcels, sort more letters,
And knit fun sparkly Christmas sweaters.'

The little polar bear cub is stretched out in front of the fire beside a bowl of cream.

'Your mother is outside, little bear cub,' says Santa. 'She's found you at last. She must have been worrying all night.'

He picks up the cub and goes outside. Mother polar bear is walking up and down, crying into the wind. She looks so worried.

'Here you are, polar bear,' calls Santa. 'Your cub is safe. Everything is completely fine.'

Putting the cub gently on the ground, he steps back to watch the mother and cub run to each other. They hug and lick and kiss and squeal with delight. They roll and play in the snow with sounds just like laughter.

Santa wipes away a tear and returns to the house. At every window are faces of elves. They, too, have tears in their eyes when mother and cub look back and give a little wave before heading off into the sparkling snow.

Much later, as Santa rolls into bed, he remembers the letter in his coat pocket. As he reads it, he sheds another tear.

'Oh dear, I'm getting to be a soppy old Santa,' he sniffs. He tells Sparkle and Tinsel, 'I'll read this letter to you tomorrow and then tell you about that lovely polar bear and her cub. I'll probably have another little sob about it, too.'

As he turns off the light, he whispers,
'Close those eyes – can you believe
It's ten more sleeps till Christmas Eve?
Christmas spells, Christmas spells, Christmas all the way...
Oh what fun it is to sleep and wake up the next day!
Nightie night, my sweetie-pies. Just you wait till you see what
tomorrow brings...'

And yes, tomorrow you will find out, too.





December

21

NOT LONG NOW

Not long now,' Santa calls to the reindeer in the stable. They are already excited and ticking off the days to their biggest night of the year.

Santa sprinkles pouffe-wouffe dust on their hay and tells them, 'This will get you ready to fly. Tomorrow we'll go for a practice flight over the house and back.'

Just as he gives Rudolph a carrot, Santa's phone bleeps. It's another text from his sister Maud. 'Oh no, what is it this time?'



Dear Santa,

I am VERY CROSS. I have just had the bill for sending you my cake. They said it was so heavy that there's an extra charge for excess baggage. I shall write a VERY STRONG LETTER OF COMPLAINT to them. I think I forgot to grate the carrots and soaked them in too much treacle. Was it nice?

Maud

Santa chuckles. 'I'll have to give the reindeer who ate it extra pouffe-wouffe dust to make it light enough to fly.' He taps in his reply.

Dear Maud,

Thank you for sending your special homemade carrot cake. It was soon eaten and greatly enjoyed. Your cooking is always such a surprise - I can't think how you do it. My reindeer like carrots but right now prefer something full of dates - it's a calendar!

Love from Santa x

Just before bedtime, Santa sits on the sofa writing out his 'to do' list. It is still very long. His phone beeps again. It's another message from his sister Maud.

Dear Santa,

I'm glad you liked my carrot cake. It's full of vegetables so with one slice you get all your '5-a-day'. How healthy is that? I gave some to the window cleaner who said he'd never tasted anything like it - just before he fell off his ladder.

I'll bring you another cake when I come on Boxing Day. I've just booked my air ticket. By the way, I didn't find your calendar joke funny in

the slightest. As if reindeer would have a calendar. It's just as well I'm coming to stop you being so silly.

Maud NCA (No Cats Allowed)

Tinsel runs from the room with a squawk while Sparkle quickly hides under the sofa. Santa sighs, 'Oh dear - my sister can be very difficult, I'm afraid.'

His wife smiles. 'Don't worry, love. Maud won't be a problem. We'll think of something, and I'll write about it in my book. In fact, I've nearly finished it. How is yours coming along?'

His face beams. 'It's done. Elf Ojas is printing the very first copy right now. I shall take it myself to little Akua in hospital. I'm looking forward to meeting her on Christmas morning. Then I'll whizz back here in time for lunch and a nice afternoon nap.'

At bedtime Santa reads his texts again. 'I shall soon need a lot more pouffe-wouffe dust!

'Christmas spells, Christmas spells, Christmas all the way...

Oh what fun it is to sleep and wake up the next day!

Close those eyes and drift away,

Just four more sleeps till Christmas Day.

Nightie night, my sweetie-pies. Just you wait till you see what tomorrow brings...'

And yes, tomorrow you will find out, too.



NAUGHTY SANTA

Santa has been dreaming a very strange dream. He even shouts in his sleep, 'No, Maud!' Sparkle dives under the bed and Tinsel gives a little hiss. In his dream, Santa has to polish his sleigh to make it spotless for collecting his sister from the airport. He knows that she will complain if the sleigh is dirty.

Then he dreams about Christmas dinner, with his sister wearing a hat from a cracker and asking for a second helping of everything. He sings it like this...



'On her dinner plate this Christmas, my sister asked for these:

Twelve roast potatoes,
 Eleven crispy parsnips,
 Ten chipolatas,
 Nine buttered carrots,
 Eight sprouts with garlic,
 Seven stuffing dumplings,
 Six roasted chestnuts,
 Five takeaways,
 Four poppadoms,
 Three vindaloos,
 Two egg fried rice
 And roast partridge with mushy green peas.'

Santa is woken by his phone. It's another text from sister Maud.

Hurry up, Santa. I need to know which flight to book. I plan to arrive in the next day or so. Please clean my room as I don't like dust and certainly no cat hairs. You must be looking forward to seeing me after so long. I hope you don't still use that silly sleigh thing. You know I feel the cold, so let's travel on something warmer, please.

See you soon, Maud.

Santa gives a big sigh and tells Tinsel in a secret whisper, 'Even though I love my sister to bits, she can be hard work. I think Carol would be happier without visitors at the moment. We've got such a lot on our plate – like Maud had in my dream! As my bossy sister won't take no for an answer, I might have to be a bit naughty. I've got a cheeky plan.'

It's another busy day at Elf House. Santa pops in to help with wrapping presents and sorting labels. He has a quiet word with Mr

Magic, the elf in charge of pouffe-wouffe dust. It's his job to make the sparkly magic powder from glittery mixtures in hundreds of twinkling jars.

'I think I can help with your little problem,' Mr Magic smiles. He takes a globe from the shelf and spins it to find a certain place. Taking a tiny pinch of pouffe-wouffe dust, he sprinkles it onto a little spot on the globe.

'That should do the trick,' he grins, with a wink.

Just as he is getting into bed, Santa's phone beeps. It's another text from his sister.

Would you believe it? I've just been told all the flights have been cancelled. All the airports nearest you just had the biggest snowfall they've ever known so they've had to close till after Christmas. The strange thing is, they say the snow was really sparkly and like nothing they've ever seen. Very odd. I will come later.

Maud

With a cheeky chuckle Santa puts out the light.

'Christmas spells, Christmas spells, Christmas all the way...
 Oh what fun it is to sleep and wake up the next day!
 Nightie night, my sweetie-pies. Just you wait till you see what tomorrow brings...'

And yes, tomorrow you will find out, too.



December
8

WHAT A SURPRISE

Sparkle the dog hasn't slept. He's worried about Tinsel who is still missing. Santa is worried, too. 'What shall we do, Carol? Can you phone the North Pole police to ask them to look out for Tinsel?'

'I can't, dear. My phone broke weeks ago. I even sent you a letter asking for a new one for Christmas! Anyway, we don't have police at the North Pole. We don't have anything at the North Pole apart from us and big dollops of snow.'

'And my sister Maud wrote to say she's coming to stay. Sorry, dear.'

Mrs Claus pulls a face. Sparkle yelps. Santa looks stressed. 'I'm so worried about Tinsel. It's not like her to disappear.'

'No, bless her,' sighs Mrs Claus. 'But I've been wondering. I saw her footprints in the snow yesterday morning, but...'

There is a loud knock at the front door. 'Oh no, I hope it's not the reindeer back again – or Maud,' Santa gasps. He goes to the door and peers outside. 'Ooh, it's chilly. It's so cold even the...'

Before he can mention icicles, he beams the biggest smile. The postman is on the doorstep but not with a sack of letters. In his arms is a very happy Tinsel, purring loudly.

'Morning, Santa. Your cheeky little Tinsel must have hopped in my van yesterday when no one was looking. I only found her when I got home. I've been trying to phone you and Mrs Claus but no one answers. Anyway, I kept Tinsel in the warm and fed her well, so here she is – safe and sound.'

Santa gives her a hug, as Sparkle runs around barking excitedly.

Mrs Claus tickles Tinsel under the chin. 'I knew something odd was going on when I saw your paw prints in the snow yesterday. They went to the track but didn't come back again.'

The postman chuckles, leaves more sacks of letters and heads back to his van. 'I must dash. Have a nice day.'

With a cheery whistle he chugs off through the snow.

Santa feels better already. 'Come on, Tinsel and Sparkle – you can come with me to Elf House. We've got letters to sort through in the office. You can give me a hand... or should I say a paw?'

At Elf House everyone in the office is busy at their desks. Tinsel and Sparkle get to work sniffing out all the letters that smell nice. Santa joins in merrily till morning break.

'It's time for coffee and mince pies,' he calls on his way to the bathroom. Suddenly he stops and stares at the toilet as it rattles and trembles. 'Oh my word – a wobbly, noisy toilet!'

He peers down the back where something is shaking and bleeping.

'Yay, it's my phone! It must have fallen down the back of the toilet and now someone's calling me. Oh no, it's sister Maud.'

At bedtime, Tinsel and Sparkle snuggle up and Santa reads his texts from Maud.

'I'll tell you what sister Maud says later. In the meantime...

'Christmas spells, Christmas spells, Christmas all the way...
Oh what fun it is to sleep and wake up the next day!
Nightie night, my sweetie-pies. Just you wait till you see what tomorrow brings...'

And yes, tomorrow you will find out, too.



December
13

A LITTLE VISITOR

Not many people know this, but Santa often puts sardine sandwiches in his pocket when he goes to work. But sometimes he is so busy he doesn't have time to eat his packed lunch. He cheerily sets off, whistling as he goes.

Not many people know this, but the elves at the toy factory use a lot of high-tech equipment. Ojas is the whizz-kid elf who looks after all the technical gadgets.

'Morning, Santa,' he says, 'I've just been uploading all the addresses onto your Santa-Nav so you can find all the boys and girls

around the world in record time this year. I've also got a headcam that fit in your hat so we can see where you are back here at HQ.'

'Well fancy,' Santa says, although he has no idea what Ojas means.

'I'll also fit an antler-cam on one of the reindeer so we get a reindeer's eye-view of your flight on Christmas Eve.'

Santa shrugs. 'I'm not really sure what all these cam things do. I've always made do with good old-fashioned magic dust.'

'Then just look at what I recorded this morning on my roof-cam. I filmed all these animals passing by outside our toy factory...'

As he watches the computer screen, Santa can't help singing along...

'On our special North Pole webcam, we've just recorded these:

Twelve Arctic foxes,
 Eleven herds of reindeer,
 Ten snowy owl chicks,
 Nine bearded seal pups,
 Eight Arctic wolf cubs,
 Seven flying puffins,
 Six white-tailed eagles,
 Five musk ox,
 Four snowshoe hares,
 Three walrus pups,
 Two Arctic terns (one good tern deserves another),
 And a snow goose with very cold knees!'

'Hey – what's that on the screen?' Ojas says. 'Something is moving outside in the snow.'

When Santa goes out to take a look, he sees a little bundle of white fur shivering in the cold wind. It has a small black nose and looks very frightened. He bends down and whispers, 'Well fancy that – it's a polar bear cub. It looks like your mum has lost you. Don't worry, I'm not going to harm you. Do you like sardines?'

Taking a sandwich from his pocket, Santa lets the cub lick his fingers. Soon all the sandwiches have gone and the cub is asking for more.

'You had better come inside in the warm and have some milk,' Santa smiles, as he picks up the cub and takes it indoors. He calls Mrs Claus to come and see their little visitor.

The elves gather around the bear cub with big smiles. 'How cute. What a little sweetie!'



Santa watches the cub roll on its back after drinking lots of milk. 'Look at this little cub closely, everyone. I think we should make some cuddly toys exactly like our bear cub.'

So that's just what they do all day.

At bedtime Santa chuckles as he tells Sparkle and Tinsel about the cuddly bear cub.

'Christmas spells, Christmas spells, Christmas all the way...
Oh what fun it is to sleep and wake up the next day!
Nightie night, my sweetie-pies. Just you wait till you see what tomorrow brings...'

And yes, tomorrow you will find out, too.



December

4

THE TOY FACTORY

Santa's elves are so excited! They are thrilled to be putting the final touches to the toys in time for Christmas. All the magic happens inside the toy factory. It has big windows downstairs and small windows upstairs. Not many people know how many windows there are altogether. What do you think?

You might sometimes hear the elves singing as they happily sew, paint, stuff and stick. In fact, right now they're singing a song called 'The Twelve Toys of Christmas' about the toys they have just made and wrapped in shiny paper.



SANTA'S
TOY FACTORY

'In our magical toy factory, we've just completed these:

Twelve wooden jigsaws,
 Eleven silver skateboards,
 Ten puppet pirates,
 Nine fluffy bunnies,
 Eight flashing rockets,
 Seven toy pianos,
 Six clockwork train sets,
 Five teddy bears,
 Four purple cars,
 Three unicorns,
 Two yellow ducks
 And a doll with her very own skis!

Meanwhile, Santa pokes his head out of his front door. 'Ooh, it's chilly out here. It's so cold even the icicles' icicles have got icicles. Come on, Tinsel and Sparkle, we're off to see the elves at the toy factory. I'm sure they could do with our help. I need their help, too. We've got a missing reindeer to find.'

The post van arrives and out steps the postman. 'Another twenty today, Santa,' he grins, as he opens the van doors and takes out twenty sacks full of children's letters.

'It looks like it's another busy day at the North Pole,' Santa chuckles. 'A jolly chilly one, too.'

The postman takes a packet of peppermints from his pocket. 'Have a mint, Santa. That will warm you up.'

'That's very kind, thank you. I rather like peppermints.'

As the postman gets back in his van, he says something very interesting. 'Not as much as that reindeer of yours. She came running yesterday as soon as I took them from my pocket. She followed me all the way down the track, too. See you tomorrow. Have a nice day!'

The van chugs off through the snow.

Not many people know this, but reindeer don't mind the cold in the least. They're quite happy sleeping in the snow, especially if they have a mint to suck. They have a good nose (sometimes a bit red) to sniff out food from a long way off. So Santa has a cunning plan.

Popping into the kitchen, where Mrs Claus is busy baking behind a cloud of flour and a mountain of pastry, he tells her his big idea.

'Carol, dear, I was wondering. Seeing as you make such stunning mince pies, could you make me a MINTS pie? As soon as the reindeer smells peppermints cooking, she'll come running.'

'Ooh, that sounds like a splendid idea, love. I wouldn't mind eating one of those pies myself!'

Santa grins from ear to ear. 'Thank you, my sweetie-pie. Just you wait till you see what happens when your MINTS pie comes out of the oven...'

And yes, tomorrow you will find out what happens, too.



December
15

SOMEWHERE IN AFRICA

‘That’s funny,’ Mrs Claus says at breakfast. ‘Your eyes look puffy, dear. Anyone would think you’ve been having a bit of a sob.’

Santa takes out a letter. ‘Only a little one. Sometimes I wish I could do far more for some children. Listen to this letter, dear...’

Dear Santa

I don’t know you but I think you must be a kind and lovely man. I am a girl called Akua and I am 6. I live in Africa and I am in hospital. I have not seen my mummy or daddy for a long time and a nurse is helping me



write this. I will be here at Christmas and I would love to meet you if you are coming by. I don’t want a present – I just want to meet you and maybe you can make me better. I don’t know much about you and would like to know more. Do you have a wife? I am learning to read and would like to have a book about you. Can you write one for me? If I get better I would like to go to the North Pole and see you.

Love from Akua

‘She doesn’t even say whereabouts she is in Africa. What a shame I can’t help her.’

Mrs Claus looks at the letter and smiles. ‘She sounds such a friendly little girl, bless her. I’m sure elf Ojas would be able to find her hospital from the postmark. He can find anything online. As for the book, why don’t you write one? I could do the pictures. In fact, I might write a book about you myself!’

That little idea gets them both thinking all day. While Mrs Claus jots down a few thoughts, Santa goes to work at Elf House. Once more there is a buzz of busy-ness and a hum of hard work. Once more elves are running all over the place mumbling to themselves: ‘Busy, busy, busy, hurry, hurry, hurry, lots to do, lots to do, even more to do...’

In another room they sing as they scatter magic glitter over Christmas presents:

‘We giggle with each magic sprinkle
To make those Christmas presents twinkle!
Then we blow – but only just,
A puff of pouffe-wouffe dust.’



Santa shows elf Ojas the letter and envelope from Akua and asks, 'Do you think you can find exactly where this little girl is? I would love to be able to take her one of our polar bear cub cuddly toys and a little message.'



'No problem,' smiles Ojas. 'I shall even enter the exact spot where she is on your Santa-Nav so you'll find her bed in the hospital.'

At bedtime Santa, Sparkle and Tinsel still twinkle with specks of magic dust. He sighs, 'Maybe this will help me find Akua and even help her to get better.'

'Christmas spells, Christmas spells, Christmas all the way...
Oh what fun it is to sleep and wake up the next day!
Nightie night, my sweetie-pies. Just you wait till you see what tomorrow brings...'

And yes, tomorrow you will find out, too.



December

23

WE'RE ALMOST THERE

That's funny,' Mrs Claus says at breakfast. 'I just saw a snowman walk past the window.'

Santa goes to the front door and peers outside. 'Ooh, it's chilly. It's so cold that even the icicles are huddling close together to keep warm.'

He sees the post van parked outside. It has heavy chains on the tyres to help them grip in the much deeper snow this morning. A snowman appears from behind a tree. 'Good morning, Santa,' it

says. It turns out to be the postman, who has fallen in a snowdrift headfirst. After dusting himself down, he hands Santa a parcel.



'This is a little present for your Sparkle and Tinsel from me. I've made them each a woolly coat for going outside in the winter.'

'That's very kind of you,' says Santa. 'They will be delighted. I will be delivering your present from us when I'm on my rounds later.'

The postman brings out another little parcel.

'I made sure your letter to Africa got there extra fast and it looks like you've got a reply already. It's got a card attached to it.'

Santa reads the message inside.

Dear Santa,

I was so thrilled to get your letter. I'm really excited you are coming to see me. I can't wait. Thank you so much.

Love from Akua

PS I hope you like the present. I made it myself. It's a plasticine African bullfrog in a Santa hat.

Before long Santa and his elves start loading up the sleigh.



Everything has to be packed carefully and in the right order so it takes a long time. It must all be ready before tomorrow. Everyone is very excited. Soon Operation Santa Claus will take to the skies.

By bedtime, Santa is very tired. He goes to bed early before the big day tomorrow. Sparkle and Tinsel snuggle up beside him just as the phone bleeps. It's another text from sister Maud.

Dear Santa,

Don't forget I'm arriving on Boxing Day. You didn't reply to my last text. Anyone would think you don't want me to come and stay for two weeks. By the way, make sure you get rid of all your decorations by Boxing Day. Christmas trees make me itch and fairy lights give me headaches. Mince pies make me come out in a rash and whatever you do, shave off that ridiculous beard. Last time you kissed me goodbye, my face swelled up like a Christmas balloon. I looked like a hideous bullfrog with a case of mumps. Get back to me as quickly as possible with your reply.

Maud

Santa chuckles, ‘I wonder what I should reply. Any ideas?’

It’s just as well he’s got plenty of extra strong poufle-woufle dust ready and elf Ojas is working his magic.

‘Christmas spells, Christmas spells, Christmas all the way...

Oh what fun it is to sleep and wake up the next day!

Close those eyes and drift away,

Just two more sleeps till Christmas Day.

We’re almost there – can you believe

Tomorrow will be Christmas Eve?

Nightie night, my sweetie-pies. Just you wait till you see what tomorrow brings...’

And yes, tomorrow you will find out, too.