

AYLCEE TARHA

ADVENT CALENDAR

**A COLLECTION OF ORIGINAL STORIES
ONE STORY PER HOLIDAY EVENING**



ÉDITIONS AYLCÉE-TARHA@AYLCÉE-TARHA ÉDITIONS

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Children: (with parental supervision)

- Clara, A Witch's Love, Vol. 1, fantasy tale
- Clara and the Stone Circle, Vol. 2, fantasy tale
- The Feudal Trio, The LMJ1, fantasy tale
- Winning Square, The LMJ2, fantasy tale
- The Elemental Peoples, collection of short stories

Teenagers: (with parental supervision)

- Dualities, romance novel
- The Elemental Peoples, collection of short stories

Adults:

- Dualities, romance novel
- Epidamos, science fiction/fantasy novel
- Feudalities, Vol. 1, heroic fantasy novel
- Freedoms, Vol. 2, heroic fantasy novel
- Fears in Troubled Waters, mystery novel

Free

Children

- Tales of Yesteryear 1, collection of 3 Tales
- Tales of Yesteryear 2, a collection of 2 tales
- Advent Farandole, an advent calendar
- Little Stories, a collection of tales
- Cocotte's Great Adventures
- The Undesirables

Teenagers

- Tales of Yesteryear 1, a collection of 3 stories
- Tales of Yesteryear 2, a collection of 2 stories
- Stray Tales, a collection of 5 short stories

Adults

- Stray Tales, a collection of 5 short stories
- The Unexpected Dinner
- The Elevator

- Predictions
- Chemical Atmosphere

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DEDICATION

This Advent Calendar contains short stories and tales to create a warm and friendly atmosphere between parents and children, along with a whole host of surprises. Each story is complete and original.

I am an independent author and publisher.

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(illustrations from CANVA Pro)

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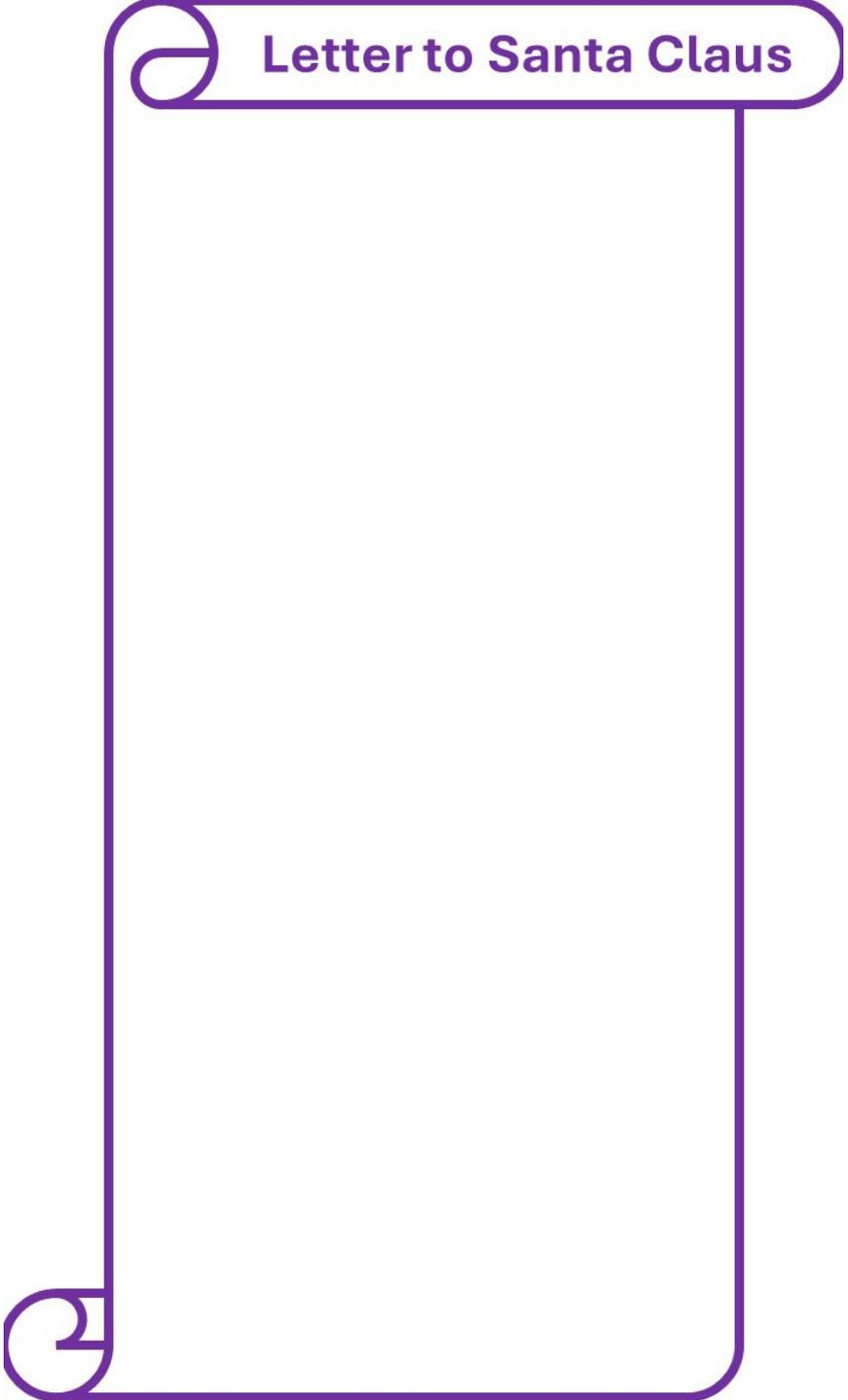
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Letter to Santa Claus

GOOD TO KNOW!

ADVENT traditionally begins on 1 December, although this can vary from year to year. However, for calendar reasons, the relevant official authorities have recommended for several years since around 2000 that it should be held on the four Sundays before Christmas. For example, in 2025, it will begin on Sunday 30 November and end on 24 December 2025.

For my part, I remain faithful to tradition. However, I am adding extra stories to begin on 30 November 2025. Everyone is free to do as they wish! It is the anticipation of Christmas, a moral and spiritual pause with pagan, secular and traditional connotations. We need to unite to form a group, a people of one mind. Light surrounds each of us; it is up to us to adapt it for peace.

Everyone will take it upon themselves to choose the festive side of this pre-Christian celebration. Solidarity and fraternity have always been a two-way street. When we reach out to others, we expect them to reach out to us, because without reciprocity, it has no human value. Otherwise, where is civility, or worse, civilisation? During this warm period, three essential points come to light:

-(Saint) Barbara on the 4th: cups of wheat or lentils to germinate, stems to eat for vitality: fertility for the home.

-(Saint) Nicholas on the 5th and 6th: gifts to fill the wait for Christmas, children kept busy with crafts, sports, cooking and rituals depending on the region.

-(Saint) Lucy on the 13th: children serving their parents, offering them breakfast in bed, lighting a candle in the evening.

The traditional aim is to make children wait for the main event, which is the secular truce of the arrival of Christmas presents for adults and children alike. If religious: midnight mass. If secular: positive exchanges over a lunch or dinner. If pagan: around a decorated tree in the garden. Some groups get together with family and pray together with

friends.

The ancients gathered during the winter solstice, usually on 21 December, to mark the cold season, a tradition taken up by many different ideologies, such as our Celtic ancestors, whose original European roots lay between nature and humanity. The current aim is to bring family and friends together every festive weekend for evenings of storytelling, anecdotes about morality, joy, love and serenity.

In economically rich countries such as Europe, the United States, the British Isles, Russia, China, Japan, Australia and emerging countries, Advent calendars containing sweets, chocolates, biscuits, liqueurs, beers, surprises, miniature toys, jewellery and more are popping up on shop shelves. Families add thoughts, poems, prayers, good deeds to do, wishes, songs, nursery rhymes...

In my experience as a granddaughter in the late 1950s, my grandmother would hang a small green cloth bag on my bedroom door handle every day, which she filled with dried fruit, marzipan, sugar candies and chocolate coins. It was a time when each child received one toy, one book and some mandarins. There was room for the imagination and dreams brought by books! This is what today's youth are missing.

I did the same thing with my children in the late 1970s and late 1990s, adding more contemporary gifts. You have to move with the times so you don't get called a retrograde by your children ! You can make your own by adding jokes, stories, rebuses, drawings, puzzles, clues to solve a riddle, guessing games, trinkets, and card games!

If you want to keep it classic, add a picture book, a little money, a small perfume, makeup samples collected throughout the year, etc. Use your imagination! Everything you put together should be imbued with friendship and affection, because Advent is a time for tender and gentle bonding, silence and contemplation, thoughtful discussions and concrete actions, help and support.

Crafts

Lentils, wheat, dried vegetables

Place some cotton wool in a small dish, moisten the surface, add dry green, yellow and brown lentils, water them gently every two days, place them in a warm spot and wait a few days for the first sprouts to appear. Green shoots will gradually appear and on Christmas Day, place them on the decorated Christmas Eve table to add a touch of greenery to your home.

Here are some creative ideas: place them in the middle of a centrepiece wreath, or in ramekins for each guest as place cards to take home as souvenirs, or around gifts, or between the nativity scene and the Christmas tree, or in front of windows for wild birds. A beautiful festive decoration for a friendly or family table! A gentle protection for the home! A kind invitation between neighbours and friends!

A brief history of fertility

One day, a woman tried to become a mother, but to no avail. She had everything: status, money, beauty, health, comfort. Nothing worked. A beggar came by and asked her for shelter for the night. She granted him his request and invited him to eat at her table with the honours due to distinguished guests. He was extremely touched, wondered at her generosity and asked her, intrigued:

'Fair lady, why do you serve me so well, a wanderer?'

She looked at him intently and smiled broadly:

'You are much richer than I am here on earth: you have many children, whereas I have none, despite my efforts.'

A tear rolled down her cheek, which she quickly wiped away out of modesty.

The next day, he left early, leaving this note for his hostess:

'You are pregnant, take care and be patient.'

Indeed, she was. Faith in life and hope are enough!

Original Ideas

On the first Sunday of Advent and for the following three Sundays, in Germanic countries, a candle is lit to celebrate the four cardinal points and bring light for the coming year, the joy of being together, white for faith of any kind, red for pagan or secular celebrations, lit alternately. Wreaths made of raffia, greenery and cardboard are crafted.

Ribbons, cotton, rhinestones, bells, baubles, Christmas decorations such as cherubs, garlands, bows and mistletoe are added: symbols of love, kindness, serenity and welcome. Don't forget to start writing your Christmas invitations or greeting cards from 7 December onwards, drawing them yourself for all those dear to your heart! What a wonderful time this pre-Christmas period is!

Even and especially if it reminds you of a death or an unfortunate incident in your life, it will greatly soften the blow, placing it in the warm light of the festive season. Positivity will come to your aid by reminding you of the happy times you spent together! Praying and making a wish can also ease the pain of loss. Placing a photo or personal item will bring them back to life in peace, in your heart and mind.



(St) Nicholas

name of Santa Claus's ancestor

In Alsace, tradition has it that on the night of 2 December, each child lines up a pair of shoes near the fireplace (or radiator or stove), singing or whispering:

'(Saint) Nicholas, my good patron (guide),
Bring me macaroons (and daisies),
Mirabelle plums for the pretty young ladies,
Marshmallow sticks for the boys!
Fill my stocking and my shoes, (St) Nicholas, please'.

The festivities are celebrated on 5 and 6 December. He is known from northern to eastern Europe, riding his white horse with the famous Père Fouettard and his whip and large sack for their rounds, sitting on his grey donkey. From the 5th onwards, children wait for him, looking outside to see if they can spot the old man going from rooftop to chimney, along the paths with his sack of presents and sweets.

He knocks on every door to offer gifts and sweets with his accomplice Père Fouettard! One gives and the other scares! Good and evil reincarnated! One rewards and the other threatens! Joy and sorrow mixed together! The second character is , dressed in brown or black, with furs on top to represent the ugliness of the nasty serf, his hand holding a whip to beat naughty children.

His sack is empty, ready to fill with naughty children, while Father Christmas' sack is full of goodies for well-behaved children. He is dressed in a long red coat under his white guide's clothes, with his crook in one hand, his mitre on his head, and a beautiful white beard. A traditional Christian image symbolising the positive aspects of life.

He embodies the good patron, the good man, the protector of engaged couples, young children, teenagers, young adults, prisoners of war, sailors and the hungry, hence the ritual of a place at the table in every home for a beggar or pilgrim on Christmas Eve. From the early Middle Ages

onwards, there was a beautiful tradition that is increasingly being lost: the place for the stranger, the wanderer.

It consisted of adding a place setting for a surprise guest.

In the Middle Ages, it was for travellers who stopped for the night.

In certain regions of France, this custom was particularly dedicated to those who had died during the year. Nowadays, this act of brotherhood could be perpetuated for lonely elderly people, those in poverty or distress, the sick, injured or disabled. This is also the spirit of Christmas! Brotherly sharing, a helping hand, warmth of heart, too often scorned.

Children accept the idea of hoping for presents such as gifts and clothes, and they become actors: writing a letter to this smiling man to ask him not to forget them came later: what could be more wonderful? ! ! !...

Hey! By the way, have you written your letter, without forgetting anything, eh?

The letter is important, and it must be accompanied by a drawing! First, say hello! Then explain whether you've been good or bad, write a list of the toys you want, promise to try harder next year, say hello to the elves in the woods, and sign off with lots of kisses...



The history of today's Father Christmas

Brought to North America by Dutch and German immigrants, St. Nicholas became Santa Claus in the 17th century. He was a traditional link to their beloved European homelands. In the early 19th century, a new commercial image was created of a good-natured, good-humoured man who became the Santa Claus we know today. All smiles, with a rough but fair personality!

The proud (St.) Nicholas is an austere but respected and feared cousin. Added to this image of the famous Father Christmas is the mystery of his birth. We must find an approximate date of birth for him to bring him as close as possible to the original truth. We search and find traces of his origins around the 13th century, a Sir Noeus. From European soil, we jump to the British Isles.

Then, in the 17th century, we discover his trail in popular Christmas songs: a man hooded in a large cape, warming the Universal Child, son of the ancestral Celtic god Bel or Belenos, god of fire, and therefore of the warmth of the hearth or campfire. This great giant dressed in dark colours, with a heavy winegatherer's hood borrowed from the god of wine and leather boots.

To legitimise itself, the United States needed a popular image to unite and socialise. The spiritual father of our Father Christmas is American, Mr Clement Clarke Moore, Doctor of Theology. He felt a force emanating from this paternal figure, offering a projection of the role of men in couples who were relaxing their more or less macho customs, with women wanting to work.

This relates to the caustic sociology of its early modern period.

In 1822, for his children, he described our old man for the first time: '... how his eyes sparkled! How his dimples laughed! (...) he had a broad face and a small round belly that jiggled when he laughed (...) he was the size of an elf

and carried a bundle of toys on his shoulder; he travelled in a sleigh pulled by eight tiny reindeer! Forty years later, Father Christmas became real!

In 1863, Thomas Nast, an illustrator for a major American daily newspaper, brought this famous character to life. He described him as a smiling man with a white beard, an affectionate gaze, chubby cheeks, a big belly, a calm disposition, lively gestures, peaceful words, a gruff voice, and a fur-trimmed cloak: he was born or reborn from the ashes!

In France, from the 19th century onwards, this Christmas man fitted in very easily with the festivities: this man with his sleigh going from roof to roof, from city to village, taking on the job of postman for gifts, appealed to adults and children alike. And it was thanks to Paris and its surrounding region, which embraced this friendly and warm figure, that he became emblematic, even inspiring a famous song.



Popular song

Little Father Christmas!

It's a beautiful Christmas night
The snow is spreading its white blanket
And with their eyes raised to the sky,
On their knees, the little children,
Before closing their eyes,
Say one last prayer.

{Chorus)

Little Father Christmas
When you come down from the sky
With thousands of toys
Don't forget my little shoe
But before you leave
You'll need to wrap up warm
It's going to be so cold outside
It's partly my fault
I can't wait for the day to dawn
To see if you've brought me
All the beautiful toys I see in my dreams
And that I ordered from you

(Chorus)

The sandman has come
The children are going to sleep
And you can start
With your sack on your back
To the sound of church bells
Your distribution of surprises
And when you're on your beautiful cloud
Come first to our house
I haven't been very good every day
But I ask for forgiveness...

Repeat the chorus (twice)

Symbols of Advent

The Fir Tree

The evergreen fir tree, filling the house with winter scents and bringing nature into the home, remains the embodiment of man's earthly origins. A protector of contemplation, it takes pride of place in the living room so that everyone can enjoy it to the full: its stature commands respect. Adorned with long garlands, multicoloured baubles, decorations evoking faith (angels, bells) and festive secularism (bows, wreaths), its branches shade the gifts on the morning of the 25th. It preserves the ritual tradition like a silent but active and reassuring guardian.

The Fireplace

The fireplace played an essential role in the legend of Father Christmas until wood heating became less common.

It was the heart of the home, the gathering place for the whole family, the link between heaven and earth: the story of gifts, presents and treats passing through this passageway was a miracle experienced by all, a real anticipation. The discovery of nature's treasures in stockings: oranges, apples, mandarins, dried fruit, chocolates, biscuits, books, coins, scarves, pouches, ties.



Legend of the Good Fairy of our countryside

During the long winter evenings, in a bygone era, everyone would gather together to feel less alone. There was solidarity in the countryside and in every village there were storytellers, guardians of traditions. There was also a legend that spread throughout the regions...

'Once upon a time, there was a kind and beautiful fairy who returned six times during Advent, once every four days, to sow seeds of love in minds weary from a year of labour. She offered men, women and children seven virtues: kindness, brotherhood, goodness, respect, generosity, tenderness and love. She entered every house and left a large chest filled with food and gifts. The villagers feasted to their hearts' content.

'And then, one year, she did not come. Their hearts no longer desired her! Human beings forgot her... And without their hearts, she could not live! And so she disappeared!'

What a sad story! But... Maybe... There's a chance she'll find her way back to us: will you try with me? Yes? No? Maybe? Well then! Take her place and create seven little miracles around you for the people you love! One small action for each of the seven beautiful virtues:

- be kind to your parents, neighbours, friends,
- don't get angry or fight with your friends or acquaintances,
- help an elderly or disabled person,
- respect your siblings and cousins,
- give your old toys to children in need,
- give hugs to grandparents in general and those in your family,
- love life and people for who they are...

I am sure you will find other ideas that suit your lifestyle. On behalf of the Emotive Fairy, I thank you for the wonderful and good efforts you will make...

History of Provençal santons

During the French Revolution, families acquired figurines representing Jesus, Mary, Joseph, shepherds and their sheep, and then gradually the nativity scene (manger, stable, cave, star, bridges). These figures were displayed in spun glass cases (a technique used by Italian glassmakers). Look but don't touch! They represented the art of glassmaking of yesteryear! Only the bourgeoisie could afford them!

A few generations later, these santons were transformed into wax (spiritual), breadcrumbs (workers) and wood (craftsmen). They measured between 10 and 35 cm and were painted or dressed in fabric (administrative employees). The Provençals made them out of clay on bases, painted and varnished, then dressed them: 'Clay is to the santonnier what man is to God'.

Nowadays, they are made of wood, plaster, lead and plastic, but the real nativity scene remains that of Provence, with its warm colours. It is this sunny and warm region that has given the art of santon (little saint) its letters of nobility. They included the donkey, the ox, the angels, the three wise men, and the local and social activities of yesteryear: miller, baker, water carrier, dowser, winegrower, woodcutter.

They are arranged against a backdrop of mountains, green and cheerful hills (moss, cork, thyme and sand) sloping down to the plains and the Mediterranean coast. It has become the symbol of Provence and a true art of living. The nativity scene is created without the emblems of Christianity (removing the duo and the child), leaving only the three wise men. The children will create a school in place of the stable!



The tale of the Green Goblin, bearer of hope

Among storytellers from all regions of France and Navarre, there are tales that intersect, resemble each other and come from a common oral tradition. Here is one that is no exception to the rule. Quite the contrary... it reinforces it! Dare to create your own!

There was a custom that brought good cheer, offered joy to everyone, and brightened up the whole household. Who performed such a miracle, you may ask? A dwarf: the Green Goblin, travelling over hill and dale! Originally from Ireland, he had ended up there, in our natural surroundings.

He would come out of the attic where he slept throughout the year and perform little miracles of everyday life during Advent until Christmas, for twenty-four days:

- repairing a broken toy, making a new one from several broken ones, tinkering with a wooden puzzle and varnishing it,
- giving out chocolates, sweets, confectionery, making papillotes, biscuits, baking brioches, cakes and gingerbread,
- washing the dishes, tidying the bedrooms, clearing out the attic, garage, laundry room, pantry or cellar,
- sorting through personal belongings to give to those in need, visiting the sick, elderly, neighbours,
- setting a good example to others, tutoring foreign children, talking about traditions and vice versa in exchange,
- not using bad language, insults or threats, explaining moral, social and human values,
- give kisses when you get angry, know how to question yourself, help or rescue animals in danger,
- saving plant species or forests, coastlines, defending marine and terrestrial biodiversity...

Today, this little Advent character no longer exists...

But you could bring him back to life by showing 7 acts of kindness to those you love and those around you... To do this, I suggest the following: Become this friendly little dwarf

and put the names of 7 people who are dear to you in a bowl. 7 gifts to come up with during Advent. 7 actions to take. This is just an example to follow as you see fit and in good conscience!

Think about what kind things you could do for these seven people around you. I am sure that deep down you will find a wealth of ingenuity to recreate an atmosphere that comes from your heart. Songs, dance, music, poems, maxims...

I have faith...

Good luck!

A little festive cooking!

Disguised Fruit

-Take some dates and cut them lengthwise. -Remove the stones and arrange them on a serving dish. -Line them up next to each other in a rosette shape. -Adapt if the plate is round, oval, square or rectangular.

-Take some pink, white or green marzipan.

-Slice them lengthwise to the size of the open date.

-Stuff the dates and alternate them by colour.

Alternatively: use prunes or dried apricots.

Every Sunday, arrange trays of sweets as above. You have three recipes by changing the fruit!



(St.) Lucy's Day or the Festival of Lights

On this day in the Nordic countries of yesteryear: Finland, Norway, Sweden, the Netherlands and certain Baltic or Russian-speaking countries, the youngest girl in each house would don a long white dress held in place by a red belt and wear a crown of foliage with 5 to 9 small birthday candles burning on it, early in the morning.

Nowadays, fearing fire hazards or burns to her hair, she places this crown of light on a round plate with tea lights, which she first brings to her parents' bedroom, which has the advantage of gently waking them up before their breakfast in bed.

Escorted by her brothers and sisters (the girls dressed alike with simple silver or gold crowns, like the Three Wise Men, and the boys dressed alike with pointed hats decorated with stars), she carries a tray to her awake parents: two cups of coffee or tea, sun-shaped cakes, and two yellow or orange candles (symbolising light). These funny wheels are made from cookies, shortbread, brioche dough, muffins ... scored like wheels with a knife blade and decorated with dried fruit or candied fruit according to individual tastes, or various circular pastries with raisins...

If there is only one child, and a boy at that, he should dress in the lightest pyjamas with a red belt or scarf. Let your imagination run wild!

In Lyon and its region, during the Festival of Lights and in other parts of France, people like to place a candle on each window sill and pray with angels, the moon and the stars.



ADVENT CALENDAR

1st December

-How beautiful, magnificent even! Come and admire this crazy flight, this extraordinary spectacle, my darlings!

-Oh yes, indeed! How pretty! Super cool too!

-That's so true: it's so magical, a real wonder!

-Hey, everyone, what's going on? What are you talking about?

-Can't you see what's right in front of you? Are you blind or something?

-Where? But where? Nothing but déjà vu. That's normal here.

-Right there, in front of you! Come on, that natural, white, fluffy-looking scene! A plain covered in immaculate snowflakes.

-Oh, that? But it's just snow falling, that's all!

-Yes, but what a cinematic screen! What magic!

-Bah! It's not the first time and it certainly won't be the last! So... As for me, I'm tired of seeing the return of frost, ice and cold weather, with all the chores of gathering wood and making bundles.

-How sweet, poetic and sad that you feel that way! For me, every season has its charm and its customs.

-If you like it, so much the better. What do you mean by 'like that'?

-Well, yes, like that! So cold, distant, not very warm, so negative! You are gruff, taciturn, you only feel negativity.

-I won't allow you to judge me. It's mean of you to say that about me! I'm not attacking you, I just have a different opinion.

-No, because it's the truth! You don't see the beauty of this snowfall, you don't feel the joy of your younger sisters! You no longer have the sensitivity you used to have...

-And have you ever asked yourself if I was happy? If I would have preferred something else for my own destiny?

-Why do you say that? Do you have a secret? Do you have regrets?

-It's my life! Yes, I have regrets about true love, about faith.

-You, our big sister, are you in pain? Are you grieving?

-Yes, like everyone else, I think... the daily life of an adult.

-Go on, tell me... You've made me curious, you see.

-You want me to tell you my story? Well, here goes:

I was very young at the time and I met a very kind and handsome boy. He was just too rich! Our parents, both ours and his, didn't want us to get married because we weren't from the same world, we didn't have any friends in common! He left for America... and he forgot me... I never heard from him again... It's been more than five years now!...'

-Oh, what a sad story! It seems so real the way you tell it... We really feel like we can touch it, soak it in. You've been sad again tonight.

-Yes, well, that's just how fate works... Right, now it's time for bed, you curious little ladies! Sweet dreams and... see you tomorrow morning at breakfast! Kisses!

-Yes, sis: you're great when you want to be!

-Good night, my pretty little rascals! We love each other very much, and that's what will always keep us going and united. Kisses!

-Yes, little surrogate mum, we love you very much too.

She closed the door to their bedroom and went to tidy up the living room: her little sisters had been doing various Christmas activities, had their afternoon snack and then their dinner there. She had just finished everything, including closing the door, when she heard an unusual sound at this time of night. An incongruous noise caught her attention: someone was knocking at the door. It was 9 p.m. and she wasn't expecting anyone. Who could be disturbing her like this?

Taken aback, she heard a half-muffled voice, soft and drawling, with an accent that was familiar and foreign at the same time:

-Hello, is there anyone in this house who will forgive me for my absence during all these years of labour so far away?

-Pardon? Who's there? Please identify yourself! Otherwise, move along, I will not open this protective barrier.

-Yes, it's me! I've come to take you all away!

-My God! It's you! How happy and surprised I am!

-My love, when I came back here, I couldn't believe it after all this time away from you! It's a Christmas miracle! I've thought and prayed so much that we would finally be together! It's unbelievable that you're not married...

-Come in, come in, tell me what happened to you... You know I'm curious... I could ask you the same question.

-Yes, that's true. Listen, it's hard to believe what's happening to us... Caught up in the excitement of my return, I arrived here and discreetly did a little investigating, and that's when I discovered that you're still single! It's wonderful because maybe I still have a chance that you want me?!

-But I can't leave my girls behind. I'm all they have... Our parents are dead now.

-I'm taking all three of you with me anyway. There's no other option: marry me and come live with me... with us... in Quebec! I've settled in the countryside, between forests, lakes and my food processing plant.

-What? How, down there? The three of us? And the paperwork to finalise, here to sell or rent this property and in Canada?

-I have a friend at the Consulate: no worries about such a small thing! That shouldn't stop us, unless you don't love me anymore? For me, the main thing is that you answer my little question!

-Yes, of course it's yes... I love you... and you're not saying anything?

-You think not? I've made two sea voyages for you, to see you again, to talk to you and to bring you back with me as my wife, already having a whole family to take care of?

-Yes, okay, and should I rent or sell? I have to discuss it with my younger siblings and the solicitor. I am responsible for them and for this property, which has been left to the three of us in equal shares.

Given the considerable distance, it was decided that once the

sale was complete, the money would be put into two savings accounts as a dowry for the siblings to use for marriage or as an endowment when they turned 21, while the eldest's share would be bequeathed to her directly. The wedding took place very discreetly, unbeknownst to the groom's family, who were too stuffy to accept such a misalliance, having a title of nobility.

They were happily united on Christmas Eve, surrounded by her sisters, and set sail for Quebec the next day!

2 December

An isolated house collapses under the weight of snow, at the edge of a mountain, curled up on itself. Two dogs bark from their kennels to deter passers-by, thieves or the postman. A woman and two young children prepare for Christmas celebrations, smiling, helping each other, delighted. A pack of cats rushes out of the garage attached to the house, meowing and squabbling.

In these first days of Advent, there are many activities to be done: decorations to repair or recreate, last-minute preparations, festive meals, maximum effort from every volunteer! Excited, Aude and Joël put their shoes out for tomorrow's small gifts. They are confident, laughing. Mum has given them a job to do: choose, colour, tidy up the mini cards, write their wishes, sign them.

The glowing fire provides warmth and presence, a spark of life to this home. The candlelight enhances the welcoming atmosphere of the fire inside the hearth. The trio get on very well, listening to Christmas carols, joking about the amusing anecdotes of the last few days. They enjoyed nature, observing the animals and the climate, the plants in winter dormancy.

-It's time for the cats! They're asking for their plates and bowls of fresh water! Who can help me carry the two buckets and the washed and dried bowls? It's quite heavy.

-Me, Mum. I like to cuddle them too, those greedy gourmets.

They're cute when they meow happily!

-Yes, less so when they hiss or fight each other, unfortunately. They're real rascals, those light brown and white ones!

The dogs' bowls were filled at the same time and brought to their comfortable wooden kennels.

-Every day has enough trouble of its own," said Mum. "I'm sure you'll both be fasting! Yes? No? Maybe?

-Oh no: there's something that smells really good in the oven! We still have a bit of a nose here, don't we?

-All right, I get it: you're ganging up on me!"

-Yes, Mum, how did you guess? It's our special day! The day of lights, let's light the candles in the windows!

Aude and Joël wash their hands in the bathroom sink and quickly set the table, as they are eager to eat. They sit down cheerfully. Mum serves them a plate of hot lasagne with lots of cheese on top: what a treat! They thank their mother and when she comes to the table, they start eating with gusto. Aude takes the huge giant cookie with candied fruit for dessert.

-I want more, please, Mum! Oh yes, mmm! I'll do the washing up afterwards, I promise! Delicious and tasty!

-And I'll dry it, I promise! Me too, thank you, it's so good! You're the queen, Mum! Yum, yum! And after the sweet treat...

-We'll save some for breakfast and afternoon tea tomorrow. We'll add some chocolates and fruit jellies.

-Come on kids, into the kitchen, a promise is a promise!

Tonight, they'll watch a very sad film: L'arbre de Noël, starring Bourvil, a true cinematic masterpiece. They'll cry on the sofa, all three of them huddled together, snuggled up against each other. Their emotionality is so moving and endearing! These three brown-haired kids have been inseparable since the tragedy that struck them... this autumn. The loss of a man, an unexpected accident, another life.

A nice herbal tea to help them sleep will bring a slight smile to their faces and then it's 'off to bed!'. No more nasty nightmares! A little story like every night where the trio will laugh and a big hug in their arms! But when the two young children brush their teeth... a nice surprise lands... in their slippers! Mummy then cries out: 'Help! Help!' and falls... flat on her face... laughing loudly, doubled over!

'What's going on here, Mummy?' they say, alarmed.

The little ones run towards her, frightened by all the commotion. Joel closes the open door. 'Where's the key?' Aude trembles, shivering in the hallway and... sees in her mum's hand... the missing key! They close it quietly, turning around: there are treats in the filled socks! They discover delicacies: chocolate-marshmallow wrappers with funny stories or jokes!

Mum smiles mischievously... 'Mum, you naughty girl!' whispers Aude, who is very clever... she knew! 'I was so scared!' says Joël, half-jokingly. The three of them kiss each other tenderly. Joy in their hearts! Mum looks at them affectionately and tells herself that despite everything, they are happy! 'Next year, it will already be more convivial, the grief will slowly fade away,' she thought.

Dad had gone to heaven to join Grandad and Granny, and all three of them were watching over them, protecting them easily. She said a silent prayer for them, thinking that sometimes fate had not been fair to the three of them. She would fight for her two children every day and wondered what the future would hold for her: 'I want nothing more than peace. Aude and Joël are healthy and happy, and that's all that matters to me.'

Suddenly, she felt a caress: 'You are an angel.'

'I'm going to give them a wonderful Christmas: I want to see their eyes light up at the prospect of a future together as a family of three! Already, the market and then the tree, the lentils are sprouting, the presents to buy, wrap and hide! What a wonderful Advent with all these activities, traditions,

preparations, excitement and magic! Our Advent and Christmas will be unforgettable, my darlings, I solemnly swear: incredible!

3 December

Once upon a time, there was a little wood elf named Garyl.

He was a beautiful winged creature, a kind and mischievous will-o'-the-wisp!

Intelligent and studious, he valued his independence, his autonomy, his freedom of action and thought. Active and determined, he had personal projects. He had thin, fluorescent wings that guided him through the night when he flew and sheltered him during the day. Curious and intrepid, delicate and fond, daring and bold, risky and proud, he sought his love: Clotilde, glimpsed for a brief moment.

One poster of her, and boom! He fell madly in love!

Since then, he had been searching for her everywhere. He kept this image inside him, dazzled by such fragile beauty, evanescent grace, iconic charm and understated elegance! White snow covered his entire surroundings with its colourless blanket, dotted with green and brown, around a truly sad Garyl. He wandered like a lost soul: the heavy, thick silence of winter was gradually suffocating him!

He decided to leave the next day for the city, embodying movement, glitz and lights. No sooner desired than invested! Then, after a good night's rest for such a long journey, he woke up fresh and ready to go. And off he flew! He landed in the middle of the avenue and... Oh! Surprise! What did he see? There in front of him? HIS Clotilde! On a poster, duplicated in several copies! He was definitely going a little mad.

On display in a shop window! For all to see, in shop windows, everywhere!

Surprising! Inappropriate! Disconcerting! Unnerving!

He took advantage of a customer entering the shop to slip

inside.

Stunned, he opened his eyes wide! 'But... but... that's not possible! What does all this mean?'

Worried and stunned... He is devastated: there are hundreds of SA Clotildes! 'Sisters, cousins, friends?'

He swallowed hard, wringing his cap between his hands. Garyl slipped between them, there was a whole row of them, observing the doppelgangers, exact copies of his beautiful lover:

'Where are you, where are you hiding, my dear little Clo?'

He thought quickly, wrinkling his forehead, and finally tapped his forehead with his frail paws, glimpsing a solution:

'How silly of me! They won't answer me, they can't speak: they're not alive! They're just pale imitations!'

At the end of an alley, he sees HER appear... in front of him, vibrant! 'My God, how beautiful she is!' He stands there, shy, powerless, speechless, devastated, lovesick, made of the pretty happiness that his eyes perceive. He sees nothing else but her, here, as if waiting for him! He slowly approaches this doll of love. She looks at him and... disappears... into a music box!

Panicked, he searches for her and finds her in the hands of a little girl who... Oh! Horror and damnation! No, not that!

She turns a squeaky key behind her back! He must help her, ignoring his torment, he must free her, yes, that's it!

She immediately puts her on a checkout conveyor belt without any care or consideration, landing her in a festive bag.

'That kid doesn't love it like I do!'

He tumbles from his observation post: Ouch! He feels no pain, just a slight discomfort, it's no big deal!

He gets up with great difficulty, trembling and staggering.

His bump is really swelling now!

'I have to treat my injury, take care of myself, come up with a good plan and then ask her to marry me, that would be ideal!'

He remembers that it's almost Christmas, right in the middle of Advent!

The time when storytellers bring to life tales filled with fairies, princes and witches. The next few days will be spent preparing for Christmas in his white and cold world! Acorns, walnuts, almonds and hazelnuts have been gathered and stored away for winter and the festive season! Pfft... He rubs his head, perplexed . Pfft... No shops in his forest, nothing, just cold... snow... twigs! Pfft...

'Ah, what a fool, really!' He moved so much in his bed that he fell flat on his face: what a bump!

Just a nightmare... No big deal. What an adventure for a sensitive winged wood elf!

Well yes, unfortunately it was only a dream! Unless it was a nightmare, who knows? And what a creative imagination!

Garyl in a toy shop, no less! Pfft...

Hard to imagine! And yet! What if it was bearable for him?

'So where are you and what have you become, dear friend? I'm so happy to find you in my wardrobe for this Advent!'

The boy took it out of the pile of toys to be given to poor children, saying to his parents, 'Not him, he's my friend.'

Garyl was placed prominently on the bed, and his human friend gave him a Clotilde doll as a Christmas present! A dream come true!



4 December

In a small village in France, a family was in great distress. The Christmas holidays were shaping up to be sadly nostalgic for these people. The poor health of their parents saddened the eyes of the two little girls. Outside, the snow was falling thick and fast, adding to the loneliness of these isolated children. They tried to bring joy by smiling warmly at them.

The white carpet muffled their footsteps in the fresh snow, like the incessant complaints of their poor relatives, who were suffering from an incurable disease. The nurse came to see them to administer care and injections to relieve their pain, but there was no hope of a cure. Amandine and Automne supported each other as best they could: they prayed hard for their parents to recover.

One freezing night in December, a lady appeared to them in a dream: a serene face looked down at them. She was completely illuminated, wearing a long, immaculate lace dress. A smile floated on her thin lips. Her voice was tender, filled with love: 'Beautiful, sweet children, you must love them very much to say so many prayers! I have heard you and here I am: go and fetch...'

In the morning, Amandine and Automne prepared what the Lady had told them and offered it to their dear, very sick parents. Suffering was etched on their emaciated faces. Several hours later, the nurse was surprised by how the illness was receding. She asked the girls what could have happened: they didn't know what to say, stammering vague answers of hope.

They couldn't talk about their dream, or they would have been called crazy, so they agreed to keep quiet, waiting to see what would happen next, praying even harder and thanking their protector. Their father and mother were slowly getting better, and as they drank the potion, they felt better and better. The girls were kind and cared for their weakened father and mother with unconditional love.

When night fell, they started again, and so on until things

improved in their cottage. Every day, in the early morning, they followed the Lady's recommendations, and the potions and incantations worked wonders. Between herbal teas and invigorating soups, spiritual care by placing their hands together over the sick bodies, as recommended by their Lady, faith accompanied them.

Dad and Mum were no longer in pain and were getting stronger and stronger. The nurse stopped coming, thinking that the magic of Christmas had worked once again! Sighs. She too began to pray more for her patients, for her family, and for herself. It was an irrational and instinctive impulse of the heart: she felt much better in her medical and personal life. She became an angelic child once again.

Only Amandine and Automne knew, but they didn't say a word to anyone. They busily prepared wooden wreaths and salt dough decorations for the Christmas tree in their farmyard. They decorated it with determination and affection. One morning, their parents were able to admire their creations from their bed: through the windows, with the curtains drawn, they saw the beautiful decorated tree, lit by the moon!

In tears, they listened to their children's story: the worry, the expected end, their dreams, their prayers, the herbal teas, the nurse, the festive decorations and the traditional Christmas Eve meal they had prepared. They tenderly took them in their still frail arms, rocking them and cuddling them: Christmas Eve was approaching and the two girls had set a beautiful table for the four of them!

They were reunited and delighted because they knew that only love could have accomplished this miracle and given them back their lives: the love of their two treasures, their beloved daughters! What a wonderful Christmas that year was! And what became of these two sweet little girls much later? They became serious teenagers studying medicine and surgery, keeping their spirituality secret for serious cases.

When they graduated, they dedicated themselves to Our

Lady!

Joining forces, they performed miracles in their hospital wards to such an extent that their peers were jealous, begging them to set up their own practices. They did so with joy, knowing that they would be able to practise for the benefit of the greatest number of people. Aurore returned to general medicine and Automne built a hospital-based clinic thanks to a humanitarian foundation in geriatrics.

Both married renowned researchers in new procedures for incurable diseases. Every Advent, the two couples would get together, surrounded by young people and the elderly. They not only offered help and advice on medicine and healthy living, but also gave hope to the most disadvantaged through small gestures such as friendly Sunday meals and snacks.

The workshops were joyfully run by associations of parents, stay-at-home mothers and retired grandparents: they were the core of festive moments where all the best intentions were embodied, as secularism devoted to a common cause: the well-being of everyone. The tradition was preserved with respect for all and shared with people integrating into republican society.



5 December

One fine winter's day, Little Sapinou grew tall and strong: his roots were now deep enough to feel secure and the rich green of his foliage was magnificent! So beautiful that a woodcutter happened to pass by and spotted him! The man returned a few days later with his axe and wanted to cut it down to take it to his home for the holidays and decorate it for his young children!

The members of both families were expected, as well as a few friends, to celebrate Advent and Christmas Eve!

Little Sapinou expressed his passive disapproval by whistling, creaking, grumbling, and angrily saying:

-Why cut me down? Couldn't you take me with my roots and replant me in a pot so I don't die? Wouldn't that be better for everyone? Don't you think, woodsman? Or better yet, replant me in the ground?

-Mm...? Who is talking to me? Am I going mad? Is my environmentalist conscience awakening in the face of this natural charm? Is my fragile mind taking precedence over my childish poetry?

The good man scratches his head, his cap askew, worried and perplexed by the situation, not believing his ears!

'You're talking? You, the fir tree? This is the first time I've ever witnessed such verbal and vegetal activity!'

Little Sapinou shivers, then trembles, and snow swirls around them, helped by the cool, swirling wind.

'Yes, it just happened one fine day, all by itself! I didn't try to learn it: apparently, I'm good at talking!'

Lonely and isolated in the vastness of his mountain, he was looking for some kind of understanding, kindness, intimacy.

The woodcutter told him he was going to fetch the right tools and would be back later, which he did in the afternoon. The two agreed on each action with a tacit understanding: one helping with his uprooting and re-rooting, the other

escorting him and keeping him safe. The journey was difficult for both of them. Fortunately, there were more descents than ascents, and the weather was clear and dry.

They made a remarkable and much-noticed entrance into the household: the children and Mum applauded their dishevelled and dishevelling appearance. Sapinou was quite overwhelmed by the atmosphere that reigned in this joyful interior, with the gentle warmth of the hearth presiding over the common room. A long wooden table and benches were taken over by the children for a fun and noisy snack.

-My goodness, how big and strong it is! It's slender and bushy! It will be sparkling and bright thanks to the garlands!

-It will look beautiful in our hall! It will be the soul of our beautiful home! It will be the patriarch that was missing here for Christmas!

-It will be magnificent decorated in gold, red, orange, blue and silver! It will smell like the forest and pine sap too!

-It will take care of our presents, lining them up! It will keep them safe and protect them, hiding them from intruders, with the help of the elves!

-And we will dance around it! It will be great fun to do the farandole! It's so much fun to jump around singing loudly!

-This tree looks so cheerful! It reminds me of a legend from long ago! The only thing missing is for it to speak.

-Ah, what an adventure, if only you knew. Yes, what you say has a hidden meaning. Our ancestors would be proud of you and your feelings.

Everyone took part in planting it in a huge wooden pot and decorating this beautiful festive tree in their large dining room. Little Sapinou was also happy to no longer be alone, up there in the pine forest of his ancestors. He was no longer cold either, as he was close to the lit fireplace. He was finally with his family, he, the little hermit forced by his condition as a tree! 'I really like this home!'

And then the gifts piled up more and more at his feet, wrapped in ribbons and multicoloured: what a riot of colour around him!

Minou, the house cat, loved to rest under it, wash himself there and take his daily nap. He dreamed of going hunting for mice! 'Happy! That's what I am here, happy! Really good!' Advent unfolded over 24 days, full of excitement and all kinds of creative activities: cooking, painting, varnishing, refurbishing, dusting, innovative projects.

Then came Christmas Day with its songs and refrains sung in canon, dressing up to welcome guests before Santa Claus arrived. Then it was New Year's Day with lots of friends, dancing and laughing under the mistletoe! We celebrated the Three Kings in style around Sapinou and removed his colourful decorations one by one. The festivities slowly came to an end. Dad said very kindly to the young conifer:

'Here's your place, what do you think?' Little Sapinou was really HAPPY! What a charming spot, right in the centre!

The place chosen by this human was magical: it was the family roundabout, in the middle of their front lawn!

Since that day, he has stood there and seen many years go by, and made many friends. Every year, the woodcutter, his wife and their children never missed an opportunity to add green companions to him! Much later, the grandchildren continued the tradition, and so on with each generation! Gradually, happily, it became a farm of fir trees! A natural barrier of protective greenery!

A majestic fence provided ecological security, making this rural location a true haven of peace!

A brood of squirrels took up residence in their trunks, and large mushrooms grew at their feet: a Christmas wonderland!



6 December

Once upon a time, there was a tiny, cute little girl who sold flowers on the church steps. She wore a purple cape and, when the snow fell, she pulled her hood down over her long, beautiful golden hair. She was adorable, charming and reserved. She had pretty little dimples on her rosy cheeks and a pleasant smile on her thin lips.

It was a time when children worked to help their parents: in rural areas, they were employed on farms, and in cities, odd jobs were easy to find. She was almost eight years old and held out small bouquets of violets to hurried passers-by. Some bought them, moved by her youthful fragility, while others passed by without seeing her, preoccupied with their own concerns. She was a kind, polite and helpful girl.

School did not exist for the people of France, only for the nobility, the bourgeoisie and the artisans: so she earned a living for herself and her pleasant mother, who stayed at home to finish her work: a beautiful festive dress for a lady of high society. She was a seamstress working for a renowned fashion house. There was no shortage of work, as orders poured in.

These two women, mother and daughter, looked very much alike with their fine, proud features, the way they tilted their heads, their gentle smiles and their eyes, the same soft green as the meadows in spring. Slender and delicate, they were graceful in both their gait and their gestures. Their posture was feminine to the tips of their fingers, imbued with humility, sensitivity, instinct and intuition.

The only difference between them was that one was blonde like her father and the other was very dark-haired, her hair always braided into an endless plait that she tied up in a bun when she went out ly through the streets to deliver her work to the shop for fittings. She would return with her treasure and an order. Their father and husband had just departed for the kingdom of angels, as their mother said, while praying for his soul.

He had joined the other artists and was very happy to be able to continue his vivid and romantic paintings. They were alone now, managing to pull themselves out of their grief as best they could, with difficulty but tenacity. He had succumbed to a sudden bout of pneumonia during the Mexican War. The official army document attested to his silence. They had curled up into themselves.

He had stopped responding to his wife's letters after that fateful month. They lived modestly, in peace and with faith in the future, in a dimly lit attic on the top floor of a bourgeois house in the city centre. The only heating they allowed themselves was a small fire in the fireplace in the evening and a little hot water in the morning for their tea, accompanied by a few biscuits.

The rest of the time, they would sit together on the sofa with its faded cushions, a remnant of a more glamorous and better past, each wrapped in a large warm blanket. For this Advent, their first Christmas alone, they had found some wool to make a few garlands of pompoms, adding colourful dead leaves and pieces of fabric in the shape of moons, stars, angels, fir trees and elves.

The mother never complained about their sad circumstances, and the little girl was brave: they were happy simply because they were together. Mum told epic, historical, legendary or amusing stories while the little girl dreamed. Suddenly, there was a knock at their door on Christmas Day, early in the evening. They looked at each other, intrigued. They weren't expecting anyone. Mum called out, trembling...

Despite everything, Mum opened the door with some trepidation and... to her amazement, it was astonishing:

'Philippe? You? Is it really you? No, it can't be, you're dead. Is it your ghost? I prayed so hard for your return.'

And she felt dizzy! The man caught her in his arms just before she fell to the ground, right at his feet.

The shock had been too much for her. Philippe was alive!

And very much present. It was a true miracle! The girl clung to him, begging for his attention.

'I've been waiting for this day for so long...'

The regiment he commanded had suffered various setbacks in guerrilla warfare and had broken up into several fragments. The French found themselves on the other side of the border, in the United States. With their commanders having fled, they were alone in a foreign country. The survivors decided to work to return to France by sea. He preferred to establish himself and his work before joining them.

The trio kissed and hugged each other passionately: it was the most beautiful Christmas present for this clan, finally reunited!

Once the emotion had subsided, Philippe returned to the landing and offered them a good meal worthy of this family celebration. He told them about his adventures in Latin America and then his adventures in the American West, where he had worked to survive and return to France to look for them because... He had set up a chain of second-hand clothing shops in Boston, Chicago and New York, where he wanted to launch a fashion line for his wife!

He had worked hard, succeeded, and crossed the ocean to come and find them: life holds so many surprises and joys!



7 December

Boquito, the proud Alpilles ibex, leaps from rock to rock, exploring this unfamiliar corner of the mountains. He wants to find a source of fresh water, alfalfa and daisies. To do so, he climbs a rather vertiginous ridge and finds himself in a paradise! A green, flower-filled meadow where dozens of marmot families have settled!

A stream flows between the cracks in the rocky ground and plunges down a steep drop further on. 'How wonderful it is here!' he says to himself in admiration. As he walked quietly through the soft grass, he met a small animal, a black and white skunk who had lived there for a long time and was beginning to feel lonely.

-Hello, where are you from? I was born here, but no one has played with me for several months. I'm so bored!

-Why? Are you a sore loser? Are you mean to others? Are you jealous? Do you cheat? Otherwise, I don't see why the others would abandon you to this sad fate you describe. There must be a good reason for this situation.

-No, but when I get angry, I fart and give off a very foul smell. So I stay alone and keep away from my friends.

-Ah, so that's it! The marmots warned me not to come within two metres of you! I understand better now. Your only option is not to get angry.

-Yes, but I like company! What can I do to remedy this major social handicap? I like to be loved and surrounded by attention like everyone else, in general.

-Easy, don't get angry and you won't be fined or isolated from these groups anymore! Are you up for the challenge? Do you really think you can do it? Yes or no?

-Yes, but I have a strong personality. It's hard to always stay calm! she replies, confused and uncertain.

-Here's what we're going to do...! Listen carefully... Here's my plan... Do you agree with the basics? Shall we give it a try?

Our two friends, Boquito and Marvine, are having fun, shouting, laughing, jumping: what a game! Breathtaking and

amazing!

They are happy to be playing together! They stop and suddenly realise that they are surrounded by marmots!

Their leader stands in front of them to ask for permission to join in the fun! They themselves feel lonely and idle while the duo is having fun. The mischievous pair nods in agreement and then looks at each other with a playful smile. Once this unexpected pact of friendship is made, they all start running, jumping, wrestling playfully, walking and picking flowers and wild fruits.

But first, Boquito insisted on reminding them of Marvine's muting and the pain she suffered as a result! Not easy.

-I thought you didn't want to have fun with HER anymore? said Boquito, pointing at her and judging them.

-That was true at first, but then we watched you and realised she hadn't done anything wrong, so we changed our minds about her.

-Ah, I see your train of thought. It's intellectual, thoughtful and sensible. It's up to Marvine to be fair, not you!

-Yes, that's fine too... and maybe... you want us! So, what's your verdict here and now?

-Okay, on one condition: that you don't cheat! That way, she won't get upset if each of us puts in the time and energy! Because you cheat, and she, unlike all of you, enjoys challenges for the fun of the game! That is your only, but unfortunate, peculiarity. Will you then change your tactics towards her and pursue her in a friendly manner?

The marmots held a council and then replied:

'Let's have some fun games across the meadow! Full speed ahead, and may the best of us win this race!'

And since that day, they have been happily playing together!

An intense moral accepted by them, for everyone, up there!

Their fear of each other faded away: when you look around you intelligently and have the will to change, everything works out for the best! A moment of pure abandon: the

earth becomes Eden! A true snowy paradise for Christmas: every winter animal has its white Christmas, each in its own way! Sometimes it only takes a tiny little thing and everything can be turned from negative to positive!

Up there, far above the deserted mountain pastures, reconciled marmots and this friendly duo are enjoying Advent to the full, frolicking in the snowy whiteness that has invaded everything around them: a real picture postcard where the fir trees are sprinkled with snowflakes and starry frost, where wild animals timidly emerge from their woods in search of food to scratch under the thick cold blanket.

Boquito, who has become Marvine's unconditional friend, confides in her a secret that is ruining his life. She listens attentively and says to him, 'We all have our wounds, we put a bandage on them and then we forget about them. It forces us to move forward. Thank you for your trust.' He was relieved that she did not judge him but understood him: let's do the same and have a wonderful and tender Christmas!

And his secret? You won't reveal it, will you?

Shhh, here it is: Boquito escaped from his corral at Father Christmas's house to be free! Goodbye harness! Hello future!

The freedom of movement in the beauty of these forest expanses versus the security and tenderness of dear Father Christmas: to each his own dream! Cheers to life!



8 December

Once upon a time, there was a little field mouse who invited herself into Julie's house. She was cold outside and very scared all alone in her burrow. Suddenly, she saw a ray of light and followed it: the door happened to be ajar, so she went in, somewhat apprehensive about what would happen next. Brave but not reckless, she quickly noticed a small hole behind the fireplace and scurried inside.

It seemed like a warm place and big enough for her home: she set about arranging it to her liking and felt better than she had outside! Safety, warmth and comfort were paramount for a quiet and peaceful life! She set to work with enthusiasm and quickly realised that she had a talent for decorating her new cosy nest. With very little, she made a lot.

She found a handkerchief, which she managed to turn into a soft bed sheet thanks to a long matchbox!

She rummaged here and there and finally discovered some cotton, which she used as a mattress: it was ingenious and very practical!

With other boxes, gloves and doilies, she made a wardrobe and a chest of drawers, a table and a pantry!

She knew how to sew and knit, so she made cushions for a soft sofa to rest her head or feet on, and a blanket to keep her warm at night. With a glove that she patiently unravelled, she made a beautiful, soft rug for her living room! Using a thick, flat rectangular ashtray and sturdy cardboard, she made herself a secure door! She added six thumbtacks and attached three strings of paper clips to it.

One day in December, she explored her territory a little further and saw a little girl watching her approach. The two little ones liked each other and hugged: one's hand clinging to the other's, they understood each other immediately and accepted each other right away! They kept the secret of their meeting from the adults! It was theirs! A mystery kept

jealously, fiercely, courageously!

'How pretty you are, little mouse! I'm like you, you see, so lonely sometimes when my parents are working...'

When night fell and the little girl was lonely, Ninon would come and snuggle up against her, and in the early morning, she would return to her own room. It had become a ritual, a tradition between them. Each had her own life and worries, her freedom and intuition, her space and fears, her sweet dreams and terrible nightmares! In short, the little human had duties: school and leisure, music and holidays.

'Look at my beautiful schoolbag: I'm a big girl now! Don't be jealous, I'll teach you everything I know!'

This went on for several years. One offering food to the other!

Until the unexpected arrival of a very special gift from the little girl's parents that Christmas Day!

Catastrophic! Appalling! Terrifying! Horrible! Staggering!

-Here, this is for you, my darling. We thought it would keep you company during our travels!

-You can have fun with it! You're its little mistress, so it's up to you to look after it, you're responsible for it! It's a lively creature.

-You're so sensible and calm, we're sure you'll be a good surprise!

-Yes, you'll know how to take care of him properly because you're sensible!

-Oh la la la la! What is it? Phew, can I open it then?

She cuts open the package in front of her and lets out a loud, delighted 'Oh!', not realising the consequences for Ninon.

It's a... tiny... kitten! The number one enemy of mice! Yet this little tomcat looked so harmless.

'I have to move out right away!' thought Ninon, distraught.

Suddenly, she saw something terribly awful.

Her human friend knocked the cat over and put batteries inside its belly?! Phew, it was just a toy!

'I prefer that!' thought the mouse, relieved nonetheless.

She danced and jumped around in the middle of her safe room.

'This will be a companion for both of us,' said the little girl, amused by the reactions of her beloved little mouse!

The rodent waited for the right moment to rejoin her young friend: Christmas was good, warm and cosy with this... stuffed cat!

Ninon savoured a ramekin of leftovers for a long time; for her, it was a real Christmas feast: turkey, pâté, cheese, cake!

As the little girl grew up, the little mouse grew old: one went to boarding school and the other remained as a guardian of the bedroom.

Minou-matou served as a heater for our mouse friend and as a fan in her flat in the summer! Air conditioning.

Daily life changed: Ninon was forced to do the shopping, assisted by the rebellious and absent-minded teenager!

One Christmas Day, Mrs Mouse was found snuggled up under the cat, protected and warm! Heavenly soul...

The girl said nothing and cried, then buried it under her favourite tree. A smiling vision, a memory of childhood!



9 December

It was a particularly cold day: snowflakes had been falling thick and fast, covering the surrounding countryside with a thick blanket. Plumes of smoke rose from beautiful houses, evidence of human presence. Inside each home was a fireplace, heating the dining room where the Christmas tree stood, symbolising the special family celebration that is Christmas!

In such cold weather, few people were outside in this winter wonderland: the weather forecast had predicted heavy snowfall and advised everyone to stay at home as much as possible. Even the animals were warm and cosy with their food. The silence remained muffled, as if stifled. A strange atmosphere of peace emanated from this magical setting of intense fervour.

Snug and warm, near stoves or fireplaces, the heat was gentle: the houses were decorated for the three end-of-year celebrations that followed one another over a period of nearly two months. Advent was a time of preparation for the two celebrations to come, one family, Christmas, and the other, New Year's Day, with friends, preceding Epiphany and its galette des rois! Red, green, gold and silver were the colours of choice!

At the window of one of these cosy homes, behind the flowered curtains, was the small face of a worried and curious little girl. Her name was Catherine and she was eagerly awaiting someone's arrival. The person she was waiting for was none other than Father Christmas! She was trying to catch a glimpse of him so she could say good evening and thank him for his silent and humble work.

Catherine had made her own Advent calendar: she had drawn a house with lots of windows on a piece of cardboard! Inside were things to do, poems to read, songs to sing, thoughts to whisper, wishes to send, and crafts to make. On the outside were numbers from 1 to 24. The whole thing was very joyful, cheerful, colourful and friendly.

She wanted to take charge of putting up the Christmas tree and decorating the table with three Christmas tablecloths and candles on the windowsills. She wanted to set up the nativity scene that her mum had inherited from her own parents: small santons to be placed far away on the mountains made of rock paper, then medium-sized ones on the plain where the nativity scene was set up with its sparkling star.

At the bottom, the tallest figurines represented crafts in general, the Provençal people at the port, with thirteen desserts.

The customs and traditions of our ancestors will remain in this world long after we are gone, in direct contact with age-old traditions.

Ever since her mother had whispered to her that HE was coming that evening, she had been watching for his arrival. She had made the little nativity scene herself, decorated the brightly lit Christmas tree, read the Advent calendar night after night, coloured the personalised cards to hang on the presents, and now she had only one desire: to be in his arms, protected and cuddled: the best of the best in the middle of winter.

-I can't wait for Father Christmas to finally arrive here at our house. He's taking his time, isn't he, Mummy? I'm very impatient!

-Yes, my dear little one, you must wait patiently. I'm sure he won't forget you on his way here, believe me!

-I hope so too: I already miss Dad so much, so if he lets me down too, it's not fair! Our life is sad without them. I've decorated everything, all that's missing is them!

Whisper secrets in his ear, ask him for presents if possible, find out if the elves were having fun in the snowball fights, if the reindeer were happy in their forest. Suddenly, through the falling snowflakes, she heard the very distinctive sound of little bells and her eyes widened! In front of her, on the pavement, a sleigh had just parked!

It was pulled by... reindeer! A man dressed all in red with white fur trim got out: Father Christmas had arrived! He was tall, big, huge! He turned his back to her and grabbed a sack and some very heavy bags. He looked at his order book, checked the address and headed straight... for the neighbourhood! What rotten luck! He wasn't coming just for her!

But she hadn't been that naughty this year, had she? She had calmed down and been more thoughtful! She had even made some progress at school, so why? No matter how hard she tried, she couldn't figure it out! She was so preoccupied that she went to curl up in her father's big armchair near the Christmas tree. That's when an unexpected sound rang in her alert ears: someone was ringing the doorbell!

She went to open it mechanically, her heart heavy.

She opened it slowly and... jumped back in surprise! Was it really HIM?! She threw her arms around his neck and covered him with kisses! It was so magical: he was really there, she could touch him, it was really him! She still found it hard to believe! 'What a wonderful Christmas!' she thought. Merry Christmas to all, maybe he'll come to your house? Accompanied by all his little elves who assist him every year...

Share some wonderful, warm moments with your family!



10 December

'A snowman has run away!' cries the magazine seller. He hails passers-by and potential customers in a stentorian voice. 'Headline in the Journal de la Forêt: read the exclusive article, ladies and gentlemen!' Lisa and Jujube weigh hazelnuts for their buyers and read the anecdote of the day. They love them. 'The snowman you admired this week at the Carrefour des Trois Chênes has disappeared!'

They look at each other in astonishment. They are friendly amateur detectives in their spare time. 'No one has seen him for nearly two days!' This is unheard of, despite some investigations by the police! The nagging concern is felt among the friendly group of snowmen who are trying to alert the population. "A call is being made to each and every one of us!" The duo takes up this disturbing news item.

His future partner issues a heart-rending cry to anyone who may have crossed his path, to all media outlets, associations and politicians!

'S.O.S. to... for any reliable information, no prank calls please, thank you in advance. I am waiting for him with the hope of seeing him again soon.'

-Well, tell me! What a commotion... So close to Christmas too! Poor thing, to be left like that... Just before their wedding: actually, maybe it's because he was afraid of making a mistake, don't you think? There have been people who have done that in the past!

-You said it, what a mess! Your point is valid, running away doesn't solve anything. Sometimes you have to face reality.

-What if he was depressed, ill, who knows? ... He may have forgotten to write a note because the police found nothing at all!

-You're right, but still! Before leaving, you say goodbye to someone, you explain your actions. Here, nothing, nada!

-Yes, it is strange... What if we looked for him, the two of us? Come on, let's become experts, puzzle pros!

-After all, why not... During our free time: at least it's for a

humanitarian and ecological cause.

They tidied up their stall and dressed warmly, as sports enthusiasts who love mountain running and trained caver.

Off they went to investigate: in their younger days, they had solved some tricky cases. They had met during their training as urban police officers and had been together for life. Before retiring peacefully to this corner of the countryside, the pair of ex-cops had changed careers and were now working as greengrocers at the markets.

Listening intently to what was being said, repeating it to each other, they came up with various leads.

They snooped around, heading towards the last place the suspect had been seen before taking off. Little by little, they moved away from it and there... at Lisa's feet, her pipe and her round hat! 'Well, I'll be!' Jujube, meanwhile, discovered her scarf and broom in the opposite direction. It was getting stranger and stranger, very enigmatic even... They were going round in circles, they knew it, and they didn't like it one bit.

'Oh yes.' They wondered about these clues, these last traces left behind: 'Why in opposition, in inversion?'

The four buttons were scattered at the bottom of a deep ravine: a gaping hole opened up in front of them.

What if he had fallen in? It was possible.

Without a moment's hesitation, they roped themselves together and descended quickly!

They tiptoed into a huge cave and what they discovered was nothing short of astonishing, mind-boggling!

Amazing! Breathtaking! A work of art. Admiration. Hats off, truly: great respect! Phew!

Lisa and Jujube had tracked him down, against his will!

This intrepid and rebellious fugitive had come to furnish and decorate his future living space in the utmost secrecy: it was

his Christmas present for his beautiful fiancée, because these two loved each other very much! The amateur detectives were amazed at how beautifully it had been done: a peaceful nest!

They praised him for it, revealing what was happening outside his future home once they were married.

At first he laughed, but then he was saddened to have made his sweetheart unhappy. How could he make it up to her?

He had thought of the freezer, which would keep them cool, very cold, icy cold until next winter! Hi, hi, hi!

Everything that ends up in the freezer is so fresh... Tenderly embraced... Frozen and frosty until the bitter cold of winter!

He was moved by their words and the three of them went to the town hall for a unanimous and joyful "I do"! Their Advent was coming to an end, the mystery solved and the ceremony as picturesque as their love. Christmas brought the newlyweds, their witnesses and their friends together, making them waltz all night long, as starry as their eyes looking at each other... until the early hours of the morning when they locked themselves in their frozen space!

Dear grandchildren, this is just a magical tale: don't try this adventure or experiment by going into a refrigerator or freezer, which are only meant for snowmen on a spree!



11 December

Once upon a time, there was a very old, very lonely lady, nicknamed the Witch, who pulled up plants and put them in a large wicker basket as she walked along the road. She wore a long black dress and a headscarf: she spoke to no one except animals. People visited her when they needed her, otherwise they pointed fingers at her and made fun of her. But she was free!

Yes, the villagers and farmers had obligations!

She remained free! She took charge of her own life! However, one day the King's hunt came through the woods! A horse bitten by a snake went mad and dragged its rider into a frantic, un d race: luckily for the man, the Witch was there! She suddenly shouted, standing upright on the path, facing the runaway animal! As if by magic, the horse stopped dead a few steps in front of her!

She had not been afraid of the frantic steed!

The rider was quickly thrown from his saddle but was very happy that it had finally stopped! He got up nimbly and thanked her warmly for her invaluable help! 'You saved my life, woman! I will not forget it!' The incident was over. She curtsied as she left. Time passed. As the seasons followed one another in turn, the lady continued her daily activities, petite as ever.

All summer long, she walked the paths in search of herbs to dry for her preparations, syrups and other balms.

A few months later, in the middle of a harsh winter, two warriors came to the village asking for the Witch: they wanted to see her immediately! At the bend in the path, they ordered her to accompany them to the King's Castle without delay. She listened to them and nodded. She rode with them on the back of one of the horses, bringing her herbalist and healer's baggage.

As it was bitterly cold, she wrapped herself in a cloak. They finally arrived at the King's Castle and accompanied her

directly before him and his court, resplendent in gold and silver.

-Woman, I have heard of the miracle performed by my son, the Prince and heir. But will you be able to speak to the proud Dragon that haunts my Kingdom?

-cannot answer without seeing him with my own eyes, Sire.

-I am at a loss in this most delicate situation!

-Before I make a decision, I must speak to him. Where is he, your savagely diplomatic Dragon? Bring him here!

The King takes his sceptre, pointing it at her, filled with cunning leniency, beautiful arrogance, and blasé baseness:

-He has hidden himself deep inside an enormous cave within the Blue Mountain, I tell you! Go on, then!

-I can do nothing, Your Majesty. I stand firm in my position.

-I offer you two of my emissaries who will take you to his home and wait for you there for three days.

-Very well, in this case of extreme urgency, thank you, Sire King.

-Good, you wretch, here they are. Go with them.

She was taken there: she climbed the path to the cave and then to its entrance. She whistled three times, letting herself go: the men of her guard had hidden well behind rocks, embodying pure villains. She was alone facing the animal, which showed its head, then its body, and finally its tail. It was a fantastic animal, proud of its strength but in no way evil, cunning or vicious.

After a long, guttural dialogue punctuated by brief, rather strange noises, she offered it a dark brown potion and watched in amazement as the beast's form disappeared, revealing a dashing man in fiery armour! It was the spell of an ancient sorceress! The soldiers stood frozen like wax statues, unresponsive, dazed for the rest of their days.

The warrior knelt down, holding out his sword with one hand and touching her hand with the other: the miracle happened!

The witch in the hooded cloak ceased to exist and died

there.

A young damsel materialised in her place before the wide-eyed gaze of the King's guards! The couple rode off on a black stallion, saluted as they should be by the King's soldiers! Only one man's heart was filled with sadness: the King's son! He secretly loved this woman, whose life belonged to him since he had rescued her in extremis from the precipice where she could have fallen. He blamed himself for having waited so long...

That morning, small white snowflakes fell, muffling the sound of the bay horse's hooves. The Prince wandered aimlessly along the roads of the kingdom, with no particular destination in mind. He saw a woodcutter's cottage and stopped his solitary journey. He dismounted and tied his horse to a stake. He hesitated for a moment, then knocked on the rough oak door. He needed a hot drink before turning back.

The door swung open and he saw HER coming towards him, smiling.

She was the spitting image of his mother: 'How can this be? Am I mad? Is this a spell?' He kissed her delicate hand and said, 'Will you marry me, fairest of the fair?' She nodded her head, speechless with joy, delighted with her good fortune, replying, 'Oh yes, I have been waiting for you for so long!' The first spell ended, and it had repercussions on the second duo: two sisters for two princes!

Carrying the lovers, who were overcome with happiness, the bay horse served as their mount to the castle where they lived happily ever after, from Christmas to Christmas!



12 December

In the Kingdom of Snow lies the Palace of Mirrors, inhabited by the Princess of Cold! She possessed a frozen territory of eternal snow, with ibex, marmots and bears for companions and reindeer for her sleigh! She also had a rather unusual art gallery: she kept framed portraits of the unfortunate souls who had come there, like beautiful specimens of the human race!

She welcomed them, fed them, put them to sleep, and they ended up prisoners of these evil paintings! It was the wheel of their destiny, immutable, sounding their final creed. One day, a wonderful solitary hunter passed by, brave, proud and foreign. He was breathtakingly handsome! The Princess fell in love with him and showed herself in her true form, that of a young woman of striking beauty!

But the hunter was not interested, he loved another! He was merely polite, composed, reserved, and adorably distant!

She went to consult her mirror in the gushing fountain: 'You who have never lied to me, give me the appearance of this girl!' No sooner said than done! She transformed herself into this young maiden, barely out of childhood, and found herself less beautiful than she really was, which comforted her somewhat. She thus learned what jealousy was.

She waited patiently for her host to fall asleep alone in his bed so that she could carry out her plan to make love to him!

The hunter in love ate and went to bed: during the night, he felt a body close to his and heard a voice he would never forget! He woke up in the early morning, exhausted but satisfied, disoriented but happy to see his beloved by his side. He was delirious, but then his brain started working normally again and he jumped out of bed to escape the spell that had him in its grip. He realised and understood!

He had let himself go, fallen into a trap!

The Princess, returning to her senses, languidly thanked him for his passion and energy... She had experienced an

incredible night... He went mad with grief and guilt and, grabbing his dagger, made the reckless gesture of stabbing her! Instantly turned into a marble statue, he adorned the art gallery! 'What a sad fate for such a valiant hunter and such a delicate lover!' she thought tenderly, touching her belly.

A few months later, a handsome boy was born, followed by a lovely little girl: the Princess was overjoyed!

For this reason, she resolved to undo the spell on Christmas Eve and sent the biological father back to his lovers on New Year's Eve! She showed him the sublime fruits of their sensual and unforgettable night together. He was scandalised by the stratagem but happy to regain his freedom! He rode towards the plain where his future wife was waiting for him, still hearing the words of the princess-witch in his ear:

-Do not reveal anything to your beautiful lady, who will know nothing of us or of me, and live happily together thanks to the coins I give you out of my great affection and respect for you! I am thus buying your silence, and by keeping quiet, I am assured of yours through our mutual discretion.

-Thank you, princess, but this secret will be very difficult for me to keep! Knowing my little ones! Let's find a more equitable solution, shall we? Perhaps visiting rights?

-If only you had loved me like that human woman! I am saddened by this, but alas, I am fatalistic! It is better to break up.

-I cannot, my heart is taken forever! I am the first husband and confused, believe me! Perhaps not so clear-cut.

-Yes, I readily understand, which is why I am trying to redeem myself in my own way with this dowry, wanting your happiness!

-That's kind of you: take care of yourselves, all three of you, and stay true to yourselves, without any subterfuge of sentiment! Stop that.

-I'll think about it when the time comes, I promise! As for our twins, if you come back here, you'll see them all grown up and beautiful.

-Yes, but as you suggested before, it wouldn't be fair to you, me or them.

-Then let's part as good friends, sharing a beautiful secret.

After that, it was a completely different story: filled with hope and maternal love only for her, who had fallen in love with him and was caught in her own trap, that of love! All her empathy was for her two children, and she became a flawless mother, full of patience, humility and affection. Something she had never known before! She grew up alongside them, between celebrations and traditions!

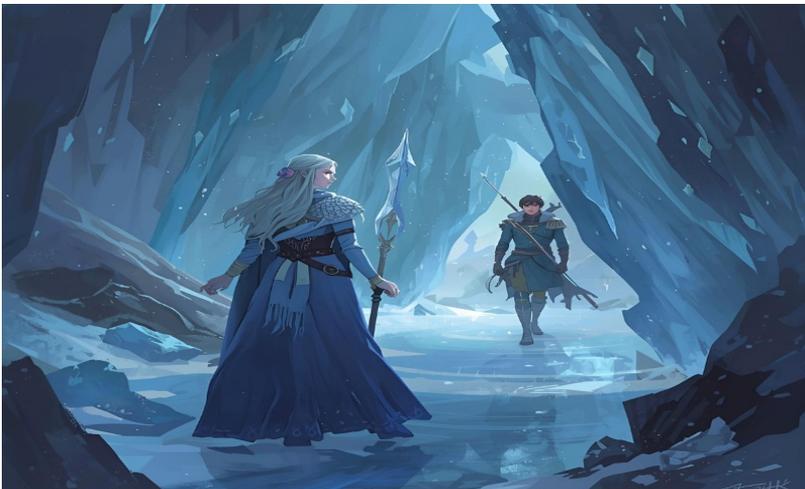
As for their father, who was never there, they later learned that he had not returned from a hunting trip on a beautiful snowy day.

They never knew the truth about this ghostly figure!

He only resurfaced when he retired, now that he was alone. His wife had died and his children were scattered elsewhere.

They lived tenderly through their last moments together.

Their two married children left this frozen land, happy to leave their mother alone with this kind stranger. During their vigils, they remembered... the customs their mother had instilled in them, based on nature, spiritual rituals during 24 days of celebration and lots of love! The faith of a life filled with passionate affection was the best path to a happy life!



13 December

Father Christmas is aching all over today, he slept very badly and is in a bad mood! Everything has gone wrong since he got up: the cup of coffee was too hot, he almost burned himself! Oh dear! The croissant was hard and the butter was frozen! He goes to wash: the soap falls on the floor and slips under the sink! The towel falls on the bath mat, which slips on yesterday's waxed floor!

'Ahhhhh! Oohhh! Boom! Oh dear! Crash! Ouch...'

He gets up as best he can, which isn't very well, and doesn't see the open door of the top cabinet and literally smashes his head on it! 'Ouch, ouch, ouch! Damn it!' What a bruise! 'My head hurts so much! Ouch, ouch, ouch!' He's really shaken up now, in this moment of absent-mindedness! He takes his toothbrush glass, fills it with water and swallows an aspirin.

He goes to change in his bedroom: his braces won't come off, he pulls on them in exasperation and... crack! He loses his balance and falls heavily to the floor once again, with one leg of his trousers in his hand! He gets up, pitiful and stunned, staggering, exclaiming, grumbling: 'Grrr... I'm such an idiot!' He mumbles and grumbles, grumpy: 'I can't wait to go to bed, this is not my day!'

After finally finding a clean pair of trousers, he needs a suitable top. He puts on a shirt: there are no buttons left! A little squirrel has taken them to play knucklebones with! He puts on his socks, but they have holes in them! 'Who did this to me?' Then he puts on his well-polished boots: a mouse has slipped in during the night and bitten one of his toes! Oh no!

Now his socks are moth-eaten: 'What rotten luck!'

He sighs, disillusioned: 'I'm cursed today! Um, what's my schedule?' He opens his door and... a ton of snow falls on him! 'And it's still coming! Boo, I'm cursed!' He steps onto the doorstep and falls head first, ending up with his face

buried in powdery snow! 'Oh no! I've had enough!' He is groggy, cold, and in physical and mental pain.

'Poor me, what have I done to deserve such punishment?'

He tries several times to extricate himself from this slippery situation and finally gets up as best he can. He brushes the snow off his clothes, grumbling, grimacing and coughing. A friendly young dormouse, thinking he wanted to play, bombarded him with snowballs! 'Well, youth must have its fun after all! And today I'm just unlucky!'

He turned up his nose and rolled up his sleeves and returned blow for blow, ball for ball! 'No, but my patience has limits!'

'No, no, no and no! That's enough for this morning, when everything is going wrong!' he said angrily, stamping his booted feet. 'I'm more than tired of all this!' He sniffed angrily.

'You rascal, you good-for-nothing, you scoundrel! If I catch you, you'll be sorry, I promise! You'll get what's coming to you, my lad! You'll see what you get from me at Christmas! A nice invitation to visit Father Whipper! You'll have asked for it!'

The more he shouted, the redder he became!

Gesticulating and shouting, Father Christmas was as angry as his festive outfit was colourful! Oh dear! Little Glorid joined Little Squirrel, quickly scurrying into their tree, well hidden by its foliage and in its hollow trunk, letting out little cries of panic but also laughter. Our little man is now out of breath and sweating! 'What a day, my God! Please let it end, and quickly! I'm exhausted by these incidents!'

He wiped his forehead with his sleeve and began to pray to the heavens.

Hearing his words, actions and thoughts, God came to him and, looking down on him from above, replied mockingly:

'There's no smoke without fire, both literally and figuratively! Have you forgotten something by any chance?'

'I don't see... Oh my God, not that, no!'

Father Christmas then remembered that he had left his soup cooking since the morning! He rushed into his kitchen at lightning speed! A foul-smelling blackish liquid was coming out of his pot: he had burnt his dinner! Charred, burnt. Fortunately, it hadn't scorched the wall or damaged the wood stove pipe! Yes, he was very lucky! His house was intact! No fire to report, no injuries whatsoever!

'Even though I'm devastated, I thank you for your help!'

He buries his head in his hands, buzzing, sad and defeated by so much adversity: 'Nothing has been the same since Mother Christmas left!' How he misses her more and more every day! And there, all alone, he realises his mistakes... when... a hand rests on his shoulder. YOU?! Is he daydreaming?! 'Yes, are you alright?' He hugs her and kisses her: 'I'll never let you go again, ever!'

'I just wanted you to realise that there are two of us here! Merry Christmas!'



14 December

Once upon a time, there was a story about a strange character.

He was a snowman who was cold and looking for a place to warm up. But he didn't know where!

He didn't want to stay alone, hoping for company.

He stumbled along and tried to enter the first village he came across. It wasn't going to be easy. This pretty little town had closed itself off, with dogs barking in the night at any intruder. The town bell rang every hour of the day and night, telling the time! He looked through the windows of the houses, but everyone was staying warm inside, by a cosy fire.

Scrutinising the houses, he dreamed of emotional warmth.

Snow and cold had raged outside for a good week: the climate was harsh that winter. Unable to stay there or wait for any help from this closed community, he preferred to leave and not waste any more time! Further on, he came across the road to another village: pretty, built entirely of stone, it had a certain charm. Alone, he wandered through the streets and encountered only an old beggar under the porch of the church.

Swaying, he approached him, serene, strong in his faith.

The old man declared straight away that there was no room for two here and threatened him, telling him to go back where he came from! Which he ended up doing so as not to make the situation worse. On his way, he came to a third village that lived outdoors: the people were not afraid of the cold, but enjoyed it! It was an innovative environment for this frozen man who was questioning the world.

These people, young and old, were having fun in the snow!

Many children were throwing snowballs at teenagers who were challenging them, while the adults gathered in the town hall square to eat hot chestnuts in cones and drink

mulled wine! Their warmth invigorated them in the face of the terrible cold that surrounded them. It was a positive daily . Their jubilation was transmitted from one to another through a contagious and unwavering joy:

-What a funny joker you are! You're a real guardian angel to me, protecting me so well today.

-Turning into a devil and pulling his feet, what an original and crazy idea! But it worked.

-Yes, but now that Halloween is over, it's up to us to come up with ideas for Advent and its gingerbread, Christmas and its Yule log, New Year's Day and then Epiphany and its galette!

They were in a very cheerful mood and jokes flew thick and fast, bringing gags and witty remarks. They laughed loudly.

A big snowman came quietly towards them, causing them to flee in a grotesque stampede: broken glasses, overturned cones, scattered napkins. One proud little fellow remained facing him. He was not afraid! Phew, someone who is willing to talk to me. Paulo, as he was called, smiled calmly at him and asked him what had brought him there, with courtesy and intelligence, humbly.

Snowman looked him up and down, sardonic, wondering why he wasn't afraid.

'Because I know you're nice and I can't walk anymore!' he replied with a mischievous wink, pulling a blanket off his lifeless legs. In their misery, though different, they were two. 'I came to warm up because I'm extremely cold, you see!' The snow had stopped falling. Silence surrounded them, misty shapes under a starry sky, connecting them.

'Why are your legs so still and lifeless?' The boy showed him a porch that would shelter them. He replied gently : 'I suffered a traumatic shock in a car accident where I lost my parents.' The two understood each other without words, and a true friendship between two lonely souls was born quite naturally! One frozen and the other disabled, they confided in each other, their sadness turning into complicity.

The thoughtful child replied softly:

'I'll lend you my duvet if you want, but you may regret it bitterly: you'll melt! Everything is a choice here on earth.'

The big snowman thought about it and replied:

'Oh well, I'll take the risk!' And he quickly slipped inside, satisfied with the understanding of this wise young human!

'You're right, we have to move forward together: nothing ventured, nothing gained these days!' The snowman, moved by the sick child's gesture, took him in his arms and they both got under the warm duvet. 'It's nice, isn't it?' And they curled up underneath it, talking quietly, listening to each other. 'Oh yes! Let's sleep a little, shall we? I'm tired from this endless walk to get to you!'

As he melted, the big cold snowman revived little Paulo's legs: by melting, he had just given him the best Christmas present ever! The frail little boy was able to walk again: every Christmas, he prays for his friend! An emotional miracle was born out of spiritual sadness!



15 December

There was a little Advent calendar that had escaped from its brothers and sisters' package, placed on the counter of the town shop. There was a lot of movement in the beautifully decorated central aisle! The cashier liked to look at it and offer it to loyal customers. It was displayed between colourful packages of chocolate coins and mugs filled with Christmas chocolates and biscuits.

Customers, attracted by the shimmering colours of these pretty pocket calendars, added them to their Christmas shopping: there would surely be someone in their family, among their friends or acquaintances who would love to receive one! They caught the eye with their deep green, bright red, immaculate white and sparkling gold and silver. It was a joyful, lively time, yet so softly wrapped in affection.

This last little one had gradually slipped away, sneaking between two hurried shoppers, ending up not in one of the bags but simply on the floor: it dodged the human feet around it, quickly making its way to the shelves where there was little or no commotion. It set off to discover the big wide world, straight ahead! 'Phew, that was close!'

With no one paying any attention to him, he felt free and looked around: he didn't really like what he saw. Many dangers lay in wait for him: he decided to go outside and, carried by a gust of wind, was surprised to find himself on the pavement. What a mistake! The wind, the cold and the snow overwhelmed him! 'Brrr! It's freezing! I'm going to get sick.'

The street wasn't as well lit as the gift shop!
'What a temperature! It's freezing! I won't survive!'

The night made him blink: he was frightened by all the darkness around him! 'How can I get back to that brightly lit shop with its warm atmosphere?' He took refuge at the foot of a lamppost and was hit by a huge splash of wee from a huge dog! It stank! 'What bad luck I have!' He washed himself in a puddle and shivered: it was so cold on that

avenue!

And then a cold wind began to blow down from the nearby mountains! All he could do was fall into a large wicker basket sitting on the ground and wait for the owner to open the boot of the car and put him in: ah, finally, he was saved! The interior was warm and comfortable. The adventure continued more positively for him, after all these incredible adventures!

He found a place between two wrapped gifts and a packet of praline chocolates wrapped in foil.

'What a lovely smell! I might as well settle down here.'

The car started up with a young man at the wheel, then stopped a few minutes later in a narrow street and parked.

The gentleman in question unpacked his shopping bags as soon as he arrived home, piling them on the kitchen table.

'Hey, I don't remember this one!' He saw the battered calendar, took pity on it and ironed it to smooth out the creases, making it look much better! He also gave it a place of honour by placing it on the mantelpiece, where it was clearly visible! He was very happy to have come this far! 'I've given myself a chance to survive all dangers through my courage and opportunism!'

He was very proud of himself, the rascal! 'What a wonderful Christmas I'm going to have with him!' He had the house to himself when the man was at work. It was nirvana! He thought of his family during the televised mass and prayed that they would be happy with their future. And the festivities unfolded with dinners and delicacies, dancing, toasting, and wishing each other happiness and success...

A year of joy passed... until the following Christmas! The young man turned it into a real festive celebration!

Our little pocket calendar, along with some older ones, was hung on the plastic Christmas tree. The man had been dismissed from his job in the administrative department where he worked! With less income, he came up with ideas

for decorating his home. He welcomed just a few true friends who came to share good times with him. That's how he met a lovely young lady whom he got engaged to!

They both took down the tree and stored all the little calendars in a padded box on top of the cardboard box until... the following year! They then continued this lovely tradition for many years... to the delight of young and old alike... as the family grew with family, daily, relationship, professional and friendship events!

These little calendars gradually became garlands, nativity scene decorations or menu decorations!

Ours slipped away, falling into the waste paper basket.

Strangely enough, it met a brilliant end thanks to the teenager of the house, who turned it into a ball of colours. Decorated with wings and a golden thread, it remained with its foster family and was brought out every year during the festivities!



16 December

Ludmilla was a fearless and courageous eight-year-old girl. On this festive day, she had arranged to meet her school friends for a real snowball fight: she couldn't wait to get there on time to take part. She put on her coat, hat, scarf, boots and, , her gloves: she was ready to fight. There was a knock at her door and she found herself face to face with her friend.

-Hello Ludmilla, how are you? Have you finished your winter holiday homework? It's hard, at least for me!

-Fine, and you? Yes and no, there's too much. Are you coming to the snowball fight in the big field? We can help each other if you want.

-Of course, I wouldn't want to miss this great opportunity to have fun! But the teacher made fun of us!

-Well, she's an adult testing our intellectual abilities.

-There are still a lot of exercises. She could have given us less maths and a book to read to make up for it.

-Ah, Charlene, grown-ups are like that, we have to be patient. When we're in their shoes, who knows what we'll do, maybe something even worse to get revenge for our current frustrations. Who will we be? What will we do, protest in the streets? We don't know.

-That's true, you're right. Here comes Dimitri! Hello! Who's with you? Ah, is that your cousin? Is he coming too? Good, that's... ? Vladimir... OK, hello to you both! This is Ludmilla and me, Charlene! Where are you from, the vast expanse of Russia? Here, it's Savoie that welcomes you, we love discovering new people.

-Hello. You're Vladimir... Shall we team up then? If you want, I'm not forcing you, you know? Do you speak French or not?

-Yes, I speak French. I live in Saint Petersburg and study at the French college. I'm French-Russian. Yes, let's team up, no problem. It'll be the Russian izba clan against the snow chalet group! What do you say? Shall we do this together?

-Sounds good to me. OK, why not? We'll crush you, I promise! That's for sure, and without cheating, you'll see! May the best team win!

The four of them set off, laughing and joking.

They all meet at the rendez-vous point, just outside their village, and the two groups form: each side marks out their territory, then the enemies build their barrier walls. They're ready! The signal is given and the battle begins in earnest. You can feel the motivation and determination to win of the young participants caught up in the excitement of the throwing game.

Other groups of friends build identical barriers!

They too want to do battle! Primary school, secondary school or sixth form!

The adults watch from the pavement, cheering them on, giving them advice and bringing them supplies: snacks! Cool.

Some parents coach their team by giving them practical information, while others would love to join in the fray. What memories these snowball fights bring back! Oh yes! The neighbourhood was reborn thanks to these icy but oh-so-warm touches. It was incredible, oh yes! People started chatting, grandpas and grandmas got closer. Hey, they were all part of the same team!

Meanwhile, all around them, snowflakes waltzing, the little ones went back on the attack with enthusiasm and determination.

At the end of the allotted time, they really couldn't decide between them: a draw was declared! Oh, what a shame!

Some were very disappointed with the draw, others delighted to have put up such a good fight: their cheeks were rosy from the freezing cold.

Everyone returned home joking, calling out to each other, jostling each other, laughing, shouting and grumbling. It was very lively!

Two children in this boisterous crowd were holding hands, smiling at each other, looking towards the future: Ludmilla and Vladimir had found each other! Without even looking for

each other, their glances had been enough to bring them together that Christmas! It was the beginning of a beautiful story that they shared as a couple and as a foursome, living apart except for each holiday season. The families would get together once a year and vice versa.

They never left each other's side after that first snowy day! They succeeded in their studies at all levels of schooling, at each stage of their degrees, as did Dimitri and Charlène, who got engaged, married, and had children a few months apart. Their professionals joined forces and their friendship remained intact, both as duos and between children. The two families organised festivities every year: a life of love, solidarity and joy for the best of all worlds!

When they retired, they moved to a sunny location, buying an island to welcome all their children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren. They sold their two houses and bought a large farm, which they renovated from spring to autumn, the four of them working together. Everyone contributed their skills and experience. They trained themselves to be self-sufficient and four years later, everything was in place!

What happy Christmases they spent together!



17 December

Momo and Kelly are sitting on the green bench in their neighbourhood park, their feet dangling in the air. He is wearing long grey shorts and an orange T-shirt, while she is wearing a pink skirt and a blue polo shirt: so cute! They know each other by sight, each attending a different class but at the same primary school. It was a time when there were separate classes for girls and boys, separated by a wire fence.

The girl opens a packet of lollipops and hands it to the boy, who gives her a big smile. 'Thank you!' They each unfold the paper, read the joke and throw it in the bin next to them. Their teachers had taught them good manners. There were rules to follow, and a certain moral code was instilled from nursery school to university. Children encouraged their parents to get involved in society.

-Hi, how are you? I'm Momo and I'm in Year 1 at Diderot. I'm from south Marseille, but I'm originally from Oran.

-Yeah, thanks, I'm fine, how about you? I'm Kelly and I'm the same as you, but at Carnot. I'm from north Lille, before that I was from Tourcoing.

-Yeah, everything's great! I moved with my whole family for work, but I miss the Mediterranean Sea.

-I understand, I was born on a farm with big animals and now I live in a flat. My parents' decision. So...

-What are you doing sitting on the bench? Are you all alone? No brothers or sisters? No friends? That's sad, isn't it?

-None of that, I look at the trees, the flowers, the birds, the cats, the dogs, the fish. No, I'm not that lonely.

-Really! I'm still sad. You must get bored sometimes, don't you? It's not easy being alone for a little girl.

-I watch TV programmes, cartoons, films, documentaries. I read, I do crafts, I dance, I sing, I play the piano!

-You're pretty, you know? You don't complain, I like you a lot: you impress me, you're original with a beautiful artistic

soul!

-Thank you, you're nice too, Momo. And you're my knight in shining armour! Would you like to be my friend?

-Yeah, why not, after all? I'm the oldest of the kids.

They finish their treats and head for the playground:

Kelly to the roundabout and Momo to the slide. They play with the others in the sandpit. A peaceful atmosphere surrounds them, each child absorbed in their own momentum, their own desires of the moment. Kelly is building a castle when suddenly, a bigger boy destroys her masterpiece with an angry, jealous and aggressive kick. Momo throws himself at him in anger and punches him in the stomach. A violent fight ensues.

Parents separate the fiery young combatants.

Momo gets up angrily and says threateningly:

-Don't touch her or her castle. Get out of here! You're mean: if you mess with me, you'll get what's coming to you!' The other boy, René, looks at him harshly, his fists clenched. Kelly wipes her tears, pitiful. 'Never mind about the castle.' She gives Momo a big kiss on his dark cheeks and then sees a large bump on his forehead. "I'm sorry, does it hurt too much?" Momo is scarlet with emotion.

He is so happy that he even forgets about his bump. René is green with rage. Kelly is being nice! He chomps at the bit and calls his friends. 'Hey, how about we all jump on her and put her in her place once and for all, guys?' Silence fell. The children shook their heads, unconvinced, not all of them agreeing on the matter. Some left early so they wouldn't have to do it; it was unfair and none of their business.

A group of four boys left the square and hid on Momo's path. Kelly was with him. They were chatting quietly. At a bend in the path, they were attacked: everyone turned on Momo. Kelly started screaming and kicking and punching his attackers. One of Momo's brothers arrived and separated the resentful group. Resentment emanated from them, a

stubborn grudge, real frustration!

The four thugs were all contrite because they were taken back to their parents, who were told the whole story, backed up by Kelly.

They were punished, and Momo got away with a second bump on his right cheek: he became the hero of the day!

Between the black eye and the bumps, he was visibly bruised!

He needed a little devoted nurse!

Kelly kissed him on the other cheek to make up for it.

What an eventful day they had had! What an adventure!

'You're starting early to pick up girls!' his big brother said to him.

Momo remained silent, so stunned was he by the surprise!

He had his mother's moral: proud of him but rebuking him!

'When you love someone, you discipline them, my son, believe me!'

A few months later, when they started primary school, the pair were in the same class and continued their studies together: they were inseparable, with identical ideas! They promised each other a future together, which they achieved through their equal shares in a property company, one as a secretary and the other as a leading agent. A happy couple with happy children in... Nice!

They decided to celebrate Advent and its calendar in a completely secular way, without the traditional nativity scene, just with houses and trades, herds, an angel and a star guiding the three wise men . Christmas was celebrated at home with thirteen Provençal desserts and oriental desserts on Christmas Eve with family and gifts, then New Year's Day with friends in the same way. Their faith remained strong but private.

18 December

In the tropics, celebrating Christmas or New Year's Day remains idyllic: the beach and barbecues with family and friends, all together! Oh yes, it feels like paradise! The sand and coconut trees provide the perfect picture-postcard image: all that's missing are the cocktails! In terms of clothing, sarongs and other colourful, frilly skirts and blouses create a palette of silky, cool fabrics.

Fishermen bring back their catches in their nets to the harbour markets for New Year's Eve, where prawns and shrimp are prepared in different ways: grilled or in a spicy Creole sauce with chicken and rice, accompanied by peas, sweet potatoes, pineapple, oranges and bananas. All washed down with tropical rum: a treat in the warm midnight sun, before or after a swim in the lagoons!

In these remote lands, these islands at the end of the world, between the infinite sky, the radiant sun, the blue sea and the natural earth, lived Paul. He was a dreamy and melancholic young man, a poet and painter in his spare time. He wrote short stories for a local newspaper and played nostalgic tunes on the island radio: he was an artist brimming with talent. This Christmas, however, he was alone!

All his family and friends had gone away, invited to stay with friends or relatives near and far. Isolated! This allowed him to daydream during the almost obligatory siesta, thinking about everything and nothing. Abandoned to his memories for a moment, he reflected on his plans, his past life, his present life and his future life ! Should he stay there or leave with his backpack and camera for a more picturesque place?

On one of the island's beaches, a young woman was thinking about what her life would be like there, in the present. She had wanted to get away from her family for a while to really settle down: to take stock of her personal and professional life. She had just successfully completed her studies and had several possible choices ahead of her: what would her final

decision be, would it be the right one, would there be another?

Having come here, she participated in the club's activities from a distance, finding it difficult to make friends. That was how she was, the tall Helena.

Slim and rational, she had her strengths.

Both of them had to choose a path: they were at the dawn of their lives. 'Oh well,' she said to herself. 'Have some fun tonight, it's Christmas after all!' And she didn't move, she stood still! In complete physical and mental contradiction, she divided them. Nevertheless, within a few minutes, she threw herself into the festivities with a great desire to do well!

She was preparing fruit juice cocktails when Paul ordered one. With her back turned, absorbed in her voluntary task, she was taken aback. He studied her mannerisms, her every gesture. He had managed to shake off his lethargy, walking on the fine sand when he spotted the party a little further away. One of the guests recognised him and invited him to join them. He nodded his head, thanking him! That's how it was in this place!

The tone of his voice stirred something in her. Helena shuddered, intimidated despite herself, in the middle of her dream. 'No, it couldn't be, after all this time!' She turned around, looked up and, not believing her eyes, jumped into his arms in amazement! She was so spontaneous that it made him dizzy! He smiled as he tried to gather his thoughts, completely taken aback.

-Paul! Is it really you? I'm so happy to see you again, especially on this special day! Finally, I've found you again, oh, it's so...

-Magical?!" Oh, my God! Helena! Is that really you? I've dreamed of you so much and called out to you in my wildest dreams! I'm so happy to see you again. By the way, are you still single?

-Yes, of course, but what about you? Are you still single too?

Is this fate?

-Yes, oh yes! This unexpected reunion is extraordinary!

Stunned, the others couldn't understand this spectacular, sudden and unexpected turn of events!

The reunited couple had to tell them the story of their childhood, which bound them inexorably together beyond even time itself:

'When we were little, we lived in the same neighbourhood, went to the same school, and were in the same classes until the day fate separated us. My parents wanted to return to their island and we children were forced to follow. It was the long summer school holidays and Helena had left. The break-up was final and lasted from the age of five until this evening! I will never leave you again, I promise, my dearest darling!'

She smiled at him so tenderly that he melted!

When Helena returned home to mainland France, it was in the arms of Paul... Married! Her family was shocked but eventually understood the urgency: they celebrated a second wedding at a restaurant! Their life was off to a flying start: she was pregnant and a novelist, he was an editor and radio DJ!

What a wonderful Christmas that year was for them!



19 December

A poor, muddy, bedraggled dog arrived in town on his own during the Advent festivities: his coat was dull and sticky, his paws dirty and tired, his muzzle shaggy and his jaw toothless. It was a real shock to see him wandering around the boulevard like that! People avoided him, finding him unsuitable for their city-dwelling lifestyle. He wandered here and there, driven by his hungry stomach.

He looked so bad that every passer-by quickly moved away from him. Could he be covered in fleas?

Yet he wasn't mean; he had a generous heart, worn out from having loved so much, adored too much, been so enamoured with humans!

All he wanted was affection, a home where he could live out his days in peace. 'Yes! A spot in front of a warm hearth.'

'I dream of a warm bath, drying off by the wood fire, being petted, a bowl of kibble and water,' he thought.

Aside from sighing, he thought softly: 'Oh yes, it would be fantastic to grow old in the warmth for my old bones!'

He walked straight ahead, aimlessly, not knowing what to do. Suddenly, he stopped his wandering: he had just smelt something cooking, which made him let out a huge groan of despair. Sausages! Real charcuterie! It had been a very long time, far too long in his daydreams, since he had seen this type of food. This was a real godsend! Would he dare to become a thief? He was at the end of his life.

He hadn't eaten anything in over three days! His stomach was growling and trembling in the icy wind. He shook his head fatalistically. He was beginning to lose faith in everything: love, friendship, justice. He was jaded about everything except this life that was not so easy to manage! He had been abandoned at the foot of a tree, tied up, with . He had waited, then barked, and finally heard: they had put him in a cage... without understanding.

Today was Christmas Eve! He was getting old, without much strength, saddened but full of memories!

And he, coming back to reality, there in all its rawness, was alone outside.

Yet until now, he had managed to survive as best he could. Where was the wolf now? Surely old age was to blame!

For several days, he had been growing weaker, cold and hungry, with little hope! 'What if I lay down here in the cold and snow,' seized by a sudden urge to let go, 'no one will miss me, and no one cares about me anyway, so? I will be serene, at peace.' Christmas was a time to depart for the stars. Christmas also performed miracles sometimes, he had been told! But was that for him...

Pedestrians continued on their way, thinking about their evening with family or friends in a cosy corner. Among this crowd, why couldn't he find someone who would take pity on him? Someone who would understand his message? Who would take him to their home, open their garage door and give him food and water? 'I'll remain a dreamer all my life, an idealist...'

Then he caught the eye of a little girl, so cute and well dressed, who let go of her mother's hand and came up to him, wrapping her arms around him, not caring about his disgusting fur. His tail twitched slightly, unable to believe his surprising luck. This little cutie was attracted to this dirty ball of fur! He watched her and discovered friendship, which made him feel so good!

The surge of love! The parents, seeing this, were touched and looked at each other in amazement. The same idea had occurred to them: to make their child happy! The dog followed them confidently. They decided to wash him, clean him up, brush him and put a beautiful collar on him before settling him into a cosy basket big enough for his large size! He understood that he was saved and let them do it, which was more than he could have hoped for!

And guess where? By the fireplace!

A bowl filled with delicious smells completed the idyllic picture of this ill-famed and hitherto unloved dog! He regained his health and protected them! He was never short of affection and was cherished and loved for many years: he returned the favour with lots of licking and tricks that she taught him.

Mia named him Beau for good!

The two lonely souls had attracted each other, recognised each other and cherished each other.

Between them, her little mistress and him, a great love story began and lasted over time: he accompanied her to school, waiting for her afterwards, and continued to do so until she went to law school!

She obtained her certificate of competence and also became an activist as a lawyer for animal rights: what a journey!

On a beautiful rainy day, he passed away in her arms!

Lying on the carpet in front of the warm fireplace... He had held on until then for little Mia, his true love, and an intense emotional bond was born forever!



20 December

On a beautiful December evening, an old lady was decorating her Christmas tree while waiting for her grandchildren and children to arrive. They were coming to collect the presents that Father Christmas had left for them, as he did every year. It had been a long time now since she had been living alone in the family home of yesteryear! She had many memories of this place, which she tried hard to keep intact, clean and renovated!

She had a life full of fun activities with the senior citizens' club and enjoyed herself, dancing and twirling around! She was active despite some morning rheumatism. She had just met Jules, a dashing man with a mischievous eye, a sharp wit, a laugh, a good nature and, what's more, an excellent dancer. Maybe one day... Who could really know? Her heart was racing!

'Here they are! My little ones!'

The cheerful family arrived with much shouting, laughter, car doors slamming and horns blaring.

They invaded Granny Cindy's space, lifting her up in their arms. She was delighted to see them again, all grown up!

'You haven't changed much, still as mischievous as ever, eh?'

She began her tour of the group, asking each of them a question or teasing them playfully, giving them cheerful hugs and warm kisses, before serving them homemade Christmas cocktails made with syrup for the children or unlimited Coca-Cola, and alcoholic aperitifs for the adults made with mulled wine or champagne! They toasted and congratulated each other until...

The doorbell rang! A great silence fell...

Granny Cindy, surprised and astonished, got up and went to open the door: oh!!! A tall, lanky man took her by the shoulders and kissed her without warning! He let her go with a big smile before realising that they weren't alone! She was

speechless! It was so strange! Jules stared at her and then did it again! What nerve... Granny was torn between anger and astonishment, confused to say the least!

Applause caught them off guard: he didn't know she was having guests and she had forgotten about them!

Red-faced, she made the introductions, which greatly pleased the lucky man, who was thus entering THE family! He shook hands, kissed cheeks, terribly at ease! He hadn't consulted her at all and was now settling into his place. For her, it was unsettling, with her children smiling behind her back and her grandchildren going to call her naughty!

The evening was a success: Granny had worked miracles in the kitchen: hot and cold starters, glazed turkey with chestnuts and green beans, mixed salads, a cheese platter and the famous thirteen desserts of Provence: almond, pine nut, dried raisin and apricot, mandarin, apple, orangette, aniseed and lemon biscuit, croque-dent, white and dark nougat, mint, cherry and liqueur chocolates, candied fruit and brioche.

We chatted, ate, played video games and board games, drank and danced part of the night away! And the queen of the party was, of course, the lovely Mamie Cindy, as warm and bubbly as ever! A real ray of sunshine for the whole family! She knew how to entertain, making sure everyone was happy, radiant and in high spirits. The dishes gradually dwindled. And Jules?

Well, he was thrilled by this rather dramatic and comforting introduction to her and to the future! Their future together ! Because he was thinking about it more and more, he wanted to be in a relationship again and, if possible, with her, whom he had just met and with whom he had fallen head over heels in love! But what about her, her thoughts, her emotions and her feelings?

He had no idea, she didn't open up easily.

Being a widower wasn't for him, no way! He hoped to feel

alive, to move and travel: it's much better as a couple! The world was calling them: cruises or romantic weekends in Europe, the United States or Asia! He would take her far and wide, protect her, holding her hand. He envisioned a comfortable retirement and hoped to enjoy it with this sparkling, intelligent lady.

The children's and grandchildren's groups made it easier for her to mediate, as they really preferred her to be accompanied, so they would worry less. When the gifts were handed out, it was a success: everyone opened theirs, their eyes wide with surprise at the contents: gadgets for the teenagers, toys for the younger ones and decorations for the adults. Near the television, there were gift vouchers.

Spontaneous laughter and cries of joy erupted on all sides!

When Jules handed her his, Granny Cindy discovered a magnificent gold ring with a lapis lazuli stone! She had also thought of him and took it out of one of her pockets: a box with beautifully crafted mother-of-pearl cufflinks and a tie clip. They looked at each other so tenderly that everyone applauded! A successful family Christmas for this man who hated loneliness!



21 December

In the days of trappers, in a land of greeting cards, shaped by ice and snow in winter, forests and green meadows in summer, a small village lost in its natural setting was in turmoil. Nothing extraordinary usually happened on a daily basis, but this was very strange indeed: a child was missing from their community. No one knew where Sean, the baker's son, was!

He was a baker's apprentice, about ten years old.

He worked hard and had only one small flaw: he told tall tales! People viewed him with suspicion and mistrust; he wasn't 100% reliable! He had left to deliver bread by cart to the neighbouring hamlet, and then nothing, no trace, poof! As if he had vanished, evaporated, disappeared, been kidnapped?! The horse and cart returned exhausted, without him, with empty baskets and the collection box full!

So there had been no thieves, only an accident could have happened. A giant search party was organised between the two villages: the men went to the road he had been forced to take to look for clues to his whereabouts. However, nothing conclusive was detected with the naked eye on the road. Their calls had gone unanswered. At this point in the investigation, there was nothing to support a viable solution.

As they approached the edge of the woods, they noticed some suspicious tracks. Skilled trackers, proud hunters, and outstanding hunters, they followed the footprints in the muddy ground: the dogs accompanying them became excited, running in all directions, barking loudly. Caution! A significant anomaly was visible, perhaps a dangerous target: no danger was apparent.

Grrr!
Humans and dogs suddenly stopped in their tracks when they heard a blood-curdling growl! They rushed towards the source of the noise, stunned by what they saw: they were far from imagining this! It was Sean! Sean was sweating! Sean was wiping his forehead, shirt-sleeved! Sean was trying

to lift a huge rock that had a gigantic bear trapped underneath it!

-Unbelievable! If I hadn't seen it with my own eyes, I would never have believed it! Oh no, that's for sure!

-What a sight, really! My God, when I tell the people in the village up above! He so frail and the other so enormous!

-Mind-blowing, you mean! That's an excellent comparison, by the way! It's a funny contrast, you can say that again!

-Well, when we tell people, we'd better be a few of us, otherwise they'll think we're liars, charlatans!

-Fathers, it took you long enough to react! I've been trying unsuccessfully for several hours! I'm pretty helpless in this situation, I have no strength left, it's up to you to help me!

-But we were all very scared when we saw your delivery cart come back alone at full speed, containing the money!

-Right, let's deal with the most urgent matter! What can we do to rescue this injured, trapped or exhausted animal? Once it's been relieved, it may turn on us!

-We have to get that bear out of there! But I don't see how yet! Let's put our heads together and come up with a positive outcome!...

-Come to think of it, is it injured or just trapped? If we free it, there's a risk! We need to protect ourselves from it just in case!

-I've been trying for ages: I've come up empty-handed every time! This rock is monstrously heavy! I've got no energy left.

-If we all work together, we should be able to do it! -I don't think he'll do it, eh, big guy?! Take it easy, don't be scared, we'll get you out of there, trust us!

-Come on, one, two... and... three! It'll be alright, you'll see, big guy! -A little more, to the right, and now we'll pivot here.

-He's moved! Just a little more and I think we'll be done! That's it, he's going to help us, he's strong and smart, that blighter!

-Just a little more effort! One, two... and... Hhhhann... Three! -We finally did it! Phew, phew, phew! I didn't think it would happen so quickly.

-There you go, lads, it's done! We did it! Yes, my friend!

-Yeah. You see, you can go home today. Phew.

-Yes, it wasn't without effort, I must say! Did the doctor come? This animal needs treatment! Look at its leg!

Dr Sullivan was summoned to the village and came to see the wild animal lying there, groaning, half groggy with pain, and gave his diagnosis: nothing serious at first glance, except that it would be unable to move for several months... The men scratched their heads because the cold season was approaching: it was impossible to leave it like that, in full view of the poachers who were always around here, or the wolves.

A log cabin was built around the animal so that it would not freeze to death! A beautiful gesture of solidarity between man and bear... Becoming the protector and protégé of these remote villages, this place at the end of the world... made him its muse: he was proudly christened Big Boss! Friendly, they brought him food and he was able to hibernate... until spring, peacefully until his final awakening!

Emerging from his retreat, he encountered a female bear who was wandering around the area, now fully recovered. He followed her and... returned at Christmas with three cubs who were playing wildly around them! Merry Christmas to all!



22 December

In the cottages of yesteryear, without refrigerators to keep food cold, meals were placed on the outside windowsills. Each household cooked their meals in a bread oven. In the past, villagers would gather in the large village hall and drink mulled wine while enjoying hot chestnuts before and after midnight mass on Christmas Eve.

They would return home to find dishes that had been simmering since the day before, some of them in the cauldron on the fireplace! The pies were waiting outside, along with the fruit tarts and brioche cakes! But sometimes accidents could happen... That's what happened this time, at the farm furthest from the village, where little Victor's parents and grandparents lived!

The whole family got ready to take part in their small town's festivities, as they did every year, and left early for the traditional midnight mass, where the parish priest would thank his flock for coming out in such large numbers. His offering would be quite substantial thanks to the collection taken! It would be used to help, feed and clothe the poor, the destitute, the needy and the sick.

They stopped for a few moments to catch their breath in the centre of the village, wish their friends a Merry Christmas and enjoy a peaceful meal inside the festive barn: it was very cold outside and they still had a long way to go across meadows, fields and paths! The bells called them and the Christmas Mass began with songs, prayers, moralising from the pulpit and coins clinking in the collection baskets.

The night was starry but freezing cold. The pilgrims put on their cloaks to face the snow, the lines broke up in the streets, the lanterns were lit, a few stragglers were still lingering, and the farmers set off at a brisk pace, invigorated by the last glasses of mulled wine and chocolate for Victor, who was growing up. He waited feverishly for his morning gifts, like his schoolmates.

They walked valiantly, well dressed in warm clothes and fur-lined boots, facing the swirling snowflakes that continued their joyful dance around their group. Everything was normal around the buildings that made up their farm when they returned home: it was only when they entered the back of the house where the kitchen was located that they got a big shock!

-Ahhhhh!" exclaimed the mother, dressed up for a wonderful celebration where the atmosphere was sure to be joyful! 'What is this?'

-Oohhh!" replied Victor, embarrassed and sheepish at what he saw right in front of him and his family! 'My God, oh my!'

-Damn it! shouted Dad, upset despite himself, 'This can't be happening, not on such a special night!' He had been looking forward to a nice dinner, which was now ruined! "It's not fair! We prayed, we gave, and what did we get? Nothing but fasting. I know, wife, I just blasphemed!"

-What's going on, children? said Grandpa, arriving at the sounds coming from the living room, still wearing his heavy coat and muddy shoes!

-Oh dear! cried Grandma, defeated, unwittingly echoing the gravity of the situation. 'Let's think...'

A family of raccoons was running away, after breaking and destroying everything in the kitchen! They were running away as fast as they could! The dishes on the table had fallen to the floor and been eaten in their entirety by the parents, not to mention the food outside! The young rascals had gobbled it all up, filling themselves up for the winter: they were the lucky ones! What to do in such a case? What to eat among humans?

Everything was upside down, the party irretrievably ruined! Except for the small wild animals and birds. They tidied up, swept, washed and ate what was left in the cupboards and the hot cauldron! They hadn't lost everything: vegetable soup with croutons, a pot-au-feu that was planned for the next day and cheese for dessert.

-Ah! What a strange feast this is, made from leftovers! We

won't have a meal worthy of Christmas Eve, sniff!

-Look at those snoopers, they really enjoyed our culinary innovations! At least they got their Christmas present! We're not doing too badly either, with our leftovers of dried fruit and shortbread left in the oven!

-Well, at least it was edible, they ate everything! Our vegetable soup and stuffed cabbage... that'll be for us, and that's that!

-Yes, it will be for us on this night of brotherhood and solidarity! And all this because of a window left ajar!

-Well, there are also the petits fours and salmon blinis in the cupboard! We have enough to survive another two days! There was certainly too much, and God showed us the surplus and shared it with the nature around us!

Santa Claus' visit brightened up the rest of the night, bringing joy back to their home: that was the main thing!

The animals had left the presents because they didn't have time to play! At the edge of the woods, they were seen looking regretfully towards the house: the adults then agreed to give them the leftovers from their meals over the following days. They remained mischievous, curious, mischievous and playful. Mutual aid was provided for these animals starved by the harsh winter: solidarity began between humans and animals on this isolated farm! Ecological assistance was established normally and naturally.

The family groups grew separately, but a bond had been formed: when winter raged, the wild animals came to take refuge in a barn where bowls of food were set out for them!



23 December

A young princess, with no siblings or real friends, tired of being alone in her magnificent castle surrounded by cold, frost, ice, glaciers, chasms and snow, announced to her dear parents that she finally wanted to get married, and right away! She wanted to share her life, hoping to find a partner who matched her sensitive and creative personality, but also to travel and discover new places.

'So your mother and I, my dear little one, will think about it very seriously. We will immediately send a royal scroll to the entire kingdom, urging every man of marriageable age to come and court you! But we are very surprised by your personal request. Until now, you were not inclined to such extremes. Can you tell us what made you change your mind about marriage?'

Surprised by this announcement, they listed her teenage grievances, even though they were delighted with her final decision!

'No, that's far too easy in this case. I want a man who is worthy of my position, not in terms of social status but in terms of intelligence. Tell them that there will be three tests: athletic, cultural and generous, the official titles of which are as follows: to find the snow flower Edelweiss at the risk of their lives, to answer a riddle and to give their opinion on an action to be taken with regard to the people, which I will communicate to them as soon as they arrive within these walls!'

No sooner said than done: from every corner of the kingdom, countless noble gentlemen rode towards the majestic Domain of the Vertiginous Peaks. Even the most valiant among them did not venture there without an escort: thieves and wolves lurked around every bend. These representatives embodied the cream of the nobility and bourgeoisie of this vast land!

They arrived at the castle with great fanfare, determined to see this princess who had so clearly challenged them.

After the customary bows, a gala dinner was served: they joked, drank, courted and danced. Early in the morning, they prepared themselves physically before venturing onto the steep slopes of the mountains where rare Edelweiss flowers bloomed: many lost their lives, slipping on the rocks, or gave up and left, finding the terrain too steep!

For the second trial, less than half of the knights remained. The riddle was as follows: 'Ten letters of nobility, heart, love and bravery form a word worthy of a king! A murmur arose: 'Chivalry!' replied a masked man dressed in black, without a moment's hesitation. He exuded a mysterious magnetism. Several young men left the throne room.

'Seven letters for art and music, dear to my heart?' whispered the smiling, well-read princess. 'Baroque!' replied a man curtly and unpleasantly. She rebelled nervously... 'Eight letters doubled to describe my character traits?' she said in a loud, calm voice! She would not be swayed: 'Tenacity and Temerity!' said the twins. She relaxed at their loud proclamation!

With a smile on her lips for this final test, Princess Héloïse approached the four winners, each very different from the other, declaring that she wanted to know their social, military, political, ecological, medical and security plans for her people on the final question: 'Gentlemen, what are your intentions for my people, who will be ours as soon as we are officially united?

The first said: 'Protection in every way and generosity of heart'. A slight bow mimicked the respect due to his rank.

The second said: 'Wars and expansion of the Kingdom!' A brief, rigid military salute accompanied his harsh and severe words.

As for the twins, they spoke with one voice: 'Love and beauty!' A virginal pirouette embellished their burlesque attitudes.

A great silence greeted the final declaration.

The princess then said: 'Let the second be Commander of

the Armies, let the young men be Ministers of Arts and Letters. You, please remove that mask, my dear future husband!' Graceful and elegant, Héloïse waited a moment for the gesture to be made so she could see this strangely princely face. With an elegant gesture, the man removed his mask and she discovered a face marked by fire and iron!

A dull, heavy astonishment fell upon the room with its high cathedral vaults, all around the future spouses.

All the nobles of the royal court looked away, except her! 'How you must have suffered! I will love you all the more for it!' And she held out her hand, which he took firmly. He then listed his titles and possessions, as well as his surname: Philibert de Sixton, Crown Prince of the Côtes de Brets and the Territories of the Parmfidmoan Islets, at your service, sweet Héloïse!

Both moved by this declaration from a generous heart, they said 'I do' on Christmas Day and lived happily ever after as fulfilled monarchs. They shared their passions and passed on their father's courage and their mother's values to each of their many children. Every Advent and Christmas was a double celebration in their reunited and peaceful kingdoms!



24 December

Father Christmas is definitely very angry today!

The workshop is clattering, the telephone is ringing, voices are shouting, impatient cries are rising! Nothing is going right, definitely!

He is extremely stressed! His beard is twitching violently!

Everything is behind schedule: Mrs. Claus hasn't ironed his regulation suit, the elves haven't finished wrapping the presents, labelling them with names, packing them in clean boxes, or putting them in the festive sleigh, and the reindeer are on strike, refusing to be harnessed! 'How am I going to deliver presents to all the children?' He scratched his head, put his hat back on, and grumbled under his breath.

Suddenly, he had an idea: he picked up the phone and called the Angels to help him with his task! They were delighted to assist him and brought him lots of white clouds to carry the presents from children all over the world. To avoid making a mistake, they planted a pretty flag of the country to be flown over inside each one. 'How lucky I am to be able to count on them!' He was relieved of a great emotional burden.

The Angels assisted the Elves and shuttled between heaven and earth: everything was loaded in full view of the protesting Reindeer. A revolt was brewing in this country. They were not happy at all! They sulked throughout the festivities! Mother Christmas arrived in her beautiful ironed red and white costume, her polished and varnished boots, her reshaped and padded hat, and warm gloves.

How well it suited her, making her suddenly so affable!

Father Christmas was ready for his work as a jolly fellow with pleasant words and a sack full of toys. The Angels each took a beautiful cloud and guided them to their destination. The Elves were there to put the small presents into the chimney flues. These parcels had been sorted by child, adult, family, address, floor, town, region and country.

The mothers entered the room to place the parcels in stockings and under the tree, while the fathers carried the large, heavy and bulky ones. This was done according to the timing specified in the orders. Gold and silver colours were for adults, plain colours for teenagers, multicoloured for children, and naive patterns for babies!

The night was long and filled with beautiful work done joyfully. The labour was accomplished with kindness and love for others. The Angels were funny during their work: they loved to laugh, to make themselves useful, indispensable, essential. Unconsciously, they loved the joy with and around them! They encouraged humans to think, reflect, write, act, achieve, philosophise, hope, dream and pray.

Above each cradle, they sprinkled stardust, and the babies instantly smiled at them.

Young children called out to them and babbled in their broken, bubbly language! In hospitals and clinics, they sprinkled beautiful, gentle energies to relieve people under great stress, those who were accidentally injured, destitute mothers, the elderly, and nursing staff. In every room, they contributed greatly to fraternal mutual aid, solidarity, and unconditional love.

Many couples reconciled by giving each other big kisses when they passed through flats, houses, factories, laboratories, businesses, streets, car parks, lifts, staircases, on the beach, while hiking, skiing, diving, horse riding, walking, cycling, driving, travelling by bus, train or plane... All you had to do was believe, and the miracle could happen.

Everything is fullness on this magical night so full of emotion and passion. Kisses, smacks, pecks: fingers, cheeks, lips.

Love seeks itself, discovers itself, cherishes itself, ignites itself, embraces itself, takes flight! What an irreplaceable earthly gift!

A heavenly feeling that lifts us all up!

Father Christmas had just finished his wonderful tour, the

Angels left on their clouds, greeting the breaking dawn, and the Elves treated themselves to a very early dinner, torn between the joy of having made the whole world happy and the sadness of having to wait a whole year before starting all over again... The moon winked at them gratefully. Day was breaking and so were the children, opening their presents... impatiently.

Christmas stretched out and lingered, to the delight of humans everywhere! Father and Mother looked at each other, eyes locked!

Merry Christmas to all!

May the opening of your presents be a magical moment for children and parents alike!



A Great Story for Well-Behaved Children

Kwerty and his Friends

Part 1

Once upon a time, there was a charming little reindeer named Kwerty because he had a habit of always sharing: cakes, clothes, books, games. Time passed in well-defined, delimited periods. He lived in the cold of the far north, where blizzards blew fiercely across the desert plain. There was a kind of silence there, marked by loneliness.

He had many friends and had a lot of fun with them: he enjoyed their friendly and affectionate company, a kind of assistance in the isolation of this remote corner. That morning, he had decided to roll around in the snow that was falling outside in gusts of large, thick white flakes: winter had suddenly returned without warning, offering them a magnificent frosty natural spectacle.

Large flakes fluttered here and there, dancing lightly around the three friends on their outing, happy to be together. They jumped and leapt, running back and forth. "Hello, Kwerty, how are you today?" said Becky, the little wild rabbit hopping around her burrow, her little snout always in the air, sniffing the air, conquering, proud and curious, always on the lookout.

'Hello, Becky!' replied our gentle little caribou, shaking his head: his antlers were starting to become quite imposing and therefore heavy. He was growing up and had to work hard to keep his balance. 'You seem very cheerful today!' grumbled Gros Pigreen, the melancholic bird with green and yellow plumage, slender and exotic in appearance despite his advanced age: he was the eldest of the group.

'And you, you must have worries, right?' replied the other two in unison, a hint of compassion in their measured words. They were sensitive, concerned for his well-being. 'Well, well, well... I woke up feeling like I had been dreaming...' Ppffttt... Ppffttt... Ppffttt... 'Don't keep us in suspense, is it something

you made up or not? What else is going on on this beautiful snowy day?'

They were questioning but not overly surprised, as GP had a sad and very discontented character. He was never really happy: his colourful personality was full of differences, nostalgia and melancholy. 'How can you know that, you who are so cheerful all year round?' he said, astonished, his eyes wide open, scrutinising their joyful and often very positive faces.

He found himself perplexed, feverishly doubtful, suddenly suspicious!

The others began to laugh: his face was sullen, unfriendly, grumpy. Carefree, huddled together in the cold and snow, they would now romp around to their hearts' content, right then and there! 'Come with us, we're going to play in the snow and make big snowmen or throw snowballs at each other! It'll take your mind off things to fool around with us, your loyal friends!'

'No, really, I don't feel like it at all: I'm going back to my warm home!' And he pretended to return to his dwelling, somewhat depressed by his monotonous and routine life, which he hated. They saw him so overwhelmed that they surrounded him, asking him to tell them about his famous dream! It was because of this dream that he was feeling this way. They didn't like to see their friend sad: he needed a real challenge!

They tried in vain to cheer him up, to at least make him smile!

'Nothing! Except...' He shook his head, distressed and troubled. 'Except that the snow fairy didn't...' He couldn't finish because he had a fit of poignant disillusionment and coughed loudly: did he have a cold? The atmosphere between the three of them became almost unbearable. They tried to understand, despite everything, to find a clue that would help them. 'What did she do to you to put you in such a state? She's so nice!' they echoed, surprised by his laconic

response.

They looked at each other, then turned back to him, scrutinising his answer.

'She FORGOT me!' he grumbled, sniffing and shaking his frozen wings. 'Yes, it's true: she really FORGOT me!' He was probably upset and wouldn't let it go, unfortunately! "OooohhhhH!" they comment in beautiful vocal harmony. 'Is that all? Is that all there is to it? It's not that bad!' they inform him with relief. So it wasn't completely and irretrievably lost after all.

'Well, yes, that's it!' he lamented, inevitably playing the fashion victim, without even looking at them. They thought about challenging him: 'Are you going to decide to follow us to get those negative words out of your head?' He dared to give them a shy, sidelong glance, so diminished was he morally, contrite and embarrassed, abandoned, shaking his wings of light snow. He found himself stuck in his ego.

The friendly duo gave him affectionate little pats on his plumage, sympathising with his morning sorrow. They tried, through this display of pity and commiseration, to encourage him to make peace with himself! They did not want him to fall back into depression or suicidal thoughts. They tried to show him life from a cheerful, lively, talkative and happy perspective.

'It'll be alright, you'll see! Come and get some fresh air with us, you'll stop thinking about your frustration!' they cheerfully assured him. They gave him big kisses on his head as a sign of positivity to quickly revive him so that this unfortunate nightmare would fade from his memory. They chatted, laughed and joked in turn. The great disappointment gradually dissipates into the air. They are together!

Becky skips and jumps innocently while Kwerty serves as random transport for Big Pigreen, GP to his friends. The latter is finally delighted with the turn his morning has taken, after such a bad start! They gather kindling for Kwerty's

home, who invites them in for a cup of hot mint tea in gratitude for their kind service. Everything was back to normal!

What a wonderful white Christmas for this trio!

Part 2

Becky and Kwerty joined forces to encourage him to come with them every day except during storms. Big Pigreen let them pluck his feathers: they were true friends to him. When he wanted to join in their games, they had great fun for several hours in the living room, delighted with their good fortune. They enjoyed playing Ludo and Goose. It was a wonderful evening among friends, enjoying multigrain snacks.

The next day, mid-morning, the field echoed with their joyful frolicking and surprised exclamations: a true moment of winter happiness. The cheerfulness was there, present. Parting ways in the middle of the day, everyone went home to eat in the warmth and enjoy a well-deserved rest. Becky had a television in her burrow and often watched films or shows!

Our friend the owl, after his invigorating nap, returned to the path and met Becky's cousin Beckett, who was jumping from side to side, zigzagging energetically, not tired at all. They said 'Hello!' to each other and continued on their way. He knocked on Becky's door and asked her calmly, with a smile: 'Ah, it's you! You're here! Come with me, I'm going to Kwerty's! Will you come with me?'

The latter replied cheerfully, 'Why not!' He was more reassured than before, but still felt a hint of disappointment: what a complex character he had! As they made their way through the snow, they suddenly smelled a delicious aroma coming from the barn where their friend the reindeer lived. They approached it almost timidly, very slowly:

'What a delicious smell! What is he cooking today?'

Intrigued by the aroma, they lifted their snouts.

But, just a few steps away, well hidden in the nearby thickets, Bull the wolf saw them approaching, calculating his supper, he who had not eaten anything in ages... He licked his teeth, running his tongue over his lips, thinking about his lucky star and his immense good fortune: for once, he was going to have a sumptuous dinner: a stew or homemade pâté! He thanked the starry sky with a prayer!

'I'll finally be able to eat properly tonight! It's a miracle! It's like winning the lottery!' Only Kwerty was watching: from his kitchen window, he had spotted the shadow sneaking up behind his little friends, who were unaware of the danger they were in! He went around his house, stealthily opening the back door, and just as Bull was about to pounce on them... He jumped too! Wham! Bam-Pouf!

It was Kwerty who lifted him up with his broad horns and sent him rolling into the bushes full of thorns and brambles: serves him right! The two friends then realised that Kwerty had truly **SAVED** their lives: they still couldn't believe the danger they had just escaped! They congratulated him warmly, with amazement and consternation.

-Thank you, my friend! I owe you my life now. Ask me for anything you want and you shall have it! That's for sure!

-Oh, how did you know? We didn't sense him behind us! He got us by surprise, it's crazy. We didn't know he was approaching so close to us. It's true.

-I saw him and jumped: it was just a reflex on my part! You don't owe me anything, Kwerty's honour! It was instinctive!

'Ouch, ouch, are you out of your mind?' yelled Bull the wolf as he emerged from the thick bushy hedges. 'Are you crazy?'

Pulling the thorny bits out of his thick, hairy body, he was furious and inconsolable. The three playmates laughed when they saw how pitiful he looked, with his bony skeleton and protruding bones from not having eaten for several days. He had become emaciated! The trio suddenly took pity on his dishevelled appearance... They felt embarrassed for him. They had a brilliant idea, consulting each other!

'Wow, you're so skinny!' The wolf suddenly began to cry bitterly: it was definitely a tearful moment! It was a strange winter's day. Each saw it in their own way: Becky waddled from one leg to the other, GP smoothed his wings, Kwerty kept his eyes on him. Wolf Bull remained motionless, not quite sure what to do. Silence fell between the quartet.

-I'm worried, I haven't had anything to eat in five days! said our frustrated carnivore. 'I'm at the end of my tether.'

-Why don't you work like the rest of us here in the forest? You could be useful to our safety, to the community.

-Me, work? No way! Besides, apart from stealing and pilfering, I don't know how to do anything else! I never learned.

-What are you waiting for to accept the system? There's still time for you, you're still young! At least give it a try yourself: we can already give you some pointers, map out a possible path, draw up a personalised plan that you can then put into practice. What do you think of the idea so far?"

-Oh, I'm too old now,' he whispered to them, feeling embarrassed, worried and upset. 'I'm beyond redemption!"

-There's no age limit on understanding, you just have to want it!

They all exclaimed in unison, surprised and shocked by his response and cold detachment. Kwerty invited him to come and taste the delicious blueberry pie he had just taken out of the oven, driven by intuition and a desire to help him sort out his life. They sat around the table and ate the succulent cake with gusto, drinking hot herbal tea with floral aromas. They fostered a friendly atmosphere, extending it to the wolf.

Jokes! Humour! Charades! Proverbs! Rebuses...

'What are you doing for Christmas? Will you be alone? We'll go to the meadow to have fun in the frozen snow! Big jumps!'

Bull listened to them, stunned and dismayed. The trio did not pick up on the signal of a very frightening loneliness, too inaudible!

One day follows another, as we all know!

-Nothing! Like every year, I'm alone, old, unloved, sick, feared, crazy, disturbed, notorious, lazy, a liar.

-Don't exaggerate, eh? You're lonely, okay, but you're not crazy or as pitiful or as miserable as you say you are, are you?

-Come with us, dare you! We'll have fun, come on! We'll go to the oak tree and make snowballs!

-And have sword fights, slide down the frozen lake.

'You want me to come with you? That's kind of you!'

Bull the wolf only understood the surface of the situation; the deeper meaning completely escaped him. 'Especially after what I wanted to do to you.' Bull couldn't believe how lenient they were being. He sobbed, confused. 'Well, it's already forgotten! So you'll come, won't you? And then maybe you can help us with our festive preparations, who knows?! They had their own little idea to make him indispensable.

There was so much work to be done to get everything ready in time!

The three friends trained him, the wolf, to be their close protection, forest, animals or those who migrated or were seasonal. Watching over the plants, making sure they were safe, like forest rangers or firefighters, in order to safeguard every species, settled or nomadic, being their policeman and their road maintenance worker: it was up to him to be very meticulous and vigilant!

'Christmas association meeting! Everyone must attend!'

The next day, they held a meeting to discuss the Christmas programme: who would decorate the tree this year? 'Me!' they heard a deep, muffled voice say behind them. They turned around at once. 'You gave us a hell of a fright, coming up behind us like that!' He curled his lips, looking rejuvenated, and replied, 'I don't do it on purpose, it's in my genes.'

Bull, for it was indeed him, began to laugh, revealing an impressive set of teeth as he pursed his lips. The little friends sweated with contained fear. Kwerty, Becky and Big Pigreen nodded their heads, delighted by his proposal, ignoring their momentary unease. 'You think so?' They remained sceptical. 'Yes, you'll see, it will be beautiful! I will be the architect of a tradition.'

Very proud, he scanned each stunned face around him.

Part 3

He then took out of his pocket some beautifully crafted wooden objects, varnished and very lifelike, showing them to them in his large, clawed hand. "How beautiful!" Bull said, unsure of his own talent. "Do you really like them?" The friendly group congratulated him on his gift for carving and his good timing, clearly very admiring, finally reassuring him, happy to be taken seriously.

'You see, this is real work that can be exchanged for services rendered! It's magical, fantastic, and very artistic too.'

The santons, characters from the nativity scene, were made of wood in different sizes and varnished. They smelled of tree resin, the scent of wood worked with artistry and skill, the delicacy of the features. It was above all a passion for him when, , he would retreat to his den. It was a pastime, a hobby that his grandfather had given him. From generation to generation, one of their family practised this ancestral art.

There was his housewife mother, his protective father, his deceased little brother, two sheepdog herders, a few placid sheep, rebellious goats, friendly cows, and stubborn donkeys. There were three Wise Men: Melchior with a fawn's head, Balthazar with a camel's head, and Gaspard with an Egyptian cat's head. The angels looked like Becky, Gros Pigreen, and Kwerty.

'They're all here!' An 'animal nativity scene' would look great in Kwerty's barn shed! Bull shook his head. 'No, we're missing the stable!' They checked, asking him to build it

while they cleaned the room and set up a long table in the middle. They decorated the room and invited the residents to join them. 'And the angel!' Bull put a dove with outstretched wings in it.

'And the star!' He returned two days later with a shooting star in his hand. Thanks to the two holes, Becky attached it to two wires that Gros Pigreen tied to a roof beam. 'How beautiful it looks!' They were delighted. 'What if we worked together to create a haven of joy in our forest, which is so vibrant with energy?' said Kwerty, the leader of the cheerful band of active and caring friends.

-I'll take care of decorating around the table in our nursery! I love creating atmosphere, adding fabrics, revamping a space and decorating it with Christmas colours! replied Becky, waving her long dangling ears. He hopped around busily, taking a step back. 'I'm going to redesign an angelic place,' squealed Big Pigreen, wiggling his green and yellow tail, which was decorated with festive plumes.

-I'll place our three angels on several clouds made from my down!" he continued, whistling to encourage himself.

-If you bring me some wood, I'll build the stable, murmured Bull the wolf softly, very pleased that he was appreciated for who he was. Once the four friends had finished their work in good spirits, they went to the clearing to relax their paws, having fun and chatting:

It was a cool party!

While playing around, running and jumping, they spotted a beautiful snow-covered fir tree: "That **will be** our Christmas tree this year! Yes, you're right, Kwerty! It's remarkable and big enough!" They began to walk around it, intrigued and already in decoration mode. 'Oh yes, you have a masterful eye for choosing the best symbol.' They applauded him warmly, stamping their feet with impatience.

They went home and fetched their Christmas decorations to adorn it with light and bright colours, to adorn it, to garland it, to ornament it and turn it into a true work of ephemeral

art! How elegant and graceful it looked, lit up naturally in the centre of the solar or lunar halo! Day and night, they feverishly tended to it with a sense of accomplishment!

Bull placed a few colourful gifts at its foot on the moss. The others cheerfully took care of the houses for wild birds to hang on certain branches, while GP flew to its top to place the wonderful second star created by Bull. As night fell, the fir tree sparkled with all its lights in the centre of the shrubby forest under the moonlight, becoming so magical!

Together, they had succeeded in their Advent, creating a festive and heartfelt Christmas, where happiness mingled with the scents!

They invited the forest creatures to join them for a hearty vegetable soup with tasty pieces of meat, left by Mother Christmas for the carnivores. The squirrels had gathered and offered almonds, hazelnuts, walnuts and pine nuts. On Christmas morning, oh, what a surprise! Father Christmas had left them treats and beautiful gifts, which they shared generously: what a successful celebration!

Every animal and insect enjoyed what was good for them!

The whole forest was buzzing with joy and peace!

MERRY CHRISTMAS!

