

Winter Tales



**A Pocket-Sized Collection of
Christmas and Winter Stories
from all over the World**

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The Apple Tree Man

A story from England

On Christmas Eve, when the clock strikes midnight, it's said that animals are magically able to talk for one whole hour. Imagine that! You're fast asleep when suddenly your dog, cat - or even your gerbil - wakes you up by shouting, 'MERRY CHRISTMAS!' I'm not sure that it's true, but lots of Christmas stories include this belief.

This story from England not only has a talking animal, but a talking tree as well! It begins in a quiet Somerset village with two brothers, Tom and Will, who lived on a farm. Tom was kind and steady, while Will was greedy and selfish.

When their father passed away, Will inherited the farm and forced Tom out of the large farmhouse where they had always lived into a tiny, tumbledown cottage on the edge of the land. The cottage had a small garden with one ancient, neglected apple tree, and a broken shed where an old donkey sheltered from the weather. Tom was fond of this apple tree; it had stood there as long as he could remember. As for the donkey? Well, Tom liked caring for things. Besides, it would be good company, he thought!

Over the next few months, Tom fixed up the cottage and mended the shed. He fed the donkey well and carefully pruned the broken branches on the old apple tree. By autumn, the tree was heavy with fruit, and Tom and the donkey spent many happy times enjoying its delicious apples.

As winter came, Tom felt settled and content, and on Christmas Eve he put on his coat and stepped out into the cold night to celebrate. He took a mug of warm cider, made from the apples of the tree, gave the donkey a carrot, then turned to the apple tree and raised his mug.

'Good health to you, old apple tree. Hats full, sacks full! May you rest well till Spring!' he sang, pouring the last of his cider into the roots, as is the tradition to bless an apple tree.

The tree's leaves rustled, and its branches squeaked and to Tom's astonishment, a gnarly old face appeared in the trunk.

'Thank you, lad,' it creaked.

Tom stumbled back and almost fell into the snow!

'You've been good to me this year,' it continued, 'and kindness should be repaid. Beneath my roots lies something forgotten. It has been waiting there to be found. I wish it to be found by you.'

Then the face closed its eyes, the branches stopped squeaking, the leaves stopped rustling, and the tree returned to its quiet old self.

Tom looked down at the roots. Something was poking out from the snow. He knelt and, brushing the snow away, revealed a small wooden chest filled with old golden coins.

He couldn't believe his eyes. 'Thank you,' he whispered into the darkness.

Suddenly, the midnight bells from the village church began to ring -
'DING-DONG! DING-DONG!...'

And as the final bell sounded, a truly miraculous thing happened - the old donkey began to sing!

'Hee-haw, hee-haw, my good friend Tom is kind and true,
Hee-haw, hee-haw, this grateful donkey sings to you ...'

Tom laughed and laughed.

It was the strangest, most magical night - and Christmas had only just begun!



The Christmas Spider

A story from Ukraine

If you celebrate Christmas, you might like to put up a tree in your house and decorate it with sparkly tinsel! But have you ever wondered how that tradition began?

Well, this is the story...

One Christmas Eve, long, long ago in Ukraine, a young mother called Nadiya, and her children were getting the house ready for the festivities the next day.

They didn't have much money, so instead of a big fancy tree, Nadiya had brought home a small fir tree from the wood where they lived.

They couldn't afford to decorate it, but it didn't matter because it was a pretty tree covered in soft green needles, which filled the small room with a wonderfully crisp, sweet smell.

Nadiya put the tree in a pot, which she had filled with soil, and pushed it into the corner. Then she leaned forward to smell the sweet pine scent and found herself face to face with a spider!

'Oh!' she cried in surprise. Then she smiled. 'Sorry, little spider, is this tree your home?'

The spider stared at her with all its black bead eyes.

'Well, you are welcome to join us for Christmas,' continued Nadiya. 'Don't worry, I'll plant your tree back in the woods in a few days!'

Then she stood back to admire the tree.

That night, when everyone was asleep, the little spider decided to thank Nadiya for her kindness in the best way it knew how, and began to spin silky webs. It worked hard all night, spinning hundreds of tiny threads until the whole tree was covered in cobwebs!

The tiny spider felt very pleased with itself.

The next morning was Christmas Day. Everyone was so excited, but

when they saw the tree covered in cobwebs, they were shocked!

Nadiya opened the curtains so they could see the tree more clearly. As she did, the sun's rays shone onto the tree, tickling the tiny webs, turning them from grey and white to silver and gold.

The children were overjoyed to see their tree draped in the most delicate, sparkling strands of tinsel. 'Wow! This is the best Christmas ever!' they all agreed.

'Thank you, little spider' whispered Nadiya.

Since that day, people all over the world have used tinsel to decorate their trees.

So, if you ever find a spider in your Christmas tree, leave it there - it might bring you shimmering silver and glittering gold!



The Fox and the Man

A story from Afghanistan

On a snowy hillside just outside Kabul in Afghanistan, a clever little fox sat quietly, gazing down at the twinkling lights in the city. It was the longest night of the year, and families had gathered to celebrate Yalda. Homes were filled with laughter, stories were shared, and delicious food was being eaten.

As the sun began to rise, the Fox saw the sky change from black to deep purple, then pink, orange, and finally a bright wintry blue, and on the breeze, he smelled something good to eat.

'Mmmm, maybe I'll follow that smell into town', he thought, hoping to

find some leftovers from the celebrations - maybe watermelon or bread, or even better, some meat.

Soon he found himself sitting on a quiet street corner.

A man came walking by and stopped. 'Peace be with you. I trust you are well,' said the man politely.

The fox looked up, surprised, and answered kindly, 'Very well, thank you.' *'What a friendly man'*, he thought.

Then the man asked the fox a question: 'What's the one thing you'd most like this cold winter morning?'

The fox's tummy began to rumble. 'I would like a juicy chicken to eat!' he said with a toothy grin and licked his lips just thinking about it.

'Well then, come with me,' said the man. 'I have chickens! I'll give you one to eat.'

The fox could hardly believe his luck and happily followed the man to his home.

'Wait here,' said the man when they arrived. 'The chickens are round the back.'

The man went inside and found a sack, but instead of getting a chicken, he filled it with heavy stones from his garden. *'Silly fox'*, he thought. *'Tricking him was so easy! And I'll have a warm fox fur hat by morning.'* Then he carried the stone-filled sack out and handed it to the fox. 'Thank you!' said the fox, about to open the sack.

'No! Don't eat it here, it'll make a mess,' said the Man 'Why don't you eat it over there under the shelter of that bush?'

'How kind,' said the fox and he trotted over and pushed inside the bush to enjoy his meal in peace. But when he opened the sack—no chicken. Just stones!

'I don't understand!' thought the fox.

Just at that moment there was a loud noise all around him - SNAP! The bush had been covered in a large net. He was trapped!

'I need to escape!' thought the fox.

He tried digging, but the ground was frozen hard with the cold. So, he tried to bite the net, but his small, pointy teeth could not cut through its ropes.

He needed to think fast. Suddenly he saw a sharp, pointy stone sticking out of the sack, and being a clever little fox, he knew exactly what to do! He picked it up with his mouth and used it to cut the net! He made a hole big enough for his nose, then his ears, then his body until he was able to escape!

And it was just in time, because striding towards him was the man!

'Come back here, fox!' he shouted.

'No!' shouted the fox, and he didn't stop to look back. He ran and ran, all the way back up the hillside.

The sun was now fully up as he sat catching his breath. He looked down at the bustling city below and smiled to himself.

'Trick me once, but never again,' he said, 'next Yalda, I'll catch my own chicken.'



The Pussycat and the Troll

A story from Norway

There was once a man called Jakob who lived with a big white polar bear.

Jakob was immensely proud of his bear, and one day, just before Christmas, he decided to walk from his house in northern Norway over the mountains to visit the King of Denmark. He'd heard that this king often gave extravagant gifts to people who could entertain him with unusual pets!

It was a long journey, and as the sun set on Christmas Eve, Jakob needed to find somewhere to rest.

Luckily, just at the bottom of the mountains, he spotted a cosy-looking guesthouse. *'This will do nicely,'* he thought.

Jakob led his bear to the door and was about to knock, when it was opened abruptly by a nervous-looking man called Halvor, who blurted out:

'I'm sorry, we have no beds tonight on account of the trolls!'

Jakob looked at his bear. The bear looked at Jakob. Then they both looked at Halvor.

'Trolls?!' exclaimed Jakob!

'Yes! Yes!' continued Halvor, who was now putting on his coat. 'Every Christmas Eve they demand a feast! It's already laid on the table. I was about to leave – and you should too! They are dangerous creatures them trolls!'

Jakob began to laugh, 'Well, I'm not afraid of trolls - I have a bear!' And he pleaded so hard, that Halvor finally agreed to let them stay.

Inside, just as Halvor had said, there was an amazing feast laid out for the trolls, with sausages, fish, cooked meats, bread, rice, and cheese, and all sorts of delicious fruits and treats.

It looked fit for royalty.

Halvor showed Jakob to a small bedroom, found the bear a cosy corner in the hall, then grabbed his bag and fled.

Jakob tucked the bear in, draping the end of a long curtain over him so only his head poked out. 'Night, night, bear!'

'Grrrr...' said the bear, and soon they were fast asleep.

Moments later, the expected gang of foul-smelling mountain trolls arrived at the guesthouse, greedily stumbling over each other in their enthusiasm to beat down the door with their clubs, so they could begin their feast.

They were a noisy, gruesome-looking bunch, slurping and burping,

chewing and sucking all that had been laid out, until puddles of drool surrounded them on the floor.

Then one of the trolls noticed the bear's head peeping out from under the curtain and, mistaking it for a cat, cut off a piece of sausage and tried to feed it to him, clumsily poking it up the bear's nose by mistake – 'Ere, pussy, pussy!'

Now the bear was not used to being called a pussycat, and he didn't like sausages being shoved up his nose, so jumping to his full height, he let out a monstrous growl and chased the whole gang of terrified trolls out of the house and back up the mountain!

Now, you might think that's the end of this story. Well... not quite...

You see, after Jakob and his bear left to continue their journey to the king, Halvor's life returned to normal - until the next Christmas Eve.

That morning, while collecting berries for the dreaded troll feast, he heard a rough whispering voice call from behind a tree.

'Halvor... Halvor...' growled the voice – it was a troll!

'Have you still got your big cat living with you?' it asked.

Halvor paused before he answered... 'Yes, indeed I have! And she has had seven kittens- all far bigger and fiercer than she is!'

'In that case,' said the troll, 'we will never visit you again!'

True to their word, the trolls never returned to Halvor's house to eat their Christmas feast.

And nowadays, if you pass Halvor's guesthouse, you will see a small sign which says: '**Bears Welcome**'.



What a Lovely Surprise!

A story from China

In northern China, the winters are so cold that snow covers the land, turning everything misty white. On one such chilly mountainside, a hungry little rabbit hopped along, searching for food. The winter had been long and hard, and food was scarce. The little rabbit had almost given up, when to his surprise, he came across two fine white winter radishes lying on the snow. The little rabbit could not believe his luck! He quickly began to gobble one up. It was crunchy, sweet, and spicy, and filled him with joy!

'Delicious!' he thought and by the time he had finished eating the first radish, his tummy was full – too full to eat another one.

'I know,' thought Rabbit, 'I could give the other radish to old Donkey. He loves radishes.'

Rabbit picked up the radish in his mouth and hopped happily through the snow to Donkey's house, but when he got there, Donkey was out!

'Never mind,' thought Rabbit, 'I'll leave it here by his cart.' And off he hopped.

Meanwhile, Donkey was on his way home, and that morning, having helped his owner carry wood from the forest, he had been given some hay to eat.

When Donkey got home and saw the radish by his cart, he wondered where it had come from.

'What a lovely surprise!' he thought, 'but I'm too full up with hay to eat this now. I know, I'll give it to Goat to eat. She loves radishes!'

And so, he gently pushed the radish with his soft velvety nose through the snow to Goat's house, but when he got there, Goat was out!

'Never mind,' thought Donkey, 'I'll leave it here on this stone by her house.' And off he trotted.

Meanwhile, Goat was on her way home; she had been out searching for food and had found a big clump of bamboo with sweet, juicy leaves to eat.

When she got home and saw the radish on her stone, she wondered where it had come from.

'What a lovely surprise!' she thought, 'but I am too full up with bamboo leaves to eat this now. I know, I'll give it to Deer to eat. She loves radishes!'

And so, she nimbly kicked the radish through the snow with her hooves, all the way to Deer's house, but when she got there, Deer was out!

'Never mind,' thought Goat, *'I'll leave it here under Deer's fir tree.'* And off she skipped.

Meanwhile, Deer was on her way home; she had been out enjoying some tasty winter berries.

When she got home and saw the radish under her tree, she wondered where it had come from.

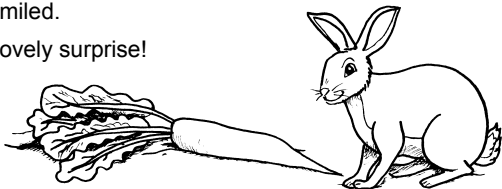
'What a lovely surprise!' she thought, 'but I am too full up with berries to eat this now. I know, I'll give it to Rabbit to eat. He loves radishes!'

And so, she picked it up in her mouth and gracefully walked through the snow to Rabbit's house. When she got there, Rabbit was asleep!

'Never mind,' thought Deer, *'I'll tuck the radish under his paw.'* And off she walked.

Meanwhile, Rabbit had been having a lovely dream all about tasty, crunchy radishes. As he started to wake up, his little nose twitched, - it was as if he could still smell them, he thought. Rabbit opened one eye. He opened the other eye and there, under his paw, was a radish! Rabbit smiled.

What a lovely surprise!



The Woodcutter and the Axe

A story from Nepal

Kamal was out in the forest, chopping wood near Rara Lake. It had been a long, cold winter in that part of Nepal, and snow still covered the ground. The pine trees were heavy with frost, and the wind whistled through the branches. Kamal needed firewood to keep the stove burning in his small house.

Chopping wood was thirsty work. He needed a drink, so he walked down to the lake. The water was frozen. He tapped the ice with the handle of his axe, but it was too thick, so he swung the axe over his shoulder and brought it down hard.

WHACK! C-R-A-C-K!

The ice split, but Kamal lost his balance, tumbling headfirst into the deep, freezing water.

Luckily, Kamal could swim. He kicked hard, pushed upwards, grabbed a root on the bank, and pulled himself out. Poor Kamal sat shivering and bedraggled.

Then he realised he had lost his axe – his only axe!

Kamal rushed forward, but he knew it was too dangerous to venture back into the water. So he sat back down, and in his despair, he began to cry.

As he stared at the lake, wondering what to do, he noticed the water under the ice starting to glow. Then the ice began to melt, and a mysterious woman appeared out of the water!

Her hair was long, and dark, and her skin blue like the lake. She was wearing a long flowing dress that looked like it was made from the mist that rose from the ice.

Kamal blinked. He had heard stories of a river goddess, protector of the waters, but he never thought he would ever see her.

Then the River Goddess spoke. Her voice was soft and calm. 'Kamal, do not be sad. You were right not to go back in the lake - icy water can be dangerous. Because you are wise, I will return what you have lost.'

She stretched out her hand, and from the depths of the lake rose a shining gold axe covered in jewels.

'Wow!' said Kamal. 'That axe is beautiful and must be worth a fortune. But that isn't my axe! Mine was just ordinary, made of wood and iron.'

The River Goddess smiled.

'You speak the truth, good Kamal. For your honesty, you may keep this golden axe.'

Then she held out her other hand and continued: 'But you may need this one as well.'

And just like before, something rose up from the lake - Kamal's own axe!

The goddess walked silently across the broken ice and handed him both axes.

Kamal looked at the two axes in his hands, one old and faithful, the other shiny and new.

'Thank you, River Goddess,' he said.

Kamal looked up — but the River Goddess had gone.

That winter, Kamal made good use of his newfound fortune, and with the money he got from selling the golden axe, he made sure no one in his village went cold or hungry.

And every winter, when he chopped wood by the lake, he remembered the goddess who rose from the water, and the day his honesty brought him a gift of gold.



Kelera finds a Hat

A story from Fiji

It was Christmas Eve. The reindeer had done a fantastic job guiding Father Christmas' sleigh through the sky, and now they were over the Pacific Ocean.

'Get Ready Team!' shouted Father Christmas. 'Operation Sunshine in 3...2...1...' As Father Christmas counted down, the reindeer closed their eyes, waiting for the most amazing feeling to happen...

You see, there are places in the world where Father Christmas uses a little extra magic to reach everywhere he needs to be. One of those places is Fiji, where sometimes he travels not by sleigh but by *camakau* - a huge magical boat with one big, beautiful sail. As his sleigh flies beneath Manu - the Great Bird constellation sparkling above Fiji - something extraordinary happens as Manu's starry wings wrap themselves around the sleigh, transforming it into a boat, and the reindeer into its sail. Then - WHOOSH! - the boat swoops down like a firework, landing in the ocean ready to continue its journey, guided by Manu's light.

... That night, just as the reindeer felt the magic of the stars change them, a tiny starry sparkle escaped. It tickled Father Christmas's nose. **'AHHH-TICHOOO...!!!'**

And he sneezed so loudly that his hat flew right off his head!

'Oh! Ho! Ho! Ho!' he laughed, reaching for his head. 'Silly me!' But his hat was gone! And he could do nothing but watch it spiral down toward the beach below.

Meanwhile, down on the ground, a young girl named Kelera was too excited to sleep.

Kelera's bungalow was by the beach, and she was sitting quietly at her bedroom window, gazing out at the sea and the sky. She loved how the moon and the stars made fuzzy white patterns on the waves.

'I wonder where Father Christmas is right now,' she thought.

As she listened to the sounds of the crickets and tree frogs, she thought she heard another sound, a ting-a-ling, like faraway bells.

Suddenly, a streak of light zipped across the sky. 'A shooting star!' Kelera gasped. 'I can make a wish! ... I wish Father Christmas was here,' she said softly.

As if the stars had heard her, there was a sudden flash! Like a firework! And something fell from the sky onto the beach. Moments later, a boat appeared on the water. It was a camakau boat with one huge sail.

Kelera couldn't resist climbing out of her window to have a closer look and, as she ran across the beach, she found the thing that had fallen from the sky. She picked it up.

'A red hat?' she whispered. 'With white fluff?' She grinned. 'Could it be...?'

Clutching the hat, she ran back inside, gently hanging it at the end of her bed, and finally drifted to sleep.

Later that night, Father Christmas arrived at the beach outside Kelera's house. *'Hmm, I think this is where my hat landed!'* he thought. He looked around, but it had gone, so with a sigh, he made his way inside. He tiptoed into Kelera's room, bent to place her present at the end of her bed, and to his surprise, found his hat!

'Marvellous!' he whispered.

He pulled his hat back on his head, then reached back into his sack one more time ...

The next morning, Kelera woke to find an extra present hanging on the end of her bed where the hat had been - a tiny hand-carved wooden boat with one big sail. Attached to the boat was a note.

It said: 'Thank you for returning my hat, Kelera.'

With Love, Father Christmas.'



Inside this little book are seven short stories from around the world. They are perfect for sharing at school, on the bus, curled up at home, or anywhere you like.

It's small enough to slip into your pocket or bag, and big enough to spark wonder wherever it's read. So don't let it sit on a shelf — read it to yourself, or share the stories out loud with family, friends, and neighbours!

And if there's a story from your country that isn't here, why not share that too? And keep the stories travelling, far and wide!

This story book has been gifted to all the primary aged school children in Rushmoor Borough thanks to an Integration and Community Cohesion Grant.

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STORY SOURCES: **Traditional:** The Apple Tree Man (Somerset, Tongue/Briggs); The Christmas Spider (Eastern Europe); The Pussycat and the Troll (Norway, Asbjørnsen & Moe, 1852); The Woodcutter and the Axe (Nepal, Imandār Daurey). **Other:** The Man and the Fox (Idries Shah, 2006); What a Lovely Surprise (Chinese fable, Dawn Casey, 2020); Kelera Finds a Hat (Original story – Amanda Kane-Smith. © Amanda Kane-Smith, 2025)