



Holiday Celebrations

Storytelling for EFL Young Learners

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Edited by
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FOREWORD

**Karmen Pižorn, Milena Mileva Blažič,
Mateja Dagarin Fojkar, Jurij Selan**

This illustrated picture book was put on paper on the initiative of future teachers, undergraduate students of the Primary Teacher Education study program at the Faculty of Education, University of Ljubljana. As part of their course on English language skills, the students wrote stories about New Year's celebrations in the United States of America and in Slovenia for young learners of English. The idea emerged to illustrate the stories, publish them in an illustrated book, and present them to the public through the students themselves. The Embassy of the United States of Slovenia wholeheartedly embraced the proposal and the project "Storytelling for English Foreign Language Young Learners: Holiday Celebrations" was launched.

Eight stories were selected and later illustrated by students of Art Pedagogy at the Faculty of Education, University of Ljubljana. This picture book is intended for independent reading or as a teaching aid in English classes. As part of this project, the students have also used it as a teaching tool for reading workshops they have organized at various primary schools in Slovenia. In this way, they have gained their first experience of storytelling in the foreign language and at the same time helped to stimulate young pupils' interest in learning English as a foreign language. An additional benefit of the project is the development of intercultural competence in young learners, as the texts and activities designed by the students for the reading workshops promote different aspects of New Year's celebrations in Slovenia and in the USA.

The coordinators of the project are **Tjaša Dražnik** and **Tina Matić**, teaching assistants for English in Education. The idea for the publication was proposed by **Miha Babič**, a student of Primary Teacher Education. Associate Professor **Jurij Selan**, Assistant Professor **Mateja Dagarin Fojkar**, Professor **Milena Mileva Blažič** and Professor **Karmen Pižorn** provided expert assistance in carrying out the project's tasks. The project is funded by the

U.S. Embassy in Slovenia under the Cultural Grants Program, which supports such cultural and educational projects that serve to strengthen U.S.-Slovenian relations.

Karmen Pižorn, Professor of English in Education

The collection brings together eight texts that are short narrative prose or short contemporary fairy tales. The authors, students of Primary Teacher Education at the Faculty of Education in Ljubljana, have written on the theme of holidays and celebrations, focusing on the celebration of Christmas in various cross-cultural contexts. Most of the texts are short and have a typical structure with an introduction, a body, and a conclusion. The main literary characters are primarily children and/or personified literary characters with functional or folk names (Ally, Barnie, Bean, Daisy, Don, Jake, Max, Sophie, etc.). Personified animals (e.g., Ally the Mouse, Bean the Dog), personified objects (Bell, Candy Cane, Ornament), or toys (Barnie the Bear) appear in some texts. Santa Claus is a Christian-themed character (Santa's Hat), who in the texts is more of a fairy tale character or a personified fairy and elf (Don the Elf).

All the selected texts are short and take as their starting point an attractive psychological condition or the motif of loneliness and/or the desire for companionship, devotion and self-realisation. Most of the literary characters live in permissive families and abundance and have their basic needs for food, security, etc. met. However, they are also guided by the law of desire (S. Žižek), they are home alone (Home Alone) or struggle to make a living and/or have no friends (How Jake Got a Brother); they want to play, to be socially connected, they want to achieve self-actualization by making others happy, which is an interesting motif of self-actualization and emotional (Merry Christmas, Bean) and social literacy (The Most Beautiful Gift for Christmas).

The solidarity of the students, mentors and other participants is a characteristic feature of the whole project, which emerged during the 2020/21 pandemic. The texts express the spirit of the times, even if they would look different in another context, and although the present texts also represent a monocultural celebration (Christmas), it is set in a cross-cultural context. The students' texts, which mainly depict Christmas, contain themes of geographical

interculturality in different worlds (cages, desert, North Pole, etc.). The parallelism between isolation during the pandemic and the texts is found in the motif fragments “animal shelter, desert, disability, lost, small cage” which vividly reflect the internal landscape. An additional advantage of the texts is the formulation of smaller social motifs that express a literary universality – the desire and need for the elements of a new humanism.

Milena Mileva Blažić, Professor of Humanities, Literary Studies and Comparative Children’s Literature

Stories are all around us, their power is immense. They take us far away and show us other traditions. They broaden our horizons and introduce us to new friends. They inspire empathy and connect us. Stories are our basic tool for learning and living. In addition to these benefits, stories in a foreign language develop vocabulary and all four language skills. They help learners hear the natural rhythm of the language and acquire the new language in context. They are close to the children’s world and as such are very motivating for them. Each of us is a storyteller, however, it is the crucial task of teachers to pass on the stories to children with love and care, so that they always remain a part of our lives.

Mateja Dagarin Fojkar, Assistant Professor of English in Education

We gladly accepted to participate in the preparation of this picture book with my third-year students of Art Pedagogy, who actually first came into contact with illustration as an art form in the third year of their studies, as part of our Graphic Design 1 course. The purpose of the illustration is not merely to repeat what has already been communicated with the text, but to supplement the substantive and associative aspects of the written story and thus form a new semantic whole formed by the text and the illustration at the same time. Students have prepared illustrations that are extremely diverse both in terms of design and in terms of the use of art techniques. It is this diversity and variety of illustrations that gives the picture book its charm and complexity as well as complements and upgrades the richness contained in the texts of the stories.

Jurij Selan, Associate Professor of Art Theory

HOW JAKE GOT A BROTHER

Miha Babič

Illustrations by Tanja Železnik

At the edge of the city, there was a big beautiful house with a marvelous garden. A small family was living in the house: mom, dad and their son, Jake, who was an only child. They were happy and healthy. Nothing was missing in their life. Jake got everything he wanted. Board and video games, new clothes and all kinds of toys that a lot of children of his age could not afford. Jake was aware of his fortune. He was grateful for having such good parents, too. But there was one thing Jake was missing in his life – someone to play with. He was often lonely. He wanted a brother or a sister, but his parents couldn't have another child.

December came and it started snowing. In the morning, Jake was excited to go outside and build a snowman, but then he remembered there was no one he could play with. In the afternoon, he decided to bake some chocolate chip cookies, but he wished someone would be there to help him. In the evening, Jake tried to decorate his room with





snowflakes and Christmas lights, but he wasn't tall enough to do it himself. Jake was sad.

On the other side of the world, elves were watching Jake through their crystal ball. They were thinking about how they could help him. Jake was well-behaved and kind to everyone, so the elves decided to send him a teddy bear, who would keep him company. They called the fastest delivery reindeer in the world to bring the teddy bear to Jake. The reindeer merrily jumped in the air. You could hear his bells ringing in the night. Jake heard the song of the bells that night, but he wasn't aware of what was happening.

The next morning when Jake woke up, he saw a big brown teddy bear sitting on his bed. The teddy bear was looking at and smiling at Jake. When Jake got closer, he saw a note attached to it, which said, "I love you." Jake took the teddy bear in his arms and held him tightly. The teddy bear was soft and smelled of candy. "I love you, too," said Jake. "You are my brother now. I'll name you Bernie." In that moment Jake felt like somebody was hugging him back. That wasn't just his imagination, it was truly happening! Bernie was hugging Jake! He became alive!

From that moment on, Jake never felt lonely again, because Bernie always kept

him company. That morning they went outside. They played in the snow and made a snowman. They were laughing and Jake was happy like never before. After lunch, Bernie wanted a dessert. Jake made him gingerbread cookies filled with honey. The house smelled wonderful. Bernie helped him bake the cookies, but he ate almost all the cookie dough even before the cookies were finished. But, Jake wasn't angry with Bernie at all. He was happy to have him. In the evening, Jake decided to decorate the Christmas tree and Bernie was helping him. They put on all kinds of ornaments and lights of different colors. That was a magical evening for Jake. He realized it is not important how many toys you have or how many gifts you get. It is important to have someone you can share them with. This is what counts the most.

That night before Jake and Bernie went to bed, Jake was thinking about how powerful love is. "Love is what Christmas is all about," said Jake to his parents. He rolled over in his bed, hugged Bernie and fell asleep with a smile on his face.

THE END





POINSETTIA FOR A VERY SPECIAL CHRISTMAS PRESENT

Urška Cujnik

Illustrations by Anamarija Založnik

It was a calm and beautiful evening. Snow was slowly falling from the darkening sky. It was simply a perfect evening before Christmas.

Little Max was walking home. His mom asked him to buy some eggs, because she used them all for her Christmas cookies. Max was not annoyed about going out at night and into the cold. He was actually quite happy. Everywhere he looked there was something amazing to be seen. The whole city was shining with countless little lights of all colors and sizes. Christmas decorations were on every corner. And there were also shop windows, showing all the cool toys that boys like Max loved.

He stopped in front of some nice-looking shops and stared at the colorful toys. His gaze stopped at this super-fast racing car. He had always wanted to get a racing car like that for Christmas.

He closed his eyes and wished hard for the racing car. Then, he happily walked away. He





had been very good this year, he did incredibly well in school and practiced really hard in his dance classes.

As he was walking past all the stores, he wondered, “Santa sure has a lot of work to do in one night. There are so many presents that he must deliver all over the world. I wonder if Santa also gets a present?”

The more Max thought about Santa, the more he felt that Santa should also get a present. Then he stopped and looked at the icicles on the old lamp post by the road. He said to himself, “I want to give Santa a present.”

As soon as he said that, a big icicle fell from the lamp. It stopped in the air and a gentle light illuminated it. There was now a small ice fairy flying in front of little Max. “Oh, little Max, did I hear that right? Do you really want to give a present to good old uncle Santa? Do you really?!” said the ice fairy excitedly.

Max nodded fast and said, “Yes! I do! But I don’t know what Santa would like... Little fairy, do you know? Do you know what Santa would like for his present?”

The little ice fairy nodded back at him and said, “Yes! I know!”

Max’s eyes were twinkling happily and he said, “Then this is perfect! Please, tell me.”

She landed on Max's hand and said, "I once heard that in The Land of Ice, there grows the most beautiful plant of them all. It is the favorite plant of Uncle Santa."

Max's eyes widened with excitement, "Which plant is it?"

"It's poinsettia," said the little fairy.

The little ice fairy flew into the sky again and asked, "So Max? Do you want to come with me and find it?"

She offered her tiny hand and Max took it. He closed his eyes. When he opened his eyes again, he was far away from home. He was now in The Land of Ice. Everything was white and blue and covered with snow and ice. It was truly a beautiful sight to behold.

The little ice fairy danced in the sky and said to Max, "Come, Max, this way. I know exactly where we can find poinsettias." She took his hand again and they started to walk in the direction of the mountains. They stopped at the entrance to a cave.

"The poinsettias should be up ahead. We are close," said the fairy. And then an amazing view opened in front of them. Underneath the gentle light that seeped inside the cave through the hole in the ceiling was a sea of plants with red leaves – poinsettias. And right in the middle grew the most beautiful poinsettia.





Max asked the ice fairy, “Fairy, how are we going to carry the poinsettia? We cannot just carry it in our hands...”

The ice fairy thought very hard. She got an idea, “I know! I will call my good friend, the elf! He works for Uncle Santa, so he might have some extra pots we could use. I’m sure he would love to help us make a present for Santa!”

She clapped her hands again. It was quiet for some time and then a blue light appeared and suddenly there was a very friendly looking elf standing in front of them.

“Hello, my good little ice fairy! Why did you call me tonight?” said the elf with great interest.

“Hello, my dear elf, I hope I did not call you at the wrong time. I know Uncle Santa has a lot of work today,” said the fairy.

The elf smiled and said, “Don’t worry, I’m happy you called.”

The little fairy explained the whole story to the elf. The elf happily exclaimed, “Giving a present to Mr. Santa is a lovely idea! You and Max are nice.” Then he looked at them sadly, “But I am sorry. I cannot help you. There are no pots left in Mr. Santa’s workshop to use for his present.”

Max and the fairy were now very sad. The elf saw how sad they were and suddenly got an amazing idea, “Wait, I know what we can do!” He grabbed his pointy red hat and gave

it to Max. “You could put the poinsettia in my hat! It is just the right size, so the plant can be kept safe.”

Max and the fairy smiled again, “This is a great idea! Thank you so much, good elf!”

Max placed the poinsettia carefully in the red hat. The present was ready.

The little ice fairy looked at the present in Max’s hands and said to Max, “Max, our journey is almost over. Now we just need to put the present under Uncle Santa’s Christmas tree, and we are done. Ah, I am so excited!”

The elf watched them and said, “I can take the present and put it under Mr. Santa’s Christmas tree if you want.”

Max said, “That would be perfect!”

“And don’t worry, Max! I will make sure Mr. Santa gets it. Goodbye now! It was nice to meet you, Max! See you around, little ice fairy!” said the elf.

Max and the fairy waved at the elf who disappeared into thin air again.

“Max, I think it’s time for us to leave as well,” said the fairy.

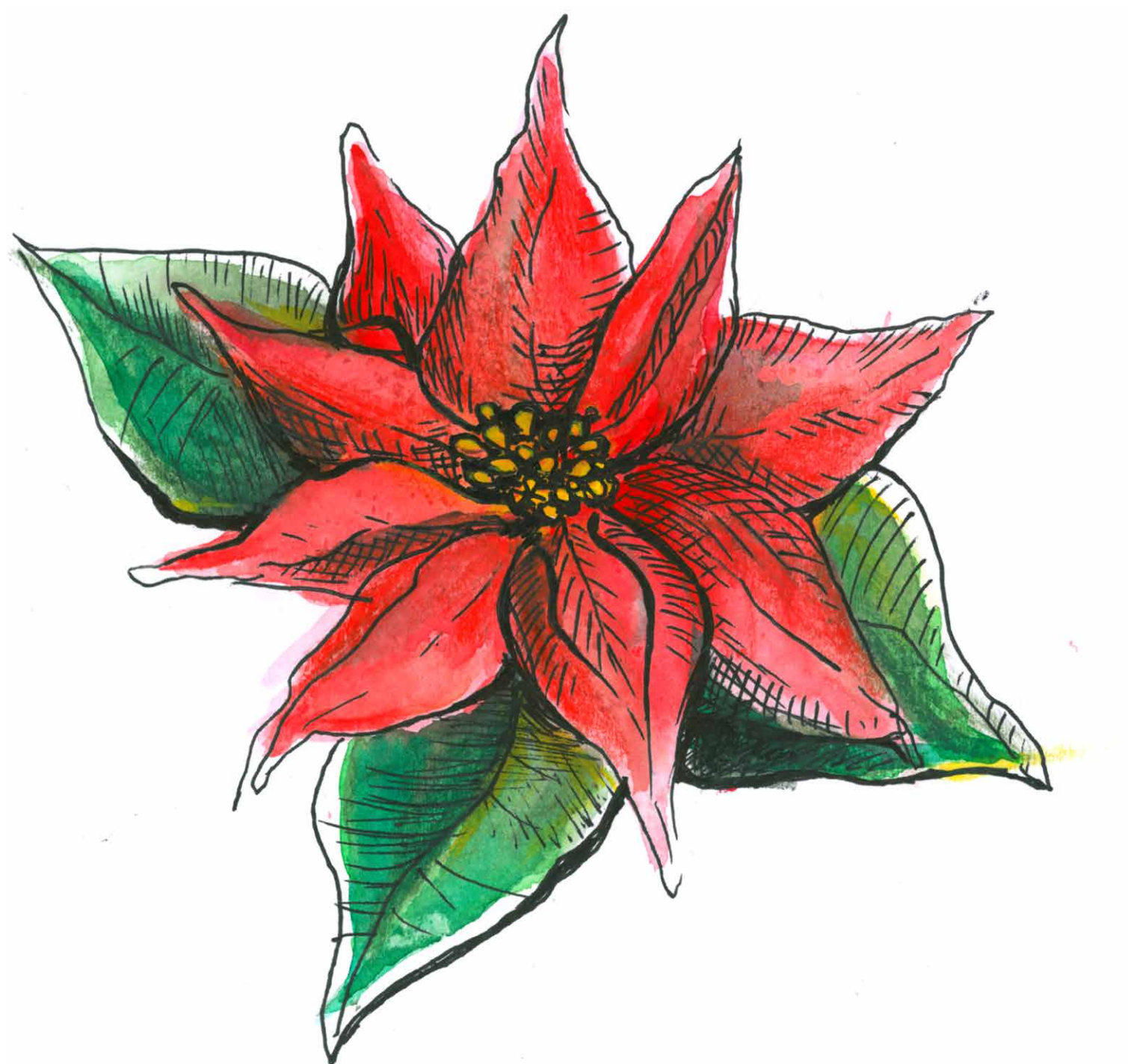
They held hands again. Max closed his eyes and when he opened them again, he saw his house.

He was home. He thanked the little ice fairy and waved her goodbye.

The next morning when Max woke up, he jumped from his bed and ran to see if there was anything underneath the Christmas tree. He noticed there was a note. He read it, “Dear Max. Thank you for the most beautiful present I have ever received. With love, Santa.”

Little Max had never been this happy. He almost forgot to check his own present that was waiting for him under the Christmas tree.

THE END





THE MOST BEAUTIFUL GIFT FOR CHRISTMAS

Nika Marušič
Illustrations by Jerca Rogelj

Once upon a time in the snow-white village, there lived a small family of four. The youngest was a little girl named Sofia. Everyone in the village was older and taller than her, so nobody wanted to play with her. One evening, while she was sitting sad and lonely by the window in her bedroom, she suddenly saw a shooting star glowing in the sky. She was amazed. She had never seen a moving twinkling star in the night sky! She closed her eyes and made a wish. Her wish was to make a friend at Christmas time. She imagined herself and her new friend sitting in the park, holding hands and laughing together.

When Sofia woke up the next morning, she heard a strange noise behind her house. She ran outside and saw a reindeer. Sofia had never seen a reindeer before, so she was scared of him. But then she realized that the reindeer was crying. She felt bad for him and asked, “Why are you sad?”

The reindeer said in a sad voice, “Every year I help Santa Claus deliver the gifts for



children all around the world. But this year while I was playing with my friends, I hit the Christmas tree and scratched my nose. Now I have a red scar.”

“Did you have a lot of friends?” asked Sofia.

“Yes, but when I scratched my nose, everyone laughed at me. They didn’t want to play with me anymore. They also wouldn’t let me fly with Santa on the night before Christmas.”

Sofia knew how he felt. She gave him a warm hug and told him that she could be his friend. The reindeer agreed happily. From that time on, Sofia and the reindeer spent a lot of time together. They played, decorated the Christmas tree, baked cookies and most importantly, they enjoyed being with each other.

On the day before Christmas, the reindeer was sad again. Sofia asked him, “Why are you sad?”

“I’m sad because I won’t be able to help Santa deliver gifts and see all the happy children when they receive the presents,” he said.

Sofia wanted to help him. She remembered she had a pot of red paint at the house. She brought the pot of red paint and carefully painted the reindeer’s nose, so that his whole nose turned red. The scar was no longer visible. Now the reindeer had a red nose and because he didn’t have a name yet, Sofia named him Rudolf. Meanwhile, the reindeer’s friends

started to feel guilty for making fun of him. They decided to look for him and apologize. Since Rudolf had a red shining nose, it was not hard for them to find him. They asked him to help them deliver the presents to children and Rudolf happily joined in. He enjoyed delivering the presents to children a lot. But what made him the happiest was that his friends accepted him exactly as he was.

The children from the village heard the story about Rudolf. They realized that they had treated Sofia very badly.

On Christmas morning, when Sophia woke up, she looked out of the window and there were the children from the village.

A girl cried out, “Sofia, come and play with us.” “Yes, come. We are going to make a snowman”, said another boy. “Come help us”, said another girl.

Sofia was thrilled and overjoyed. She received the most beautiful gift in the world for Christmas. It is called FRIENDSHIP.

THE END





CHRISTMAS IN THE DESERT

Saša Pivk

Illustrations by Tjaša Morela

Try to imagine making a Christmas painting. The first colors you would probably grab are white, some dark blue and some red and green. White for the snow, dark blue for the dark sky above, and red and green for decorations inside the house. Well, forget all of that. When you are reading this story, the images in your mind should be bright yellow and orange, light blue and of course somewhat red, because it is a Christmas story after all. So, let's begin this unusual story.

In the desert, far, far away, in some secluded place in Africa, there was a small, plain, cardboard box. If you listened closely, you could hear some high-pitched voices coming from the box that sounded like people arguing.

“Candy Cane, stop pushing me towards the Bells,” said the Ornament. “I was made in the biggest, most successful, high-class factory in the world. I am very important!”

Candy Cane didn't care. All she wanted was to get out of the box, because she didn't want to waste another minute listening to the jingling of the Bells.

She pushed the Ornament again, the Ornament bumped the Bells, and the Bells



started singing, “Jingle bells, jingle bells, jingle all the way ...” for the three hundred and fifteenth time. Then the box fell onto the side and they all rolled out into the sand.

Candy Cane looked around and was very surprised. She saw sand dunes everywhere. How come there is not a single house, a tree, or a little candy shop, where she could be admired by the kids? She was confused. “What are we doing here? Weren’t we on Santa’s sleigh just a moment ago?” Candy Cane was quickly interrupted by the Bells.

“Twinkle, twinkle little star, WHY IS THERE SO MUCH SAND IN THIS LAND???” they started screaming.

The Ornament was crying. “I am not stepping on this hot sand. It could burn off my design!”, he said.

Candy Cane couldn't believe what the Ornament was saying. She could feel the sun melting her red stripes. “I am literally melting and I am not complaining. Man up!” she said.

The Ornament wondered, “Why would Santa leave us here? There is no snow, no children and no Christmas trees as he had promised us.”

The Ornament loved the idea of Christmas. He was always told how great it was to sit on the Christmas tree. He had been dreaming of that day. “Everyone admires and praises you and you keep hanging there, looking awfully important. You then stay on the tree for a

month. And if you are very lucky, you can stay on the tree even longer!” he said.

Candy Cane hopped to the box again and read the address label. It said, “For someone who needs some Christmas spirit”.

“Forsomeonewhoneedssomechristmasspirit... what a long, funny surname!” she exclaimed.

“Well, I guess, we should find this family then,” proposed the Ornament.

“Bells, you can come with us. But only if you stop jingling,” said Candy Cane.

The Bells were so happy to get out of the desert, where their sound was lost in the wind. They started murmuring, “We wish you a merry Christmas, we wish you a merry Christmas, we wish you a merry Christmas and a happy new year...”. They jingled their way to the Ornament and Candy Cane.

While they were walking, the Ornament said, “Do you think we will see the snow when we climb over this hill of sand?”

Candy Cane replied, “Well, you can already see it. Let me explain. There are two types of snow. One is white and cold and the other is orange and hot. As easy as that. The orange snow is called the sand. I guess we must be in some exotic place where the snow is orange.”

“Hum, interesting,” said the Ornament.

They must have been walking for more than a mile when they saw an unusual plant in front of them.

“Do you see that?” asked Candy Cane.

“Yes! It is big, it is green, and it has some pink flowers on. I think it is a decorated Christmas tree!” the Ornament exclaimed happily.

Candy Cane observed the tree, “This must be a special tree. Look, it has thorns all over. You should hop on it.”

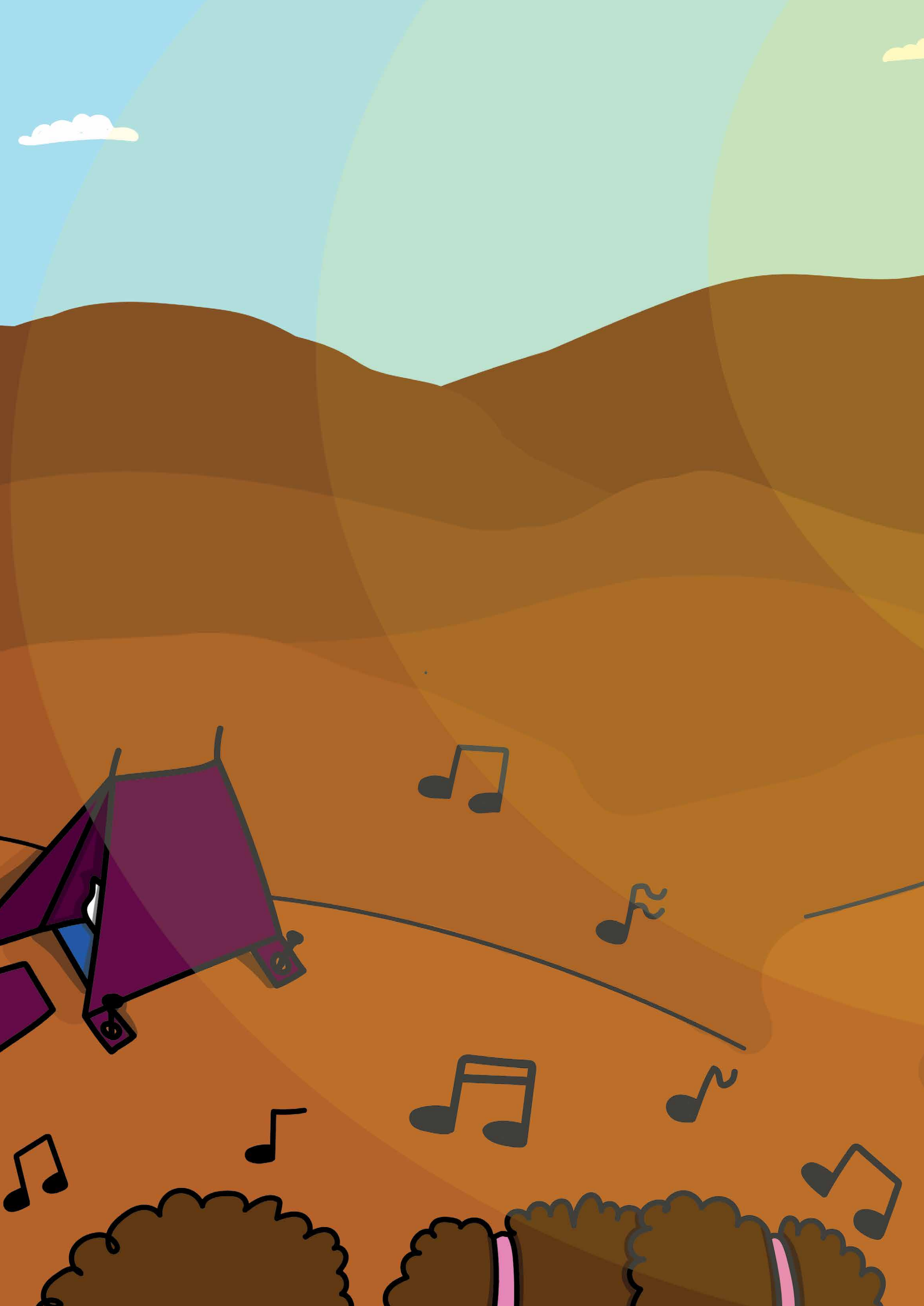
The Ornament was so excited that he jumped on the thorn. His dreams came true. “My design goes perfectly with the pink flowers,” said the Ornament proudly.

In that moment, they saw some poorly dressed children walking towards them. Candy Cane’s dreams came true. She could see the children’s eyes shining when they saw her. She wanted to be part of every child’s happiness.

The children started singing out loud all the Christmas songs they knew. They started dancing around the “Christmas tree” while the Bells were ringing the melody. Their dreams also came true.

The Ornament, Candy Cane and the Bells knew they had found someone who desperately needed some Christmas spirit. They spent their first Christmas a bit differently than most of us: with orange snow and a cactus Christmas tree – but with the happiest children in the world.

THE END





THE ONE WHO NEED CHRISTMAS SPIRIT



SANTA'S SECRET

Julija Poljanec

Illustrations by Grega Križnar

Once upon a time in a land far, far away, there was an elf called Don. He was living happily and peacefully. He had a poor, but loving family. Don's family lived at the edge of a forest. Don was the youngest of seven siblings and the most curious of them all. Every year for Christmas, Don wanted to meet Santa and ask him what his secret was. But he never did, because he would always fall asleep too soon.

But, on this Christmas Eve, his long-held wish came true. He stayed up all night. He waited and waited by the Christmas tree – a big Christmas tree decorated with beautiful lights and ornaments. This Christmas tree was decorated with love, so it was really beautiful.

In the middle of the night, Don heard someone climbing down the chimney. It was Santa! Don screamed with excitement, “I would like to know your secret, Santa!”

Don looked deep into Santa's eyes. He leaned over to Santa and whispered in his ear, “How can you do this job, year after year?”

Don't you run out of presents when you give them away all over the world?"

Santa smiled kindly and said, "Don't ask me such hard questions. Don't you want a toy?"

Don shook his head. Santa sighed and thought for a moment.

"Listen to me now," said Santa with a twinkle in his eyes, "my secret will make you a little sad, but wise at the same time. My bag is magical. It holds millions of toys that I give away on Christmas Eve. But even though I visit everyone, I don't always leave gifts or toys. In some homes, children are hungry. In others, they are sad. There is more love in my bag than toys. This bag never runs out of love and joy. It contains prayers and hopes. And the more I take from the bag, the fuller it is, because by bringing love I fulfil everyone's dreams."

Santa continued, "And you know what? You have a bag too. And it's just as magical as mine. From the beginning until the end, it is always full. It is the center of your light and love. It is in your heart. And if you want to help me on Christmas Eve, don't bother with the presents underneath the Christmas tree."

Little Don's eyes were glowing.

"Now I have to leave," Santa said.

"Santa," said Don, "thank you for telling me your secret."



“Will you help me share this wisdom? Will you use what you know now?” asked Santa.

Don stopped for a moment, placed his little hand on Santa's heart, and whispered, “I will!”

THE END

SANTA'S HAT

Jana Steele

Illustrations by Valentina Kaluža

Once upon a time in the very North of the Earth, there lived an elf called Freddy. He was one of Santa's best workers. However, he was a very naughty elf. He liked to tease other elves and sometimes he even teased Santa. His friends and Santa were angry at first, but then they laughed at his funny pranks.

One day just before Christmas Eve, elf Freddy had an idea. It was one of his pranks. In the freezing cold night when everyone was sleeping, he sneaked into Santa's bedroom and took his hat. He decided to hide it in one of the presents that the elves had wrapped for the kids.

In the morning, Santa woke up very confused. He was looking for his hat everywhere, but he couldn't find it. He was desperate. You may not know, but Santa's hat is the source of his magical powers. Without his hat, he is no longer Santa Claus – he is just an ordinary man. So he continued looking for the hat but couldn't find it. He asked all the elves if they had seen it. No one had seen it. Even elf Freddy shook his head. He





didn't know that without the hat Santa had no magical powers. He thought it was just a funny prank.

The day passed by, and it was Christmas Eve. Santa wanted to prepare his sleigh and harness his reindeers. But problems started to occur. Without his hat, he couldn't talk to the reindeers. He said, "Come here!" three times, but the reindeers didn't understand him. Then, Santa wanted to fill his big brown bag with all the presents. But he wasn't strong enough to carry the bag. The elves saw what was going on and immediately started to search for his hat.

Elf Freddy saw that without Santa's hat there wouldn't be any Christmas. So, he quickly ran to take the hat out of the present where he had hidden it. But when he came to Santa's workshop, there were no presents left. They had already been packed in Santa's big brown bag.

There were only four hours left until midnight. It was impossible to open every present to find the hat, wrap them again and deliver them to children all around the world. Without his magical powers, Santa Claus couldn't do anything. It looked like children would not get any presents that year.

Everyone was thinking very hard about what to do. Then, out of nowhere, came our

elf Freddy with a plan. What would we do without elf Freddy? He had his hands full of papers and his eyes were shining.

He presented his plan, “Every elf at the North Pole will take some presents and deliver them to children. There are thousands of elves; if each elf goes to one town, we will finish by midnight. And oh! I prepared posters to look for the missing hat. Please hang them up in every town you visit!” and he showed the poster saying:

“Santa’s hat missing. If you find it, please bring it to Santa Claus, 123 Elf Road, North Pole 88888.”

Santa and the elves agreed with the plan as they had no better idea. So every elf took some presents and was on his way.

It was just ten minutes before midnight when the elves started coming back to the North Pole from all sides of the world. They made it! Children got their presents and didn’t even know that it wasn’t Santa who had delivered them. The elves were very tired, but happy that they did a good job.

The next morning there was a long line of people in front of Santa’s door. Boys and girls, young and old, tall and short, everyone came with their hats to see if they could give Santa his hat back. Santa began trying on one hat at a time. Some were too small. Some









were not even red. Some were just right but had no magic powers. Santa almost gave up.

The last one in the line was a little boy. He had a hat that looked like Santa's. He said it was in his present even though he didn't wish for it. Santa Claus tried it on. He immediately felt the magic in his body. Indeed, it was his hat!

Everyone at the North Pole was happy! Santa Claus was back and that meant there would be many more Christmases in the future. Santa gave the little boy a ride home with his sleigh and thanked him very much for bringing the hat back.

Elf Freddy apologized. He apologized to Santa because he took his hat and he apologized to the elves because they had to work harder than usual to deliver the presents. But, Freddy did something right. He was the one who came up with the plan to deliver the presents on time, so the others were not too mad at him.

Freddy decided to be a good elf from then on. Well, he still played some of his pranks from time to time. The year passed and the day before next Christmas, Santa Claus woke up without his shoes... Oh Freddy, have you been playing with Santa's shoes this time?!

THE END

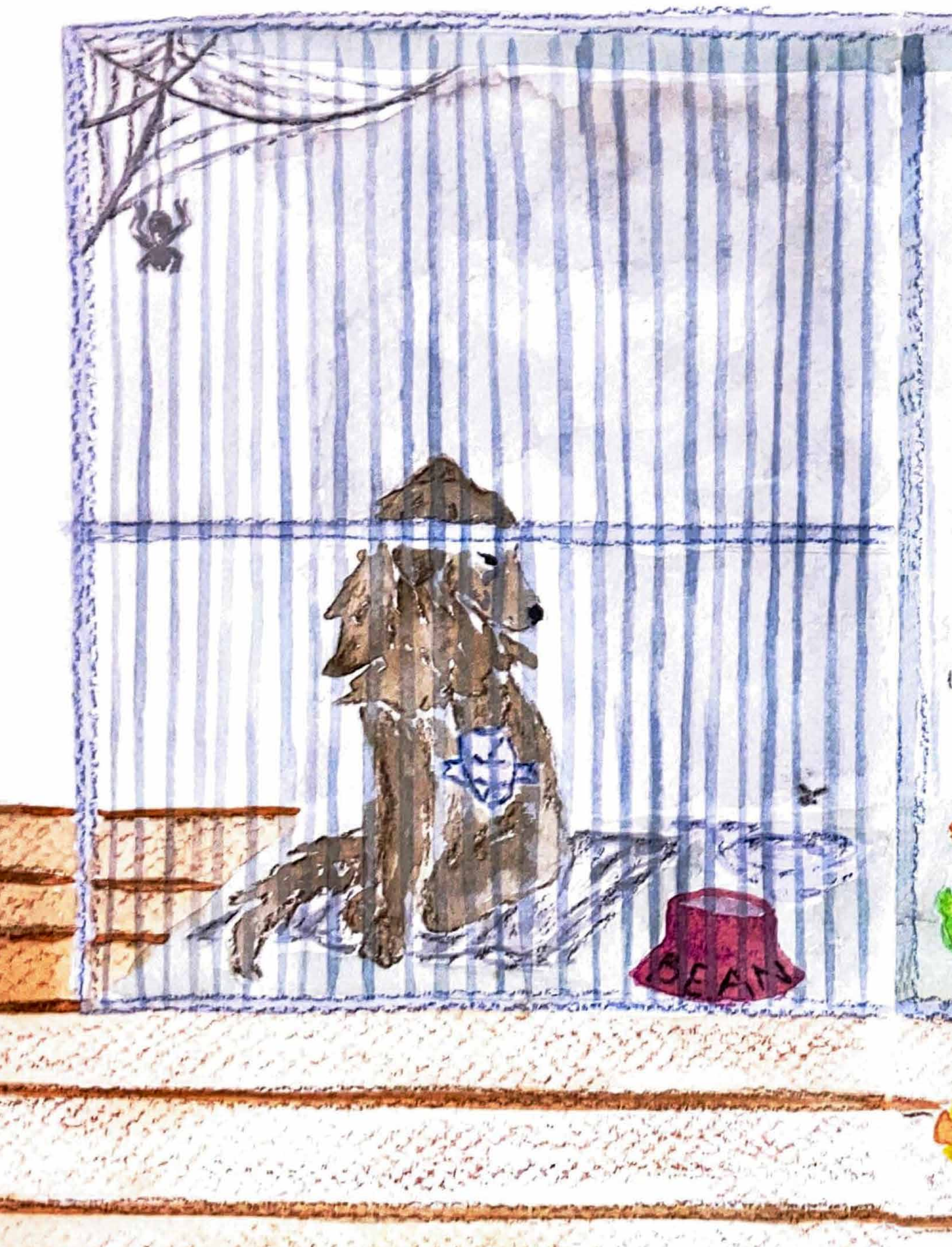
MERRY CHRISTMAS, BEAN

Ana Manca Ruparčič
Illustrations by Klementina Zavšek

A long time ago in your hometown, there was an animal shelter. In this small shelter, there were small cages. In these cages lived even smaller animals. Most of the animals were wanted as pets and were adopted very fast. But there, at the end of the hallway, lay an old, gray, tired-looking dog. His name was Bean. Bean had only three legs. He had lost one in a car accident as a puppy. Because of his disability, his previous family no longer wanted to take care of him and put Bean in the shelter.

When people came looking for a pet, Bean was always left out. They never noticed him. No one was interested in adopting a disabled dog with only three legs. People always took young, cute, furry pets, but no one took Bean. When Bean first came to the shelter, he was full of hope. He believed that he would get a new friendly family soon. He greeted people with a wagging tail and sparkling eyes.

One day, a businessman came to the shelter, looking for a puppy for his daughter. When he saw Bean smiling at him with his





warm eyes, the man said, “And what is this monster doing here? Who would even want this dog? He only has three legs.” This broke Bean's heart. At that moment, he began to believe that he would never get a new family because of his disability. Bean's eyes lost all their sparkle, and he sadly tucked his tail between the legs.

Every year for Christmas, people were rushing to get gifts. But nobody ever looked at Bean. Bean wasn't excited. He just lay there in his cage, tired and sad.

A day before Christmas, a little girl and her father entered the shelter. The little girl's name was Daisy and she wanted a dog. Because Daisy sounded so excited, Bean raised his head a little to look at her. He immediately noticed that something was different. Daisy had a bandage covering one of her eyes. Bean had never seen anything like that.

Daisy ran down the row of cages, passing other animals. She stopped right at Bean's cage. Bean and Daisy looked at each other and Bean saw the joy in her smile. She looked at his missing leg, smiled, and said, “Hello, you. You look so cute and I love your name. I see one of your legs is missing.”

Bean was sure that she probably didn't want to adopt him. But then, something strange happened. Daisy said, “Look, Bean,

I'm missing one eye. I lost it when I was just a baby. I know how it feels to be different. I'm lucky to have parents who love me despite my disability. Both my dads love me so much!"

Then Daisy said something that Bean thought he would never hear, "Daddy! We are taking Bean home!" Tears of joy started running down Bean's snout. He started shaking and wagging his tail wildly!

Bean was happy. He felt accepted and loved again! Daisy took Bean into her arms, wrapped him in a cozy blanket, and offered him a treat. He snuggled his head into her neck and enjoyed the closeness that he had missed so much. Daisy and her father took Bean home. They gave him everything he needed. It was love at first sight for everyone in the family.

Bean was finally happy because he got a loving family, who accepted him and loved him unconditionally. It was definitely the best Christmas present that Bean had ever received in his entire life.

THE END





ALLY AND THE SPILLED HOT CHOCOLATE

Sanja Ivančević and Ana Pavlinič
Illustrations by Maja Bobnar

Once upon a time, there was a little mouse. Her name was Ally. She was exactly five years old. She was very smart and friendly. She had a big family. Her family included papa mouse, mama mouse, older brother John, older sister Lena, twins Leo and Mao, and grandparents Lucinda and Arthur. They all lived together in a small house under three bridges. Ally was a happy mouse, and she loved her family. She loved spending time with them. But most of all, she loved spending Christmas with them. However, things took a different turn this time.

It was Christmas morning. Ally was the first one in her family to wake up. She jumped out of bed and put on her red dress. She brushed her hair and tied it back with a red ribbon. Ally was excited to start her day.

She went to wake up her parents, but they just yelled at her, “Go away, Ally! We want to sleep.”

She went to wake up her brothers and sisters, but they just squeaked, “Leave us alone, Ally.”

She went to check up if her grandparents were awake, but they were snoring, “Zzz.”

Ally was sad that everyone was still sleeping. She went to the kitchen and decided to make hot chocolate. She started warming the milk and added the chocolate. But, oh no, she burnt it! She tried to drink it, but it tasted bad. “Yuck”, she said.

She decided to throw the hot chocolate away, but she spilled it all over the floor! Ally went to find some paper towels to wipe it up, but there were no paper towels at the house!

Ally was scared that her parents would be angry because she made a mess. “I will go to the store and buy some milk and paper towels!” she decided. She put on her coat, her scarf, her earmuffs and her winter boots. She unlocked the door and went outside. But she forgot to write a note to her parents to tell them where she went.

The weather outside was cold and windy. Ally took a few turns – left, right, right and then left again... but oh no, she was lost! Ally wandered around for a long time, trying to find the store. Then, an old mouse man called her. She looked at him. He had a strange smile, and his eyes were not friendly. She





remembered that her mom told her: “Ally, never talk to strangers!” and she got scared. She quickly ran away to hide in the bushes.

It was getting dark, and Ally was hungry and scared. She missed her parents. Then she saw two friendly mouse police officers. She walked towards them. One police officer asked her, “Where are your mom and dad, little mouse?” Ally started to cry. She told the police officer the whole story. The police officers asked her, “Where do you live, little mouse?” and promised, “Don’t worry, we will walk you home.”

Meanwhile, Ally’s parents woke up and noticed that Ally was missing. They turned the whole house upside down but she was nowhere to be found! Mama mouse called her, “Ally! Where are you, honey?” But there was no reply.

Ally’s family searched for her almost all day. They were really worried. It was already dark and papa mouse decided to ask the neighbors, “Have you seen Ally?”

“Yes,” they said, “she was walking alone outside in the morning.”

Papa mouse asked them, “Which way did she go? Right or left?”

The neighbors did not know...

And then finally papa mouse saw two tall mouse police officers walking towards

the house. And – who was there with them? Ally! He scurried towards them and hugged his daughter. He was very happy but very angry too!

“Thank you, police officers, for bringing Ally home!” said papa mouse. And then he wagged his finger at Ally, “Next time tell us before you leave the house, young lady!”

Ally returned home with her papa. At home, everyone was happy that she was back. They all hugged her and cried happy tears. They sat around the table, ate Christmas dinner and drank hot chocolate. Ally told them that she burnt and spilt the milk – but they all only laughed! Before they knew it, it was snowing outside. Everyone went outside to play in the snow and to have some terrific mouse fun.

THE END

Holiday Celebrations

Storytelling for EFL Young Learners

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