

embrace Winterlude



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Editor's Note

Christmas nowadays is symbolized by its tree. An important part of the holiday is centred around decorating a tree and enjoying the sight that results from that. Ironically, this is usually an uprooted tree, one that will die in service of our Christmas joy.

Lately, I have been reminiscing about the time I had my own tree (insofar as you can 'own' a tree of course). I don't exactly remember when this was, but it must have been at least around twelve years ago, probably more. Maybe fifteen. I was convinced that you could plant a new tree by sticking a branch of another in the ground. After all, if you put apple seeds in the ground you will get an apple tree. Now, a branch is of course not the seed of a tree but I was young and stubborn. My family told me many times: that's not how it works, but I was convinced and I'd show them wrong. As a result, I looked for some fine branches and planted them in various spots in the backyard. I think in total, I planted four or five branches. Time went by

and nothing happened. Or, I should say: nothing seemed to happen.

Throughout the weeks, I kept my eye on these branches and made sure they stayed where they were. No trees grew from them. Except for one. There, in a little corner in front of the shed, a small tree had sprung some bright green leaves. The branch from which it all began could still be clearly made out from the tree that had started growing out of it. It was a small tree but that didn't matter, because my belief had been proven right. No one believed what I had known to be true: you can plant your own tree by sticking a branch in the earth. I had proven them all wrong and myself right. Just like I would a couple of years later, the tree grew taller and taller. However, it never lost its original frailty. Its leaves, which remained to grow as small as at the start, betrayed its sickness. Green from birth, they would always grow yellow spots. I was no biologist. All I knew was that ladybugs ate lice that I believed were harmful to trees. So, in order to care

for my tree, I would transport any ladybug I encountered in my backyard to the leaves of the tree. I never cured that tree, but that did not halt its development. From what I remember, that tree grew to be at least two meters tall, maybe taller.

But this world waits for nothing and no one, and it would not wait for my tree. It was ripped from the ground, and from my life. My parents were able to afford the big house we lived in because the previous owners left it in such a bad state, which knocked down the price. The same went for the backyard, which looked like a warzone. Whereas some warzones never recover, my parents decided to renovate the garden. I wasn't asked about this, and there was no room for my tree in the plans. Without a single thought paid to it, it was assumed that this tree could be removed. And it was.

Who can say they have their own tree? Their own tree that they brought to life and nurtured. It can't be that many people. How many people can say they defied all common sense and grew a tree by sticking a branch in the ground? The theory my family had for this surreal

event is that there may have already been dormant tree roots in the ground at that spot. Waiting for a branch to latch onto.

To me it didn't matter what the cause was, and it still doesn't. That tree grew tall, from a branch in the dirt. That tree defied the world, and the world struck back. It has doubtlessly been fully decomposed, returned to the earth, and fed new life. It's gone, but I will never forget it, and what it meant to me.

Happy holidays!



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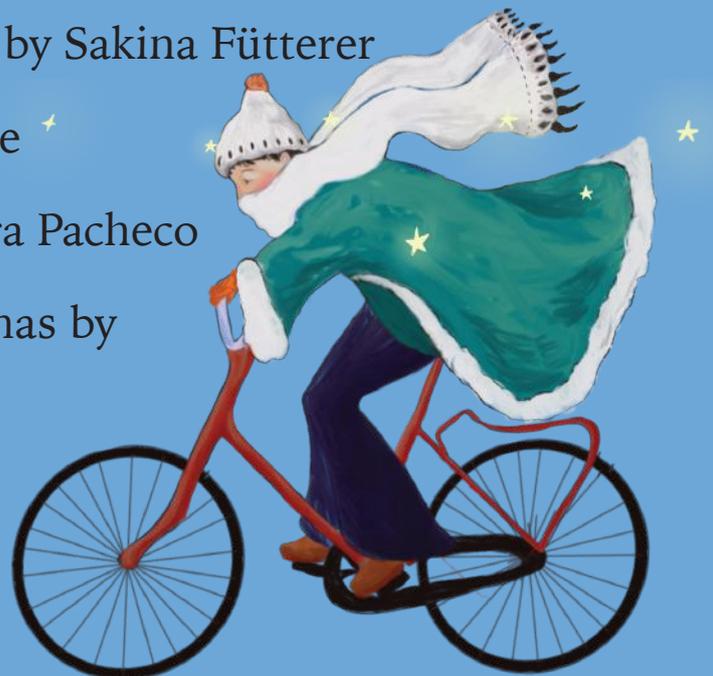
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New Year's Eve

A Poem by Sakina Fütterer

Time flies by

It is almost New Year's Eve

How many goals did you
achieve?

Were they big or were they
small?

Or didn't you achieve any
goal at all?

No worries because 2024 is
almost there

Where you have new goals
to share

Saying goodbye to the old

And hello to 2024,

and the cold.



All I want for Christmas is You! (or a romantic movie!)

Anushka Massand

Dear Diary,

Every year as the Christmas lights go up so do the romantic Christmas movies on Netflix. And why am I watching every single one of them? They are all the same, same story, same ending and almost the same characters. The movie ends with love coming as a Christmas miracle in places we didn't expect it. Or did we? Where is my miracle? Why am I still waiting? How many Christmases have there been? Is this really my year? I hope so.

*Love,
The Christmas Romantic*

Christmas to me has always been about the films. Coming from India, I was introduced to Christmas through the silver screens. We did not always have the lights, the gifts or the food for the celebration but we did have the movies. Watching Christmas features was a celebration for me. It all started when I was introduced to this movie called

Home Alone. That movie was my childhood dream, for a kid to watch Home Alone and live that life. This was followed by the obvious choices of the Grinch, the Santa movie and even Alvin and the Chipmunks at one stage in my life. It always felt like the movies included everyone, the children, the family and even the animals. As



a kid growing up these Christmas movies and the Christmas music filled me with hope. I hoped, prayed and wished for a Christmas miracle, that things will work out, that I will be loved, that I will not have to be by myself this Christmas. Even though mostly it was just me, the movies felt like friends that gave me warmth and comfort. While my choice of these films has changed over time. I will still sit down to watch a Christmas movie to warm up. Do you feel the same?

Those features make you feel your dreams could come true, you could get what you wanted and all is well in the world. Like I said, my choices of the movies evolved as I did. I always wondered why. Why are there so many films about love? About the Christmas romance? Are we all just hoping for love for Christmas? It wasn't just me. It did feel like the movies were made for my fantasies but given the track record of production of these movies maybe there are way more people like me. I wondered if we are all at home feeling lonely on Christmas, do we know that we are not the only ones? There is someone like you who is sitting in their bed watching a Christmas movie about love and weeping hoping to find a love like it this year.

Every year Christmas movies have managed to turn me into a romance enthusiast. It is the same movie, same story, just a different environment and actors every single time. The locations might change

from a palace to a small village in Europe to a chaotic big city like New York. We see it. We believe it. The story is usually a romance between two people, one of them is usually grumpy about Christmas and the other is a hopeless romantic who believes in the magic of Christmas. These movies are all the same and insanely predictable. Maybe that is why we love them? There is a certainty that in the end it will be alright and if it is not alright then it is not the end at all, the film isn't over yet. The science behind this says the same, Christmas movies do all that for you, it gives you an escape, it gives you hope, fills you with nostalgia of your childhood and there is certainty that everything will work out in the end.

Christmas romance movies are more than just entertainment. They provide emotional comfort with an escape from reality, they kindle hope and wrap around the viewers like a warm blanket of certainty through the films. As I reflect on my top five Christmas romances movies - "Love Actually," "The Holiday," "When Harry Met Sally," "Bridget Jones's Diary," and "Serendipity" - they are all about bring the emotions of shared anticipation, collective hope and the belief that, despite life's uncertainties, love in many ways is the miracle we all seek during this magical time of year.

Santa Unwrapped: From Saint to Coca-Cola Icon

Alice Raffegau

While arguing with one of my roommates about whether putting up Christmas decorations in October was acceptable, we found ourselves digressing about Santa Claus. Instantly, a vague and blurry memory of Coca-Cola being linked to Santa Claus came to my mind. However, with my memory working as chaotically as the Dutch railway system, I had to investigate this topic to make sense of this Coca-Cola thing. In a burst of magnanimity, I decided to share the results of this in-depth excursion in Santa Claus' life with you all.

The legend of Santa Claus goes back to the third century, in a place that would be the actual Turkey, only without Kebabs and Erdoğan. The one known today as Santa Claus was actually a monk named Nicolas. He did a bunch of good deeds, and soon enough he was regarded as the protector of children and sailors. Considering the infant death rate in these years, maybe penicillin would have been a better protector, but I guess the options were limited at the time. Yet, Nicolas still helped a lot of people. It is said that he saved three sisters from being sold as prostitutes by providing them with a dowry, allowing them to get married instead. Trading prostitution for an arranged marriage might not seem like the absolute dream, but we have



to imagine that the standards were slightly different back in the day. All of this made Nicolas very much appreciated, among the people as well as the Christian church. He was even elevated to the status of “Saint” Nicolas by the church, securing him a spot in heaven. People started celebrating him on December 6th, his death anniversary. This tradition developed and perpetuated itself in Europe, making the 6th of December “Saint Nicolas Day”, a good excuse to exchange gifts and enjoy pleasurable dishes.

Because religious institutions are unable to agree on anything, the Reformation movement tried to move this “let’s-empty-our-bank-accounts-to-buy-presents” tradition to the 24-25th of December instead of the 6th. Why so? Well, Protestants

simply wanted people to focus more on Christ and less on the Saints. Nowadays, several countries actually celebrate both Saint Nicolas on the 6th of December, and Christ on the 24-25th of December. I guess people found a compromise the Catholics and Protestants could not find by themselves. Because Saint Nicolas was so popular, he was still considered the one bringing presents to many countries, whether it was on the 6th or the 24th.

In the 1800s, this European tradition traveled all the way to the United States along with the Dutch people who emigrated there. Quickly, the legend of Sint Nikolaas (the Dutch name of Saint Nicolas) became popular among Americans. Soon enough Sint Nikolaas was renamed "Santa Claus" by the Americans. However, the image of Santa Claus as a joyful odd man going from chimney to chimney came later, from a professor of theology named Clement Clarke Moore. He wrote a poem in 1822 for his daughters, known under the name "Twas the Night Before Christmas". In this poem, he pictured Santa Claus traveling on a sleigh pulled by eight flying reindeer, distributing gifts to families using their chimneys to enter their homes. Either Moore had a wild imagination, or it might be time to reconsider Snoop Dog as the embodiment of being high.

Although we are getting closer to the modern Santa Claus, he did not have his famous red outfit yet. Illustrations of Moore's poem pictured him wearing all kinds of

different colors, such as green or even yellow (ew, what a fashion faux-pas). It is the American cartoonist Thomas Nast who helped create the traditional red outfit in 1870, slowly implementing Santa Claus' signature. He was not the first one drawing him with red clothes, but he is certainly the one that people remember, thanks to his cartoons in Harper's Weekly.

Half a century later, Coca-Cola finally came into the game. In the 1930s, the company needed a good strategy to sell its products during winter. The legend of Santa Claus being very popular at that time, Coca-Cola had the idea to use it in their advertisements. They commissioned the illustrator Haddon Sundblom to draw the "Coca-Cola Santa Claus". Sundblom based his Santa on Moore's poem, giving him in addition this chubby and jovial look. Fun fact, the drawings were also inspired by Sundblom's neighbor, Lou Prentiss, who was a retired salesman. Imagine for a second if his neighbor had been a retired model... Anyway, Sundblom painted Santa Claus in various situations, creating multiple advertisements for Coca-Cola. Throughout the years the character grew into an icon, very much appreciated and associated with Christmas. Coca-Cola did not invent Santa Claus, but certainly turned him into the iconic figure we all know!

Merry Christmas,
Alice Raffegau



THE DEER BOY AND THE HUNSTMAN.

A fairytale by Sofia Maior



Once upon a time, a small wooden cabin lay in the heart of a deep forest glade, cradled between towering mountains and enchanting valleys. Cloaked in a snowy white blanket at the edge of the forest, this tiny house, crafted from the sturdy embrace of pine logs, emanated a gentle glow through its modest windows. The warming light, painted in hues of soft yellow, whispered the presence of a magical life unfolding within its walls. The lazy

silence enveloped the cabin, and only the faint sighs of the boy could be spotted through the tranquillity of the home. The boy, with deer horns, slept in a small wooden bed beside the warming stove. His tiny horns occasionally bumped against the bedpost, making a quiet wooden sound. It seemed like nothing could disturb the sweet slumber of the young deer boy until a sudden and loud gust of wind burst into the room. It flung open the little window, extinguishing the candle light flickering on the wooden table and the red dancing flames of the stove. Disturbed by the wind's piercing whistle, the boy awoke and swiftly rose from his bed, feeling the cold breath of the wind on his skin. Not the absence of warmth nor the disappearance of lingering embers by the stove scared the little one.

The boy's only true cause for fear was the absence of his father-deer. On this Christmas night, he had, as always, fallen asleep, having sipped on the sweet tea of lemon balm, unmindful of when and how his father had left the wooden cabin. Rising from his bed, the boy quickly closed the tiny window. He decided to study the surroundings, seeking clues

to his father's disappearance. Looking into the forest darkness, the moonlight was shining through its coverage. Suddenly, the boy noticed a distant yellow glow. The boy held his breath. The hunter, the herald of death from his father's tales. He knew from his father that the fire was the hunter's ally; the fire was the enemy of the woodland folks. The flickering light drew nearer to the cabin, and with each glimpse of the yellow glow, the deer boy's heart sank deeper into his heels. Then, like a bolt of lightning, a thought struck him – to run is the fate of the weak; one must stand and fight.

The boy resolved, whatever may come, to capture the malevolent hunter and save the wooden house nestled in the heart of the forest. With determination burning in his eyes, the young deer boy slipped out of the cabin into the cold night. The forest whispered the path to the source of light as he navigated through the moonlit shadows, guided by the distant glow of the hunter's fire. Each step was a heartbeat, echoing the resolve within. As he drew closer, the air thickened with tension. The forest seemed to hold its breath. The yellow flames flickered like a malevolent eye in the distance, revealing the silhouette of the hunter. Yet, as the boy stood his ground, something unexpected occurred. The hunter's stern gaze softened, and the fiery hostility of the fire transformed into a gentle glow. At that moment, a silent understanding passed between them. It was then that the boy realised the hunter was not merely a harbinger of death but a man lost in the forest, seeking shelter. The boy guided him to the cabin, offered him tea, and, covering him with a downy blanket, sat at the edge of the table, waiting for a miracle – the sudden return of his father. Upon seeing the man in the house, the father was on the verge of erupting in anger. The boy quickly calmed him, pointing to the defenceless hunter's peaceful and even childishly naive figure, now peacefully asleep. Laughing and observing the mythical guest from a foreign land, father and son spent the night by the crackling fire in the wooden house at the edge of the forest.

THE END.



That Christmas Feeling When You Wear Your Favorite Sweater: A Recollection

Maya Barakova

Christmas brings out one's tendency to be completely smitten by the cold season unmindful of all its inconveniences. Somehow the faint glow of the cinnamon spice candles you impulsively purchase that one December evening seems more majestic when standing against the background of a snowy storm. Cue the jugs filled with over-sweetened hot chocolate and scoops of roasted chestnuts you never liked, looking ever so enticing this winter season. The annual family quarrels about Christmas ornaments start to sound uncommonly merry.

It's been two years since I have been home for Christmas – a shamelessly guilt-induced fact that brings upon sullen memories. A parade of emotions



twirls around this time of year as I try to evoke a sense of merriness and warm nostalgia. Still, I am excited, not in a sense of child-like eagerness but rather a subdued adult-like curiousness and wonder. Would I develop a new favorite pastime

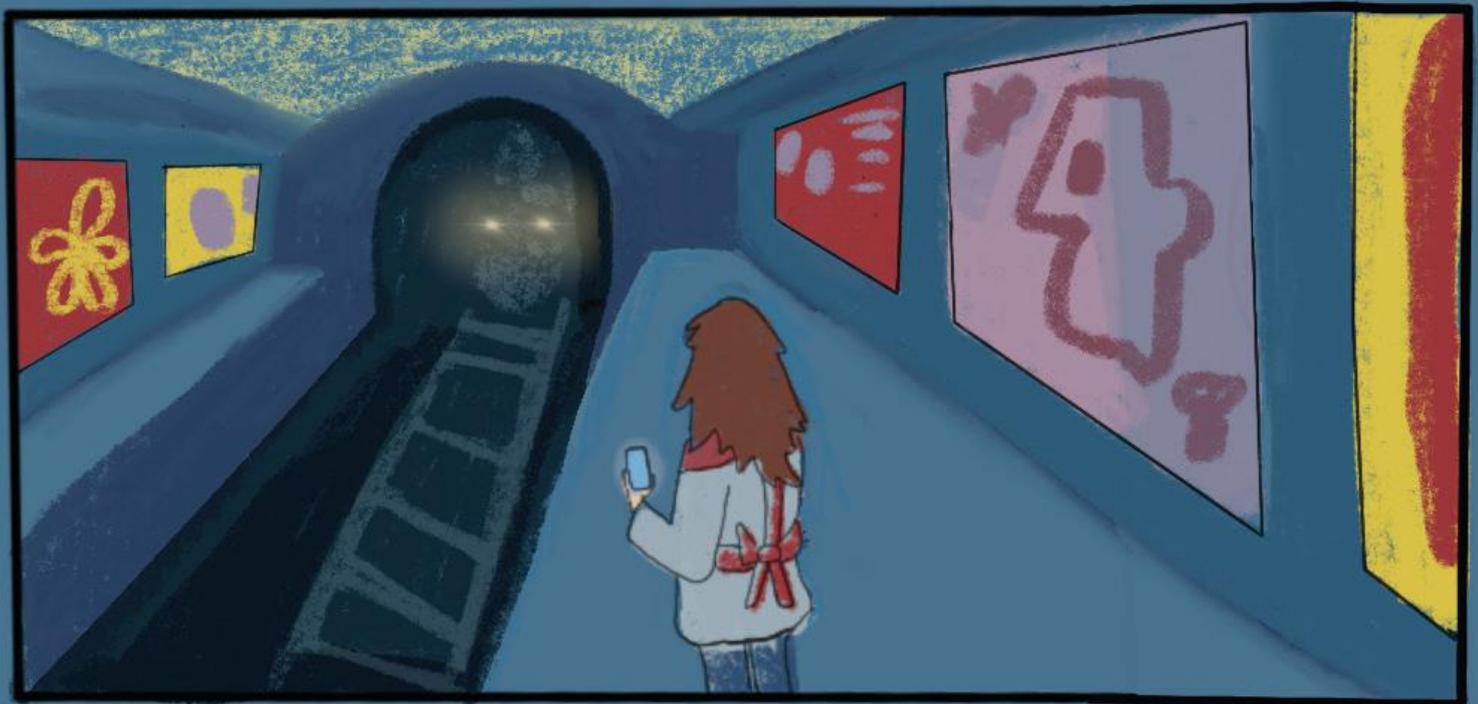
now that my emptiness, during the holidays, is not filled with work responsibilities? Would my family's detailed line of questioning seem burdensome, or would the veil of coziness disregard any annoyance on my part? Back home I am a mere child – I am not being carelessly pampered but my anxious tax-paying brain calms from the feeling of subtle safeness in the family nest. Dietary restrictions are thrown out the window upon glancing at the day-long cooking extravaganza that is my grandma's Christmas buffet. There are no kids around anymore, so Santa's suspicious gift-dropping acts are no longer required in this household. Yet they are replaced by a nuanced, yet seemingly nonchalant appreciation wrapped in the action of gift exchange. Oh, what joy it brings me to look at the expressions on my parents' faces as I provide them with meaningful and thoughtful presents– I am a slave to defying my parents' particularly low expectations. Oh, what a festive celebration brings to my mind the act of giving a useless but fun gift to my younger teenage gloomy perfection of a sister - one that my parents would never approve of or could wrap their minds around. I walk around in a oneiric state of mind, one upon which creates the illusion that I am an impeccable ice skate performer. I doubt that I am, however I don't want to crush my dreams just yet. Still, the dread of my own expectations proves to be a constant hum distributing my

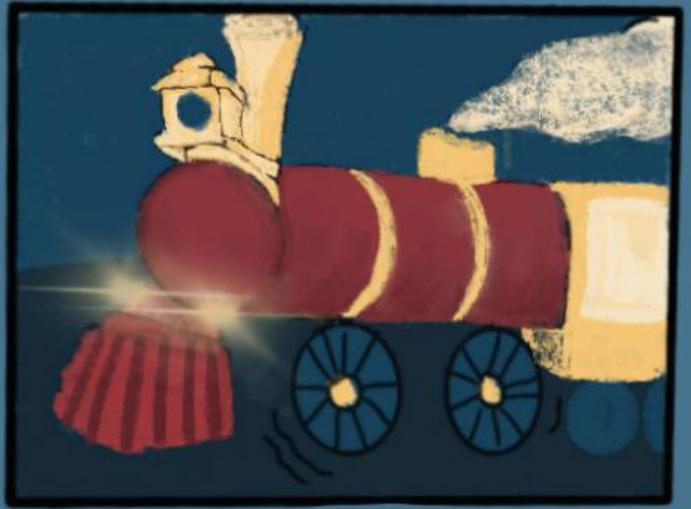
hazy consciousness. Am I more than my past achievements and future goals? And which family member's perception of myself do I need to adhere to this Christmas season? What's more, I know that nostalgia evokes feelings I bury deep. These feelings impose almost a physical ache that I have no idea how to deal with. No one talks about how the warmth of Christmas can be tampered by the coldness of that empty chair at dinner once filled by the dearest person in my heart. Yet, blinded by my excessive Christmas consumerism I dust off the ghost of Christmas past and blast Michael Bublé songs with a complete disregard for my judgmental sister's glares.

Cheers to a wintertime packed with terrible table manners, loud conversations against the backdrop of bad Christmas movies, and anything gingerbread.

-xoxo, Maya

The Christmas Tube





The End

Benny's Christmas Carol

A Modern Christmas Classic

Noa op 't Ende

"You can pack up your desk. You're done."

Bob looked in horror as the news slowly hit him, but Benny didn't feel guilt. Firing people wasn't new, or difficult for him to do. In fact, he even felt a little smug about his decision to do so. The fewer people work for him, the more money is left for himself. Right?

Ebenezer Scrooge (or Benny as most people call him) is a 56-year-old man, with a successful accountant's office under his reign. Benny is a man of great wealth, and great greed. He inherited the business from his father in his early 20's and has been working hard to make it big ever since. So hard that sometimes, it was at the expense of some friendships and happy memories, but hey... that's the cost of success. At least, that is the thought that always comforted Benny. But it was also the motto that turned him into the cold-hearted man he is today.

"But on Christmas-eve? I have a family to feed, presents to buy for my kids, my mother's hospital bills... Please, Ben--"

"It's still 'sir' for you! And I won't hear it. Go bore someone else with those sob stories. At the end of the day, it doesn't earn me anything... Or does it?"

Benny raised his eyebrows



arrogantly at the young man from his position behind his giant desk. Bob's lip started quivering, as he realized there was nothing to do. Mr. Scrooge's decisions were always set in stone.

"Okay, sir. I'll be out of your hair right away." Bob mumbled as he wandered off out of Benny's office. He rolled his eyes. "Don't forget to close my door on your way out. And that's all." He yelled after Bob, before turning his attention back to the work on his laptop.

The next time Benny looked on his Apple-watch, it was close to 10pm. His office was already dark and empty, except for the lonely light burning on the corner of his desk. His employees already left to celebrate Christmas eve with their families, but not Benny. He

celebrated the holidays alone, but he didn't mind. Benny was used to it. He lived for his business. Always being the one to open the door at the beginning of the day and close off when it turns dark outside. Benny didn't have a family to return home to, so what was the rush?

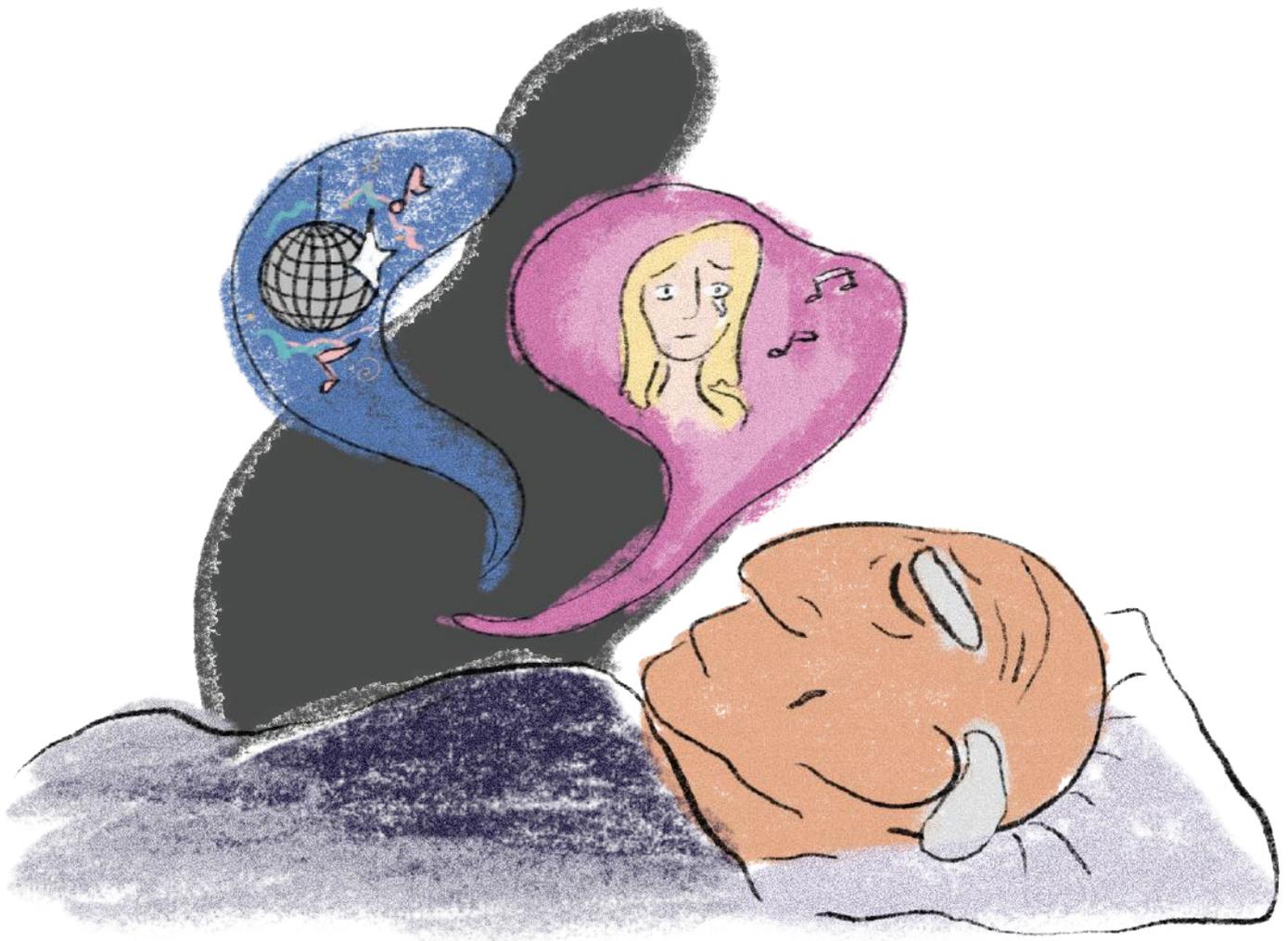
As he passed ZARA on his short walk home from his office, Benny was stopped in his tracks by a shimmer suddenly appearing in the window of the store. He tried to shake it off for a second. "Must be hallucinating from the tiredness." Benny mumbled, but he started daydreaming away to the familiar face he saw in the mannequin: his mother. Around Christmas time, his mind always wandered off to that final Christmas eve he spent with his mother, and what she said to him on that night.

"Benny." He could still hear her soft

voice, sending chills down his spine. "I know your father was always harsh on you, always expecting the most. But please my dearest... Don't turn out like him. Be giving and kind, okay? Only then will you grow to be as old as me, with a full heart." "Nonsense." Benny mumbled to himself at the memory of his mother, still not believing anything she said that night. He always found his mother too soft, too naïve. Why else would she blabber all that rubbish? As he sunk deep in thought, he stared at his reflection in the window. Harsh lines around his eyebrows and face, a deep frown, dull eyes. He started to look more like his father every day. Benny coughed, straightening out his tie. Looking around if no one just witnessed his moment of self-reflection, he continued walking.

Benny lied down in bed, grabbing





his phone from his bedside table. He always has a habit of scrolling through his social media for a few minutes to help him fall asleep. Swiping up his screen mindlessly passing the Instagram posts, one particular video suddenly caught his attention. A girl who looked exactly like his childhood girlfriend, his high school sweetheart. Even with the same name. Was he still awake? Already dreaming? Or stuck somewhere in between? Benny slowly got sucked into the scene playing on his phone, like he was almost present in the moment. But it was a scene that was far too familiar to him already. Like a ghost from his past... The girl was standing outside the disco Benny spent a lot of his teenage years in. This is where he had his first drink,

his first cigarette, his first kiss. But this night of firsts, the one he was re-living in his nightmare right now, was one he always tried to forget. “Are you kidding me, Ben? You haven’t been yourself lately... This obsession over your father’s business has got to stop!” The girl screamed at the young boy standing face-to-face with her. As Benny approached the scene, he realized the young boy was him – but 35 years younger. “You can’t tell me that! What gives you the right? I’m 21, Belle. I need to get more responsible. Imagine how much money I could make in the future if I just continue now.” young Benny said back, voice slightly raised. “And what does that matter?” Belle’s voice got smaller, as the pain in her

face revealed her breaking heart. “What do you mean, what does it matter? A simple job or a small salary is just not an option, Belle! You know how people say money doesn’t buy you happiness? Well, they’re delusional! Money is the only thing that makes you matter, that will make me matter!” Benny ranted on, as he got more and more consumed by the thought of wealth. “But you matter to me, whatever you wear or earn. Is that not enough for you?” Her eyes welled up with tears.

“Well, I guess it isn’t.” young Benny spat out the words like they were nothing, as Belle flinched at them. This is where it happened, his first and only break-up.

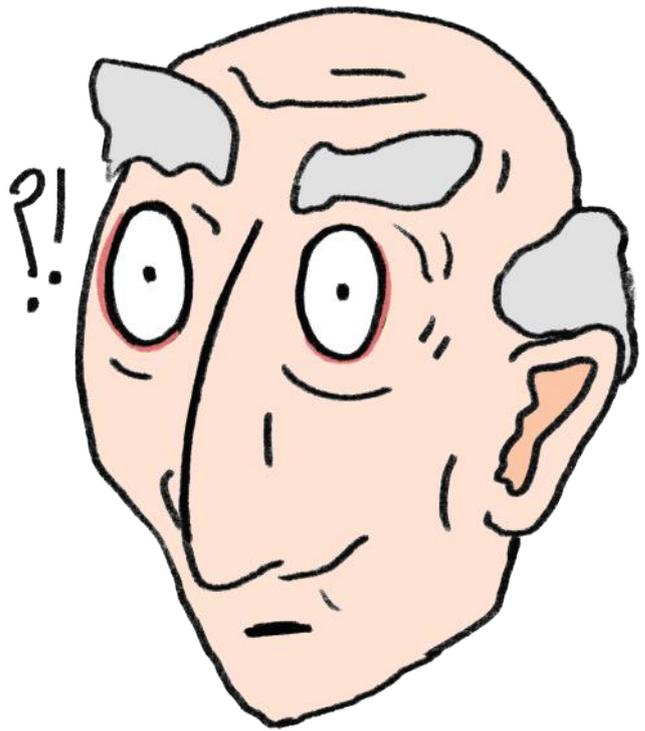
“I don’t want to be someone like that. With someone like the person you’ve become.” Benny could still remember Belle’s shivering voice barely coming above a whisper, Wham’s ‘Last Christmas’ playing faintly in the background at their high school Christmas dance. Somehow, hearing Belle’s words again stung. But sadness was an emotion. Something Benny could just switch off.

As Benny turned his attention away from the nightmare in his dream, he was met by a dark figure standing before him. He couldn’t quite make out a face under a large hood. “Who are you?” Benny asked, taking a step back from the unfamiliar entity. The figure didn’t answer, but only stuck out his hand to Benny in

response. Overcome by curiosity but without being able to explain why, Benny took the large hand...

All of a sudden, he woke up. Benny let out a sigh of relief.

“Well, that was strange...” he mumbled under his breath. As he



threw his duvet from his body and swung his legs out of the bed, he snatched his phone from the bedside table. Scrolling through the missed notifications, there was one tweet that took up all his attention.

‘NY Daily News: Multimillionaire Benny Scrooge dead at 56’. It was as if all the air got sucked from Benny’s lungs. Opening the news article with shaking hands, Benny squinted his eyes to read the headline once again. “Maybe I’m just reading it wrong.” he mumbled. He shook his head and rubbed the sleep out of his eyes. But as he opened them again and adjusted his eyes to the bright

screen, he read the same. Now the hyperventilating started. His head started spinning, his ears ringing. The blood slowly drained from his head as he has the first panic attack he had in a while. 'Heart-attack', 'Found behind desk', 'No next of kin' were the only few things he could make up from the article. He had to inform someone that this was not true. That he was still alive and breathing, and it was simply fake news. As he scrolled down the string of reactions underneath the tweet, shock overtook him as he noticed that... No one cared. On the contrary, most responses were interwoven with a feeling of relief. Delight, almost.

@dwilkins : 'Tbh, not a loss.'

@joseph54: 'What a MONSTER of a man he was.'

@chrissy1: 'The fact that he was alone says enough.'

Comments



@dwilkins

Tbh, not a loss



@joseph54

What a MONSTER of a man he was.



@chrissy1

The fact that he was alone says enough.



@bellebaby

Just a shame what he became...

@bellebaby: 'Just a shame what he became...'

The words in the posts stung Benny. Sure, he was aware that he didn't have a lot of people around him. But this much hatred and dislike? To the point where some people are glad at the thought he passed? As he looked up from his phone, he saw the same dark-hooded figure standing in the doorway of his bedroom. Was this real, or still a dream?

Before Benny could gather his thoughts to say something, the figure reached his hand out again, motioning Benny to follow him this time.

As Benny walked down the street behind the floating figure, he noticed he was walking towards a neighborhood he didn't recognize. Had he ever been here?

They entered an apartment building, taking the elevator to the 5th floor.

"Where are you taking me?"

Benny tried to ask the figure. And just as expected, it didn't say a word. But right when they stopped in front of apartment 54, it clicked for Benny. This was Bob's place. That guy from the marketing department that he fired just yesterday.

Walking into the cozy, but cold apartment, he was met by Bob sitting at the kitchen table behind his laptop. His wife stood behind him, looking at the screen with him. Bob's three children stood together by the small Christmas tree in the corner of the room, practicing a new TikTok song together.



“Bob, I apologise for the sud-...” Benny started. But as he talked, he noticed that Bob didn’t hear him at all. Benny turned to the figure next to him.

“Can they not see us?”

The figure shook his head, pointing Benny’s attention back to the scene in front of them.

“Another rejection, darling?” the woman, Bob’s wife, asked her husband.

“This was the last option, too...” Bob’s shoulders fell at the realization.

“We got next month’s bills coming up, Christmas gifts for the kids... I don’t know if we can do this another month. It will be our 12th one without a proper income. We already don’t have the radiator working anymore.”

Benny’s breath caught in his throat. “I fired Bob a year ago already?” Benny looked at the date on his Watch. ‘December 23rd

2024’. One year later. He was one year in the future.

Bob dropped his head in his hands, as his wife started rubbing his shoulders. It was barely noticeable, but she swallowed away an obvious lump in her throat.

“We’ll find a solution.” her voice trembled slightly. “Damn you, Benny Scrooge.” she whispered under her breath.

That’s when Benny realized what he had done. The sharp cold air in this apartment, the lack of Christmas gifts under the tree, the tiredness in the eyes of Bob and his wife... It was all his fault. This was what was going to happen in one year, all because of Ebenezer Scrooge.

To be continued...

Part 2 coming on December 26th on EmbrACE blog!

The Finality of Winter

Karsten Okkerman

“Cold” is perhaps the most common and obvious association with the concept of winter. Others see winter more in light of festivities, getting together with friends and family. For me, winter often evokes the idea of an ending. The end of the year, the end of a lot of life, the end of a cycle.

When I made the mistake of volunteering to write for the first issue of EmbrACE, I had to consider very hard what to write about. When I read last year’s magazines, I remember articles in which their authors had the courage to be open about their personal feelings most fondly. Those articles were always nice to read. It didn’t have to be anything ground-breaking, but when I was presented with a different perspective from a personal point of view, it always sparked an interest in me. I’ve also found that writing like this is incredibly hard.

Indeed, I’ll be honest: the idea of opening myself up to a larger audience - even if only a tiny bit - fills me with dread. It’s far easier to simply reflect back on your own writing process in a meta and snarky way without laying any part of yourself bare. I don’t want to do that. If I were perfect, I would like

to write solely about what makes me feel uncomfortable and share something interesting with people. As Hemingway said: “Write about what you fear most.”

One of my weaknesses is putting things off. I suppose that is not an uncommon weakness. We probably all experience the temptation to put things off, and most of us figure out ways of dealing with that temptation. I’m sure people’s inclination to the path of least resistance has some biological origin. The worm that ate the food that was easiest to find and then rested, survived longer than the worm that kept expending energy all the time until it starved.

What I experience, though, is putting things off and then being paralyzed at the thought that I might already be too late. To connect my rambling back to the topic at hand: there are times where I might feel like a farmer, knowing he has autumn crops to harvest, but seeing the cold frost of winter approach day by day. Each morning, new frost kills another small part of the plant. There will be a day, he knows, when he will be too late and his harvest has failed. Some day, everything he planted will be frozen and dead, no longer

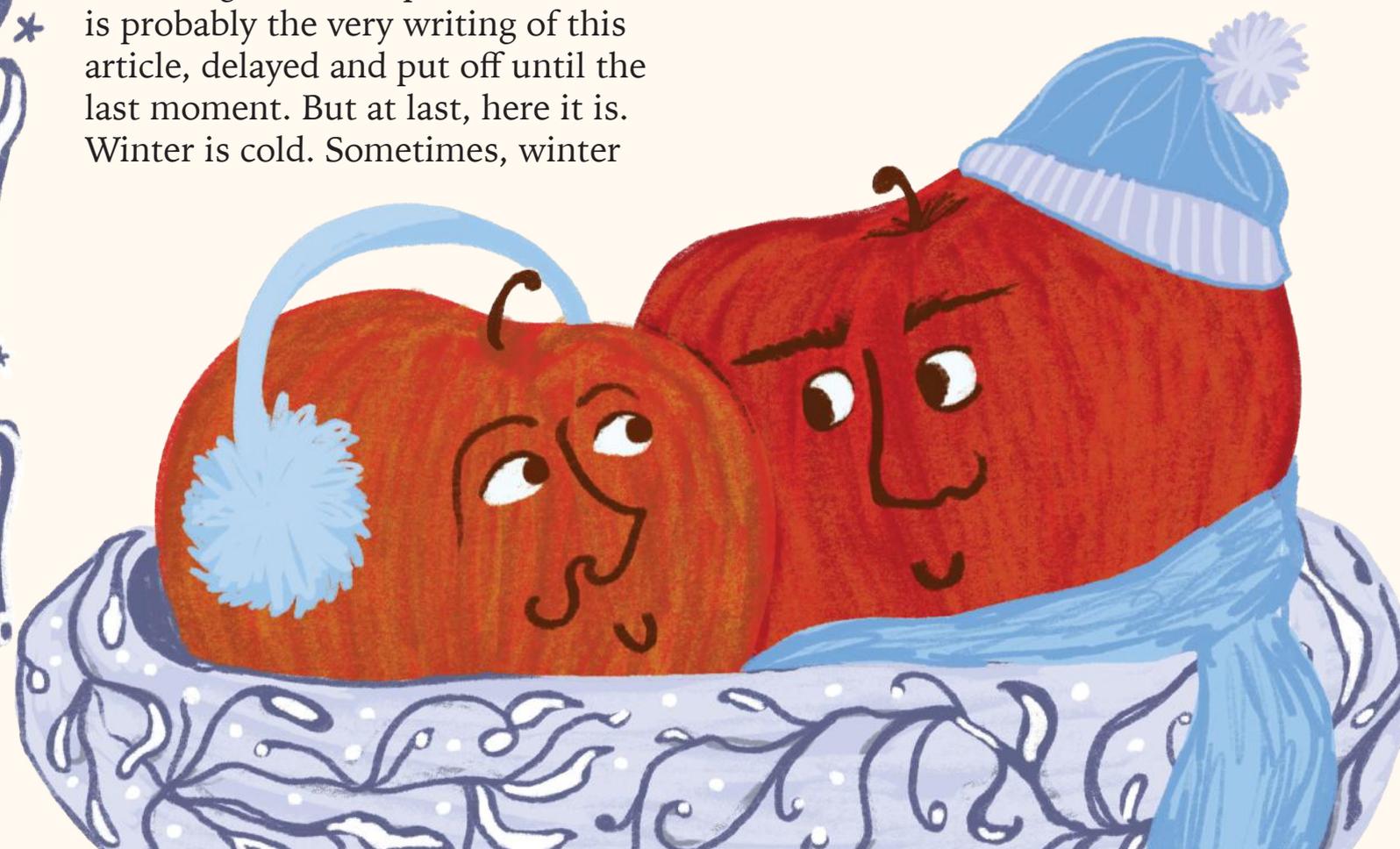
useful to him. But there is no way of knowing whether that day has already arrived until he just goes out into the field and puts in the work.

For something that feels so difficult, the problem of putting things off has a stupidly simple solution. Just put in the elbow grease. It might be too late, your harvest may be completely frozen and dead and useless, and then you will know after putting in the work. But it may not be too late. You may recover part of your autumn crop. You may even find out that what you planted was a hardy winter crop all along, and the night frost actually improved it. Best case scenario, you didn't need to worry at all. Worst case scenario, at least you know, and you know what you should do differently next time: put in the work earlier.

The thing that exemplifies this best is probably the very writing of this article, delayed and put off until the last moment. But at last, here it is. Winter is cold. Sometimes, winter



is death and decay and struggling to survive. Time marches on relentlessly, getting us closer to it, whether we like it or not. But I suppose, winter is also the time when we can all cozy up together and share our stories. And perhaps, if we are willing to take the risk, we can even share the experiences and feelings that matter most to us. "Hang on," you might say. Did I reflect back on my own writing the way I said I didn't want to? Absolutely. If I were perfect, I would have done exactly what I set out to do. But I'm not. Maybe winter next year, I will be a tiny bit more perfect. Winter is the end of a cycle. But cycles keep renewing, and we keep getting new chances.



How much of a Christmas Lover are you?

Find out with the Ultimate Christmas Test!

Sakina Fütterer

1) When do you start listening to Christmas music?

- Through the whole year DUH (4 points)
- Somewhere in October...nothing to crazy (3 points)
- When it's December (2 points)
- Never, I don't vibe with Christmas music (1 point)

2) What do you think of decorating the Christmas tree?

- I see this as a fulltime job and want to do this ALONE (4 points)
- I like decorating it, but I want to do this with others (3 points)
- I like seeing the tree, but don't ask me to decorate it (2 points)
- What tree? I don't even own a tree (1 point)

3) What do you like most about Christmas?

- Being together with family and friends (4 points)
- The presents (3 points)
- The food (2 points)
- Can it already be 2024? (1 point)

4) Are you counting down the days to Christmas?

- An absolute yes, I want it to be Christmas everyday (4 points)
- Yesss, I can't stop talking about it with others (3 points)
- No, but I am still excited to celebrate it (2 points)
- No, I have better things to do (1 point)

5) You get the same present for the fifth year in a row, like Christmas socks. How do you react?

- OMG THANK YOU, I LOVE IT! (4 points)
- Smile and politely say thank you (3 points)
- Oh great (puts it on the pile of Christmas socks) (2 points)
- Throwing it away when they are leaving (1 point)



Results! (max. 20 points)

0-6 points:

You are Mr. Grinch! You absolutely hate the Christmas season and you can not wait for it to be over. If you could destroy it, you would. You can not stand the music, having dinner together or people who sing Christmas carols. On the bright side, when Christmas is over, it takes a whole year until it is Christmas again. Stay strong my friend, you will survive this period.

7-13 points:

You are Scrooge! Back in the days you were also hating Christmas. Slowly but sure you are changing into a person who is welcoming Christmas with a warm heart. Before you didn't want to celebrate it but now you are going all over the place and have dinner with your lovely uncle Fred ;)

14-20 points:

You are Santa Claus! Who loves Christmas more than Santa Claus itself? You literally love everything about Christmas and you enjoy every second of it. Whether it is packing gifts, preparing food, singing songs or being with your loved ones, you see the Christmas period as something magical, just like Santa on the North pole.

Capturing the Magic: How the Media Shaped Christmas

Cassandra Pacheco

Close your eyes for a moment and envision Christmas without the aroma of your favorite foods, the excitement of unwrapping gifts, or the cozy glow of holiday movies. Could you possibly imagine it without the color red? Today, we embark on a journey into the heart of the world's most celebrated holiday, navigating the delicate balance between tradition and the influence of media.

As we step into the magical realm of Christmas, we can attempt to decode it as a web of carefully crafted messages that have become intertwined with the very spirit of the season. These messages, conveyed through various forms of media, have had the power to shape our perceptions and attitudes over generations.

Traveling back in time, we see that many communities would come together during midwinter festivities, rallying to uplift spirits during the bleak and isolating cold weather. However, it was in Victorian Britain that Christmas underwent a transformative evolution. It was then that the concept of a family gathering on December 25th to celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ took root, laying the foundation for the Christmas we recognize today.

We see a true cultural shift in this tradition with Charles Dickens and release of his timeless masterpiece, *A Christmas Carol*. In the pages of Dickens's tale, we witness the birth of a holiday linked not just to religious observance but also to a profound sense of sharing and generosity. The 'Dickensian' revival of Christmas gained momentum rapidly, with the act of gift-giving emerging as a key symbol of these values. This cultural phenomenon went on to transcend Britain's borders, absorbing influences from diverse traditions, such as the German Christmas tree and the Dutch tradition of filling stockings.

Another traditional icon of the festival, "Old Father Christmas", also underwent significant change. Originally depicted as a rather thin and young advocate of drinking during winter, this character underwent a metamorphosis with the rise of mass communication and advertising. Recognizing the economic opportunities presented by the holiday season, businesses flooded the media with their depictions of Father Christmas bringing their products to the public. The once thin man transformed into a fuller and older symbol of gift bearing generosity.

Yet, it was a 1937 Coca Cola ad campaign that etched a definitive image of Santa Claus into our collective consciousness. Clad in Coca-Cola red, this simplified and culturally ambiguous version replaced the traditional Father Christmas worldwide. The evolution continued as modern Christmas advertising reflects the multicultural tapestry and increasing secularization of our societies.

In a recent Selfridges TV ad, titled “A Christmas for Modern Times,” we witness a vibrant, multiracial group celebrating a “future fantasy” of Christmas. This chosen family shares gifts, food, and joy, culminating in dancing at a nightclub. The ad mirrors the evolving narrative of Christmas, adapting to the dynamic shifts in family structures. We continue to see changes each year in traditional conventions and societal norms.

As we reflect on the many iterations of Christmas, and the future of the festival, the concept of late-stage capitalism looms. For instance, in contrast to other nations where Christmas Eve often involves carving a turkey, Japanese families, influenced by a triumphant KFC advertising campaign, have embraced the tradition of sharing a bucket of fried chicken. This practice has become so deeply rooted in Japanese culture that individuals are required to pre-order their Christmas meals. Moreover, during this holiday season, brands leverage the festive spirit by introducing

special products, like Starbucks’ collector’s edition coffee cups. Furthermore, the concept of gift-giving is prominently emphasized in advertising, exemplified by brands like Swarovski suggesting that true Christmas celebrations involve presenting loved ones with precious and upscale gifts. Christmas in recent years has been characterized by this heightened consumerism, corporate influence and commodification of tradition. Furthermore, in the current economic and societal landscape, it’s evident that we stand on the brink of yet another metamorphosis. What lies ahead is a narrative waiting to be written, guiding us into uncharted territories. A fresh chapter yet to unfold, guiding us into the next period, whatever it may hold. Christmas, it seems, is a tale forever in the making/
marketing.



Sarah and her Perfect Christmas

Sakina Fütterer

Once upon a time, there was a girl named Sarah. Sarah has been trying to find the perfect Christmas for two years now. Unfortunately, she still hasn't found it. Last year, she was crying about it because she saw other families all together. She saw them laughing together, eating together, and playing games together. She saw the warmth she was secretly longing for, because at home it was just her and her mom. Not that she didn't like being with her mom, but she just felt that something was missing. So this year, she decided to do it differently. Instead of arguing with her mom about why they can't have a perfect Christmas, she decided to write a letter to Santa, hoping that her wish will come through. On a Saturday morning, she woke up and started writing her letter:

*Dear Santa,
I don't have many wishes compared to other kids, but I do have a big one which will make me so happy. Can you please give me a perfect Christmas this year? Just like any other family? I don't like being alone with my mom and doing nothing on the Christmas days.
With love,
Sarah*

Sarah got an envelope and wrote down the address: To Santa Claus, the North Pole. That night, Sarah puts her envelope next to her bed so that Santa can pick it up. Little did she know that not only the envelope was taken away, but she also got taken with. She woke up hearing the bells of the deer and was shocked... "Wow, is this real?" She thought. "This is awesome!" Santa began to laugh and said: "Hello Sarah, I saw your wish, and I am going to make it come true, but first I wanted to show you how I work." The next morning, Sarah and Santa were walking towards his office, where a big book was displayed. "This is where I save all the wishes of the children. Sometimes children wish for something else, which in the end also makes them happy." Sarah was



looking full of admiration. The next couple of hours, Sarah saw how the presents were made and distributed. And later that night she was brought back to her bed again, because the next day Christmas would begin. The next day Sarah ran downstairs expecting to see her

perfect Christmas... but nothing had changed. She cried and yelled at Santa. Her mom was trying to calm her down, but that didn't help. But then she saw a letter on the ground saying: Here is your present, dear Sarah. Sarah ripped the envelope open and there was a text:

Dear Sarah,

You are probably wondering where your perfect Christmas is, but guess what: you already had a perfect Christmas each year. I want to give you a wise lesson: don't compare what you have with others, because you don't know what they are really feeling like. Maybe it looks like they have a perfect Christmas, but they may be grieving for their loved ones. You still have your mother who loves you unconditionally, and you have friends and other people that care about you, so be happy with the things you have and spend your Christmas with your loved ones before it is no longer possible. When they are gone, you will see what I mean, but until then, just always follow and remember my advice in this letter. And if you understand it already, you are a smart girl!

With love,

Santa

Sarah read the letter and began to cry even harder. "I am sorry mom that I am always angry with you, especially around Christmas. I have to be glad that you care for me, love me and that you are trying

your best. From now on, I will also try my best. Do you want to play a game with me?" "Yes." her mom answered. And that's how Santa can make your dreams come true.

