

WINTER WONDERLAND

ediția a IX-a

Highschool



BIBLIOTECA JUDEȚEANĂ
Gh. Asachi IAȘI
2019

Winter Wonderland

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Winter Wonderland

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When I was a child I used to dream I was a snowflake. I would travel around the world, slowly swaying in the air as the wind blew me further. It was my biggest wish and I would always dream of it. As I grew up, I stopped thinking of snowflakes and childhood. I started focusing more on school, making friends and finding a purpose for myself. But this would soon change...

Last winter, my family and I went to our vacation home in Sweden. I grew up going on holidays in Sweden every year and I loved it. It was breathtaking. The snow was always sparkling and the trees covered in fluffy white blankets looked magical. The most beautiful scenery of Sweden is represented by the Kebnekaise mountains. Kebnekaise is the highest mountain of Sweden and consists of two peaks. We used to own a wooden cabin near the top. The view from the tall, fogged window of the cabin was unimaginable, looking like it came straight out of a painting. The sky was pale blue and





everything was covered with snow. I could hear the wood crackling in the fireplace and I felt the warmth hugging my entire body.

When it started getting darker, I went to the attic to find a book to read by the fire. Climbing the stairs to the attic, I felt a strange sensation, as if someone had already been there. Anxiously, I went in. I looked for the old bookshelf which held my favourite books. A book stood out from the rest. It was blue with sparkling snowflakes all over. I was stunned to find out that my own grandfather had written the book, not knowing he used to be a writer. I held the book close to my heart, being reminiscent of the times I had been with him. Suddenly, an old piece of paper fell out of the book. It said: "My dear Amanda, whenever you want to escape, read this book and become a snowflake for a little while-Love, Grandpa". For a few hours, I sat near the fire reading my grandfather's book. I loved it. There were tales of a snowflake named Amanda. I was so happy that my grandfather had written a book about me. We both shared the love for winter and snow and the book told tales of the most beautiful places in the world that my grandpa always told me about-The Blue Lagoon in Iceland, the Victoria Falls in Zimbabwe and the Krabi in Thailand.

Finding the book that my grandfather wrote brought me so much closer to him. I felt his presence near me and I could almost hear his joyful laugh. I knew he would have been very proud of me today. I closed the book and packed it in my luggage, planning to take it home with me to read every time I was sad and I missed him. I spent the rest of my night with my family, sharing stories about grandpa. I was thrilled to be in this winter wonderland that I loved so much.





The Snowy Execution

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Once upon a time there was a kingdom in the middle Europe. Its name was the Miglance kingdom. And on the day of December 23 the guard duty was given to Diavel. He had to guard the entrance to the Miglance Palace, alone in the snow. He was dressed very warm and comfortable under his shiny silver armour, his helmet having a pointy top with the Miglance flag on it, red lion dancing with a hawk on a blue surface.

The palace was right in the middle of the capital, surrounded by a big space filled with people singing, drinking in the tavern, dancing on the streets and children playing in the snow. Diavel had neither kids nor a wife, not even a brother, making him perfect for the guard duty these days. As he stood there, he saw the villagers building a Christmas tree filled with wooden toys, candles, candy and more. He enjoyed the songs sang by a wandering bard, and those sang by drunken men filled with alcohol.

That day, a woman came.

“Is the king having as much fun as we do?” she asked.

“Probably, who knows?”

“At least, are the knights having fun?”

“No, we the proud knights are always on duty.”


Diaval started whispering.

“But I know that almost 40 or so of them are at that tavern over there, 60 or so are with their families, others are in their barracks dancing with each other.”

“And when will you join them?”

“Who knows...?”





The woman left him. And Diavel listened to another song sang by the bard. The bard was singing about a brave king who took over a country in order to let Santa spread presents easier. Then another one about a sheep who gave its wool to the wolf, after that he sang about a blacksmith hiding himself in the mountains forging the best presents for everyone and delivering them by a talking barrel. But there was one song that got Diavel's full interest. It was about a snowman who wished to be a knight and defeated his enemies with yellow snowballs, blinding his opponent and delivering a powerful strike with his hands. Diavel liked the idea of throwing snowballs towards his enemies, instead of arrows.

The next day. It was the December 24, Christmas Eve. There were fewer people in the taverns, but more at every workshop in this city, looking for something special. Our knight was still there, at the gate. But today a little boy came. That boy was neither rich, nor poor. The little boy said "You see, we made teams but some of us want to be in one team more than the other and I thought that maybe you can join us to even the odds." Diavel was pleased. He wanted to go. So, what he did was this: He filled his armour with snow and made it stand there, helmet closed. Then he went to have some fun. The problem was, that Diavel's superior, Roger came. Roger wasn't the kind of person to joke around with, that kind that would punish someone for anything. Diavel was scared and confronted him.

"Please excuse me. I just saw everyone having so much fun and I wanted to do something. And then these kids showed up and I kind of went to play for less than a minute."

"These kids? Roger was pointing his shiny spear at the kids."

"Yes, sir."

"I want you to execute them..."

"WHAT? NO, SIR I..."

"Don't interrupt me, Diavel ... I want you to execute them with the biggest snowballs they have ever seen. To think twice before tempting a knight. And don't forget to get more snowballs to your face, as a punishment of course."

"Yes, sir."

And this is how Diavel spent his Christmas Eve. Who knows, he may still be "punishing" those kids even nowadays.





Winter Wonderland

Rareș Mihail Neagu

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Many Christmases ago, a shoemaker lived with his three sons. His wife had been dead for several years and the poor man was struggling to support his family. On good days, like when he repaired the good shoes of a farmer, they received fresh goat's milk. If he repaired the shoes of his baker's wife, they would get a dry loaf of bread. For the butcher's shoes they received a large pot with tasty stew, with vegetables, noodles and veggies, which made it tasty and satiny. Sitting down at the table, the shoemaker exclaimed happily:

“Well, boys! Today we have a delicious Xmasluck.”

The boys were laughing with delight, watching as the stubborn father divided the food into the plates. It didn't matter what their father said it was called, as long as the delicious stew didn't end. This was in the good old days when they were not hungry. But this year was harder than all the others. The war broke out in the country. People were running out of money, so they didn't repair their shoes anymore, and the shoemaker only had enough to feed his children. All summer and autumn they will feed on the fruits of the earth: grains, berries and roots. But with the coming of December, the land became barren and empty, so that winter only brought hunger. The three boys wondered what sort of Christmas they would have this year. They hoped from the heart that their father would come back with some good food. But it had been a long time since the butcher's shoes had been repaired. It was Christmas Eve and, when the father arrived home, he found the boys crouching around a crack of fire.

“I didn't repair any shoes today, guys. But I found out that the inn is full of soldiers. The people who march for sure need a shoemaker”, said the father.





“So you will go there and see with what Xmasluck will come back to us”, said the boys, as they had eaten nothing in the morning.

The shoemaker put on his thickest clothes and tightened his tools in a backpack. Do not let the fire go out! Drag the ball out after it comes out, wrap it with the duvet and don't let anyone in! And he left, facing the wind that howled from all sides, on Christmas Eve.

The three boys were doing exactly what they had been told and stuck under the duvet, listening to the quiet noise of the fire. But all of a sudden there was a knock on the door.

“Let me in!”

There was a hissing voice. The eldest boy hurried to the door and as far as the ball to pull. –“Remember what Dad said!”, cried the youngest boy, and the other was looking at him with confusion, hidden under the duvet. The eldest drew his eye through a crack in the door and saw in the snow a little man of tiny stature. They clenched their teeth in their mouths and trembled, from head to toe.

“Don't open” whispered the small boy.


“But you must,” said the other.

He will freeze. The boy drew the zest and on the threshold appeared the strangest little man ever known. Under the gnome cap a large, red-faced minion with a jagged nose and a long, reddish beard. But you made me wait a lot longer! Keep all the heat and the dishes just for you, the stranger laughed with his comic voice, which had not even come out of the small and thick body. He glanced at the fire that was barely flickering, and at the table on which nothing was to be seen.

“Well, you could at least warm me up a bit.”

Saying this, they jump straight to bed where they remained speechless. The eldest tried to explain to him that if they did not meet him properly, they did not because he would not be welcome, but because they had neither firewood nor food. Well then, go ahead! Don't you see that I can't sleep? And drew half of the quilt, with which he covered himself to the neck. The eldest said very politely: Sir, the little ones must sleep. There is enough room for everyone. But the little man began to jump and flutter, screaming. “Give me the quilt again! Give me the quilt again! I'm cold and I'm hungry!” And it angrily hit the young boy. “Be gentle, sir!” the eldest insisted, just as politely. “I promise you that I will give you the food that your





father will bring.” “Beautiful promises, guests. If you’re still so well intentioned, give me your seat!” And he pushed the eldest out of bed. “And if it’s cold, go over some tumbles !” Suddenly, the eldest woke up as he started to wheel around the room. As he reached with his feet up his pockets all sorts of things fell to him. The little boys were still amazed. At each tumble, from his pockets were rolled ripe oranges, garnished with sweets, in golden and silver tin. “You!”, shouted the little man, pushing him from the bed. Do the wheel like your brother! The second boy began to roll around the room and from his pockets began to drop muffins, sweet iced cake and biscuits with almonds and raisins. "From now on, I will sleep peacefully," said the guest, slipping out of bed with the little boy. Down with you! Make some tumbles, that's the trick! so the youngest boy woke up from one corner to the other when he was doing this gold began to fall like hail in the room. From his pockets large coins fell. The boys came to him through the room, singing with happiness, and the eldest said: the belief that luck had overtaken us, now we can welcome you in the spirit of Christmas ... But there was no one in bed. The guest disappeared as a wonder. The boys gathered together the goodies: they placed the glossy oranges in bowls, the muffins and biscuits on the plates and filled them with gold coins.

Just then, their father entered the door with bread, milk, noodles and meat. With the money from the soldiers he had bought the food needed for his family. But he couldn’t believe his eyes when he saw all the goodies on the table. The boys rushed to tell him what had happened, crouching and talking to each other. The shoemaker nodded as he understood everything. “So it’s true what my grandfather told me!”, “What is it, Dad? “asked the boys. He was telling me that Emperor Merkaba, older than the spirits in the Upper Lands of Taryl, used to visit a house every year for Christmas. He kept to himself and made wonderful gifts. Well, I did not find him very kind!, told the youngest one, he pushed me out of bed. Well, it didn’t hurt us, Dad, said the eldest one in order to reassure him . And they sat down at the table, savouring the delicious aroma of stew that had spread throughout the room, along with the scent of sugary powdered biscuits, sweet spice cakes and orange scent. The shoemaker smiled: “What do we have at the table?” “ Some Xmasluck!” The three boys answered in a voice.





Miracle at the Subway Station

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Hurried people in business attire including the customary eye-bags, sleepy little children carrying backpacks bigger than themselves and lifeless students breaking off their contact using the compulsory earphones; those were portraits that Lilith never ceased to spot in the morning crowds at the subway station. Even if for some this picture might've seemed gloomy, for her it meant the act of living.

Today was quite different for the ill girl. While she was going upstairs, a sudden well known refreshing air filled up her lungs. Big sparkly snowflakes were dancing in front of the subway exit. Getting her leg up on the last staircase, she suddenly looked on her right. A small old lady with a kind and tired face, hugging her even smaller dog, was sitting on a thin cardboard. Sadness creeped in Lilith's heart and her eyes began to water.






The next day Lilith, weaker than yesterday, decided to leave the house earlier. Once at the subway station, her eyes searched for the old lady and her dog. The same picture showed up in front of her and she froze on the spot; behind her watery eyes hid thoughts about the poor creatures that had to witness both winter's beauty and threat. Lilith knew the only thing that was failing her was her body, but that lady over there, her body wasn't failing her, people were failing her, people that had the power to help her but were choosing not to; it felt like she was invisible for them. For Lilith, she and her dog weren't invisible and she would try to not fail them. With small steps she headed to the old lady; she stretched out her arm and gave her some food. The old lady lifted up her eyes and gave her the warmest look she had ever been given. In that moment, Lilith made a promise with herself, to give that lady back the same warmth she received.

At home she pleaded her parents to bring the old lady at their house until she found a new place for her. Her parents, worried for their safety, refused to let the old lady sleep at their place. The parents promised her that they would help her with anything else, except that. By failing to help the old lady, Lilith noticed that her parents failed her for the first time. From her bedroom's window, the view seemed picturesque; frail snowflakes wobbling under the street lights until they carefully laid on the immaculate fluffy blanket was a view that couldn't be enjoyed by people like the old lady, Lilith believed.

Weeks have passed and in spite of her declining health, Lilith never stopped bringing warm food and hot tea to the old lady and her dog on a daily basis. With a little luck, she even managed to find her a spot at the homeless shelter, Christmas Day being the day of moving in. It was Christmas Eve and just one cold night away from a warm place. Lilith arrived early at the subway station with hot tea, warm food and bliss in her eyes. The old lady seemed a little colder than usual, but still had that look full of warmth. Lilith got a little worried, but the lady assured her that everything was alright, as it should've been, and gave her some cookies wrapped in newspaper. She told Lilith that the cookies were solely for her as a present for the warmth she and her dog had received. That night, Lilith ate the cookies while thinking about those words.

Christmas finally came and Lilith rose up early in the morning to get her promise fulfilled. Arrived at the subway station, the old






lady and the dog were nowhere to be found. She asked about them, but nobody seemed to know about their existence. Days, weeks, months have passed and Lilith never found them, but instead she found the strength in her body. What could've happened, even the doctors gave up? Maybe a miracle?

One Winter Love Story

Ștefana Tudosă

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Oh sweet, sweet winter... it is that time of the year again! Huge snowflakes lying on the ground, creating a snow carpet on which kids are playing all day long. The cold air never stops them from having some fun, while their parents are hidden behind the curtains, watching them. But Tom was not playing with the other kids. He was at his grandparents' house with his family, helping them prepare for Christmas. He loves his grandparents very much, and every year for Christmas he helps his mother and grandmother with the food and decorates the house and the yard with his dad and his grandfather. While they decorate, his grandfather always plays with him and makes jokes about Santa and his reindeers, they steal cookies from the tray and prank Tom's dad. Tom is very happy when he spends time at his grandparents' house. While playing with the train under the tree, Tom saw his grandfather reading an old book of which he seemed very interested and he started asking questions about it.

-Grandpa, what is that book you are reading about?

-Well, Tom...it is about two young people who fall in love on Christmas Eve.

-Really? Woow!”, exclaimed little Tom in astonishment.




-Mhm, it really is. You know, me and your grandmother met each other around Christmas Eve for the first time like these two young people.

-Please grandpa, tell me the story!, said Tom while jumping on his grandpa's lap.

Then, the grandfather placed the nephew on his lap as comfortable as he could and began telling him about his first meeting with the love of his life.

-It all started when I got a job as an elf in the centre of the city, near the Christmas huge tree. I was helping Santa to give kids presents and I saw her coming with her little brother, great-uncle Ben. He was very nervous about meeting Santa so I assured your grandma that he will be ok and Ben that Santa is very sweet and he has nothing to worry about or be scared of. She gave me these sweet and funny looks while Ben was talking with Santa. I tried my best to be hilarious so I could impress her. I was actually very charmed by her and I really wanted to see her again. When Ben returned to your grandmother she thanked me a lot for being nice with him, so I told her she could return anytime she wanted. The following days I was looking for her so much that I started ignoring the kids and look around for her. Soon, I started to realize that I should pay more attention to Christmas spirit and kids and not be that focused on her all the time because time always gives us the best answers. And it really is like that. After a few days of intense waiting, she finally came back but without Ben this time. I was really excited to see her again, even though I was really nervous. Under the Christmas lights I told her that I'd like to see her again sometimes, maybe somewhere where just the two of us could be. I was very surprised to find out that she came to me to demand the exact same thing. We spent a lot of time together, even on Christmas Eve we meet and shared gifts to the needy on the streets. On Christmas day I wished her a Happy Christmas and I gave her a little necklace with a fir-shaped pendant, just like the fir where we first met. She was very happy to receive such a gift so she hugged me very tight. We both felt a little awkward because of the tension, but we returned to talking about how we spend the Christmas day. That particular moment I realized that she is not like any girl I had liked before... she was so beautiful and honest, caring, brave, charming, soft, with a golden heart and I was the





luckiest man alive to be next to her in those moments. We decided that we should see each other on New Year's Eve near the fir where we first met. That night, I remember how we behaved, as if we were friends for a lifetime. We laughed a lot, we danced, we sang, we ate a lot of sweets and when the countdown started I told her how much I liked her and how I'd like to spend my days with her. Just when the New Year's Eve arrived, I pulled her by the waist and kissed her. I never thought I could have as much fulfilment in my soul as I did in that moment. From that moment on, we have never been apart.

-Wow grandpa! I wish that one day I found someone as special as you did."

Suddenly, his mother and grandmother asked him from the doorstep what the two had been talking about for so long.

-So Tom, what story did grandpa tell you?

-He told me about how you two met each other and how he fell in love with you, it was very interesting.

-I bet. Now little monster, let's decorate some cookies, what do you say?

-I really want to!

Tom jumped off his grandpa's lap and rushed into the kitchen, where he continued his Christmas preparations adventure.






Forever gone

Tușcă Ana Raisa


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Ystad was definitely Santa's favourite location when it came to visiting the children all around the world on Christmas Eve. Situated on Sweden's southern coast, it is one of the most neighbourly and sympathetic villages Santa has ever encountered. It shelters a genuine community of altruistic northerners that expect Santa yearly, whose arrival is no longer a surprise, as children greet him either with hot cups of cinnamon, tea or milk, and a plate of delicious, chocolate cookies. Men and women of all ages welcome him within their houses, where Santa has the privilege to taste the authentic Swedish meatballs. The kids around take care of his reindeer too, and lacquer his wooden sled before he leaves.

Most of the natives give Santa gifts in return. Last year, he received a knitted sweater with Rudolph's face on it, which he is currently wearing as he is packing up the presents. He can't contain his excitement as he ponders on his arrival. His tremendous love for Ystad is as compelling as the beauty of the village itself. Although its population is not as considerable as elsewhere, Ystad is the home of the genuine Christmas spirit. The decorations are mesmerising: handmade stockings, each having a unique pattern, advent chimes, Tomtar and Nissar, the tiny domestic gnomes with long, white beards wearing a conical cap in red that guard every single house and the astounding Christmas Tree, decorated with bright blue crystal globes. It is said that every northerner of Ystad hangs a single ornament on the tree, and the elder of the village hangs the Star.

Santa is now bracing his reindeer as he admires his still lacquered sled. This year, he has a marvelous, gigantic bag, filled with whatever he could find. He is feeling a little concerned, as he hasn't



received any letter from Ystad, regarding the gifts the children desire. He shakes the thought off, however, as soon as he is seated on the sled and begins to ride towards Sweden.

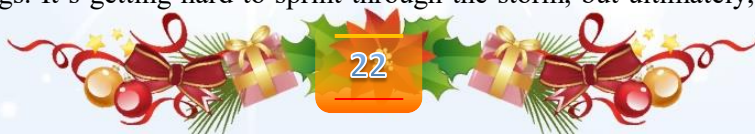
But despite being ecstatic about visiting the village once again, he can't help but feel like something is definitely off. The letters are bugging him. Why hasn't he received any? He has got an entire bag of letters from England, for example. Most children wish for sunny days. He also has a box of letters from Belgium. Children of Belgium told Santa they don't wish for chocolate anymore. Most of them want stuffed and plush dragons however. Children from Eastern Asia asked Santa to bring them vacation, and less exhausting homework, if possible. Children from Australia are looking forward to seeing snow this year. American children are still relying on generic toys. Ystad is just oddly quiet.


But maybe there is no reason to feel uneasy! Perhaps the northerners are organizing him a surprise party. Or, it is plausible that they don't want anything specific this year, and are only looking forward to seeing Santa once again. He is happy with this thought.

The ride to Ystad doesn't take long. It is his first stop. The moment he lines up his sled, however, his anxiety begins to grow again. The village is quiet, and dark. It is so dark that Santa can't really make anything out of the surroundings, which is a little bit suspicious. The wind is howling, closing and opening the doors of the houses around, which are now empty. There is no sight of people, let alone decorations. Tomtar and Nissar are gone, too.

Santa realises it can't be a surprise party. The people of Ystad have disappeared, and he can't figure out why. He begins to wander around, calling out for anyone, but receiving nothing in response. He then suddenly remembers that he might as well check up on the Christmas Tree, which he does, but to his surprise, there is no decoration hung on the branches. However, the Star is still on top, and considering the legend, it is the elder of the village that hangs it.

It starts snowing heavily as Santa starts looking around for the elder's hut. The snow underneath his heavy feet feels like quicksand, as he begins to run towards the end of the village, close to the pine forest. His beard is now carrying tiny snowflakes that descend from his frozen, red cheeks, as he keeps squinting his eyes at the surroundings. It's getting hard to sprint through the storm, but ultimately, he





catches a glimpse of a flickering candle inside a little house. It must be the elder's hut!

As soon as Santa reaches it, he slams the door against the wall as he catches his breath, and looks up at the elder: a little man, reading on his chair. He lays his eyes on Santa as soon as he blasts through the door, and looks at him with wide eyes.

“Santa?” he asks, bewildered.

“What are you doing here? Christmas has been dead for years!”





The perfect holiday

Cuțai Corina


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What a wonderful season is winter, it is the perfect period to give and receive gifts, the atmosphere is full of happiness and kindness. You're willing to be a better person. You're inspired by the smell of tangerines and the look of the lights on the pine tree in your living room. It's warm in your house and you're with your family and friends spending time together watching a movie and eating snacks. Your mother is making her best cake, and it's smelling so delicious in the kitchen. It's snowing outside, the big flakes lay on the ground. You're listening to carols and talking to your friends.

Tomorrow is a new year. It's late but you can't sleep. You're very excited from the fireworks you see. You have a glass of champagne in your hand and watch the wintertime landscape at your window. The clock is nearly 12 a.m. and you spend the last minutes of this year thinking how good it was. You have done everything you have planned. The next year will bring you more happiness. You're





ready to create, you're inspired. You're opening the gifts you received from your relatives. You find there what you dreamed of. What's there? A device? A smartphone? A teddy bear? A book you wanted to read?... you're a happy person. It's a perfect description of what can happen at New Year'Eve. A lot of delicious food on the table, a lot of games to play with, pleasant songs, popcorn and TV with all the movies you have to watch or a warm blanket with a cup of tea. A book in your hands and a smile on your face. I know what you want. You want a perfect holiday. You want your parents to be next to you. You want to tell them how much you love them. You want to call someone who is far away from you at the moment. Call someone you didn't talk for a long period of time. You want to be loved and fulfilled. You have a long vacation to be spent in the way you want. You can lay all day long in your bed or you can go for a walk. No school and no work. It's only you and your wishes. You can eat a lot, sleep a lot, sing and dance.

Winter holidays are aimed to make anyone happy and excited. No matter how old you are, a child or a grown up, a man or a woman, winter holidays mean the same thing to you. It's the time when magic comes true. It's the time you can spend as you want to, when you can feel as in childhood beside your toys. Close your eyes and be thankful for everything you have done this year. No matter how hard it was to deal with some problems, you're here right now, watching the stars and the moon at New Year'Eve. Drink your last sip of tea and go to sleep, because tomorrow a new year, full of magic, will begin.





Winter Wonderland

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Once upon a time, there lived a brave and adventurous squirrel. Her name was Swirly. She had a fuzzy chestnut fur, two glistening black eyes, a big bushy tail and a green wool sweater. Her home was in the hollow of an old pine tree near the main street of Mag Mell, a magic village where wishes come true if you are worthy enough. Clumps of crystalline snowflakes drifted on the city and suddenly the town hall church bell rang. The residents of the city, mostly witches and wizards started the preparation of the “Winter Wonderland” carnival. Every year they gather together and play mystic games, have spell contests, give each other gifts and have a great time.


“Hurry up, Jake! We are going to miss the start of the carnival!” Swirly said to her friend, Jake, a black cat, the familiar spirit of a known witch in the South of Mag Mell.

“I am trying! But it is so easy for you to jump from a tree to another... Look! We are almost there!”

They slowly entered the gates to a new realm where everything was tremendous, trees were covered in thick snow with fairy lights over them, bells were ringing in the distance and in the air you could feel the smell of cake and oranges. Our two friends quickly went and tried to find something to eat. One friendly witch offered Swirly some nuts and a cookie, and Jake a big delicious fish which he kept talking about all night. They were limited in doing things, because magic is too powerful for animals. After a long walk under the starry sky, Swirly saw a strange wagon near the end of the realm.

“Look! It says that if you enter your wishes will become instantly true. I am going in!”





“Not so fast,” Jake said as he grabbed the dizzy squirrel by her paw. “I may be a cat but I know how to read! I am sure it tells us to enter at our own risks! Don’t forget we are animals and magic is too powerful for us!”

Our stubborn squirrel entered the wagon alone and was greeted by an old lady. The inside of her room was dark, only one candle was lit. She murmured something. Swirly didn’t hear her and instead started to tell her that she wished she received many expensive gifts. The old lady nodded her head and everything around disappeared in a thick fog. The squirrel looked around for her friend, but he probably left so she decided to go home too because it was cold.

The next days were unlucky, her tree was cut off because it was too old. She also received a letter from Jake telling that he was disappointed that she hadn’t listened to him. With tears in her eyes, Swirly decided that the right thing was to apologize to her friend. She knocked on his door hoping for the best.

“Look, Jake...I am sorry for that night, it wasn’t the right thing to do and I should’ve not believed that wishes come true that easily. Now I’m having bad luck, my tree house has been cut off and now I am on the point of losing you.”

“Oh, come here!” Jake said as he went to hug Swirly. “Thank you for apologizing, I was sad, but I wouldn’t want to lose a friend like you! Also, you can stay at my place for how long you would like.”

Because she admitted her fault and apologized, she now had a stronger friendship with Jake and together found a new place for Swirly to live in. The squirrel figured out that her wish came true in the end, she received the most important gift, true friendship. Thus did she have a wonderful winter, indeed.





The First Snow

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Living in Australia had always been wonderful for Margaret - she loved the people there, she loved all the great hobbies she was able to pursue there, such as singing and writing, she loved the festivals she was part of every year, she loved all the actors and actresses she had the opportunity to meet.

There was only one thing she didn't love about her country: the weather.

Margaret is an optimistic person and she tries to seek the good in everything, but it's not working all the time. But regarding the weather in Australia, she can't seem to find *one* good thing about it, despite her hopeful personality.

"It's always the same here in Sydney," she sadly tells her best friend. "The sun shines, the sky is blue, and if it's not that, then it rains a little bit. But outside it is always warm. *Never* cold. We don't even have four seasons - but *two*. What is winter? Well, I don't *know*, because Australia doesn't *have that!*"

Margaret is always complaining about the winter in her country, that is not an actual winter like in Europe, or Asia. Australia is a warm place for most year, even during winter the thermometer states about 50 degrees Fahrenheit, which is too warm for winter time. This is what bothers Margaret the most: she can never wear scarves, hoodies, or jumpers to her liking because of the warm temperature. But what annoys her more is the fact that she might not be able to experience real winter *ever*, because of her job. Margaret wouldn't give up on her amazing, well-paid job as a writer just to see how winter is out there. Deep down her soul, she wishes she could, though.



The thought of winter always made her happy because of one thing only: *the snow*. Margaret had always wanted to see and feel real snow, because in Australia it never snows. It seems like her fantasy would stay just that - a fantasy - for her entire life, until one day, when something changes everything.

“You want me to write about a winter wonderland?” she asks her agent. “That sounds really exciting, but how can I write about something I’ve never experienced before?”

“I know that it doesn’t really snow around here,” her agent responds with an apologetic smile plastered on her face.

“Doesn’t *really* snow? We don’t ever have winter, we have a cold spring. It’s gonna be pretty hard to write that, but... I’ll get it done as soon as possible, don’t worry.”


“Don’t stress about that, Margaret. I have a better option for you: the publishing house that you’re about to write for is offering you a trip to Switzerland just for you to write an amazing book! This way, you’ll see real snow and hopefully write something good that will stay on New York’s Bestseller List for a long time.”

“Wait, are you serious?” Margaret couldn’t believe what she just heard. “This is wonderful! I’m gonna write the best novel ever written, trust me on that!”

Just like that, Margaret flew away to Switzerland, in Zurich, to see actual snow to help her with her book. She felt all kinds of emotions in her soul, getting closer and closer to her fantasy becoming reality. The girl was so nervous that her hands started shaking and she couldn’t get any sleep on her long flight to Zurich.

When she arrived there, she finally understood why people in movies were so excited when the first snow came. The air was slightly colder than in Australia, and she definitely needed warmer clothes during her stay there. It was *actually* snowing, with big and wonderful snowflakes that landed gently on the girl’s hair, clothes, and suitcase. She wanted to sit still so she could be covered in more and more snowflakes, she wanted to keep them all to herself. The snowflakes also landed on her face, and she felt like she hadn’t been living her life to the fullest until up to that very moment. It was an unique sensation, all new to her. Margaret couldn’t contain her excitement for long, and she almost started jumping out of happiness right there,





in front of lots of people. The publishing house's manager was waiting for her at the airport, and she hurried to him only to leave her belongings and return back outside to enjoy her first snow. It all seemed unreal. She started making big and tiny snowballs, she stood still while the snowflakes landed on her, she made a small snowman with no eyes and no nose and she even had the courage to pull out her tongue to taste the snowflakes, just like toddlers do every time. It was a magical time for Margaret, and she felt just like in a winter wonderland.

When she returned back inside the airport, the manager greeted her with a smile.

“Enjoyed your first snow, miss Margaret?”

“A lot,” she answered, out of breath. “Now I can write my winter wonderland, because I had just lived it.”





Winter Wonderland

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It was one of the coldest days of the year. The silvery snow covered the earth like a heavy blanket making the land no longer filled with songs of birds and the green paint of the trees fall in a deep slumber. The chilled air from the outside made the warm house of Lauren feel like a dream. The place was filled with the smell of fresh baked cookies, oranges and Christmas songs, adorning the atmosphere of the Christmas Eve.

-Grandma let's play another game! said Lauren.

-I am sorry sweetheart but I think is time for you to go to bed.


-But mommy and daddy have not come back yet.

-I know sugar but they are very busy at work. They will be here tomorrow morning just like they promised.

-They say that every year... and every year they don't come until the holiday is ending.

-This year it will be different, smiled her grandmother, a little worried.





-Grandma? Can you tell us a story before bed? Asked Lauren holding her best friend, Lilith the bear.

-Of course honey. Let me tell you the story of a little girl called Miranda and the day she met Santa Claus.

-You know I don't believe in Santa.

-Why not?

-If he were true, mom and dad would be here, said the little girl on the verge of crying.

-Oh sweetie.

The lady took the girl in her arms and sang a little to calm her down. Lauren embraced her tight as a sign for her to start the story.

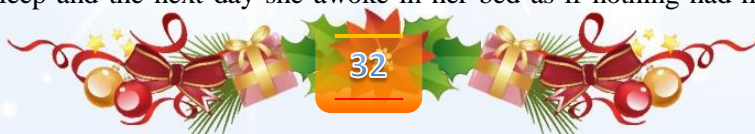
-Once upon a time there was a little girl, Miranda, who did not believe in Christmas. On Christmas Eve she heard a weird noise outside. She looked through the window and saw a train.


-Why would there be a train there? asked Lauren.

-Let me continue. The girl ran to the mysterious train and a man opened the doors. He asked if she had the fit ticket to see Santa. The child was shocked by the question but when she searched into her pockets she felt the weird presence of an object. What she took out was a real ticket to the town where Santa lived. The ticket collector beckoned her to sit along with other children and the girl was served hot chocolate and all kinds of sweets, one tastier than the other. The girl felt the luckiest in the world with so many wonderful things to eat.

-I want to go with that train too. The train from here is full of old people and stinks, said Lauren.

-Maybe next Christmas. As I was saying... the girl spent the road eating sweets and playing different kinds of games with her new friends but when she arrived at the station she was astonished. Outside of the train there was a little town filled with houses very nicely made, with globes and different colors. The child was mostly amazed by the giant man that was waiting outside. His clothes were all red except his brown belt and black boots and he was looking at them with such warm eyes that she felt like she had known him all her life. He showed the children how the toys were made by his little helpers, the elves in his little factory and the sleigh pulled by reindeers. As a gift he gave one of the bells to Miranda who could not believe what was really happening and thought it was just a dream. While she was returning home she fell asleep and the next day she awoke in her bed as if nothing had hap-





pened but when she went to the Christmas tree she found under it her gifts along with a bell exactly like the ones Santa had showed her a period of time before. From that day on she believed in Santa Claus and the magic of Christmas.

-That was such a beautiful story... said Lauren.

Then the sound of a door opening and the wind rush filled the house.

-Lauren? a familiar female voice called.

-We are here! a man continued. That voice sounded well known too.

-Mom! Dad! The girl rushed to them.

-A generous man helped us at work and drove us here. He even gave us a bell as a gift for you.

The girl took it and smiled secretly. Her wish came true, then. Yes, however, yes, Santa really existed, she felt grateful towards him.

Winter Wonderland

Claudia Fasolo


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Nature gets lost under the cold white of snow. Christmas is approaching and no one ceases to prepare for this celebration.

The sky is silent and dull. The rays of a round pale sun struggle to scrape through the thick and white clouds. From the high sky, though, small snowflakes tumble ceaselessly towards the earth already covered by a shiny white cloak. The flakes fall as if a frightening character would incessantly squander the snow through a giant sieve. The wind that escaped from its reins is blowing unendingly. Large snowdrifts can be seen here, and the paths traveled by people are covered entirely by the white ocean.





On the horizon there are villages buried beneath the mountains of snow. The only sign of life in the Snowy wilderness, which leads us to the warmth of fireplaces, is the thick smoke coming from the chimneys. In the yards of the people, on all the paths of the villages we find children who enjoy the snow, playing unceasingly while parents and grandparents sit in the house preparing all kinds of goodies, including fluffy cakes, aromatic tangerines, pies and much more.

The trees can fall under the heavy weight of the snow which presses their shoulders. Like white fantasies, trees are lost in the Snowy wilderness, inspiring fear in the viewer's soul. Along the road covered with a white carpet, the aspens look like white candles strung out in a perfect order.

But besides the multitude of children who enjoy the snow, there are also children who still hope for a moment of happiness. On the outskirts of the village, a small cottage is going to fall. In it lives a family that thinks about what to put on the table on Christmas Day. While parents were thinking of who to ask for food, the child was writing with his frozen hands, at the candlelight, a letter for Santa Claus that sounded like this:

"Dear Santa Claus,

My name is George and I'm 14 years old. I'm sure you're going to get a lot of letters from all the kids all over the world and that's going to take some time but I hope you can read the letter from me. I'm going to let you decide how I behaved this year.

What I want for Christmas is to have one as I have never had before, to feel the wonderful magic of this holiday, to be happy, at least this once. First of all I want a phone, because mine's not working well. I also want a new pair of shoes, books, food, clothes and chocolate. There's one more thing I want, but I don't think you can give it to me. My idol is Lionel Messi, professional football player from FC Barcelona. It would be a great pleasure to have at least five minutes to talk to him and get an autograph. Whatever you bring me, Santa, even if it's just a packet of crisps, I still love you for listening to me. "

Lovingly,

George





And so on the night before Christmas all the letters were sent to Santa, to the North Pole.

The letters are opened and read aloud by an elf in front of Santa. Finally, George's plea reaches Santa's ears who is deeply impressed by the modesty of the child so he takes the letter in his hand and puts it in his chest pocket. Close to midnight all the gifts are being carefully placed in the sleigh. Santa drinks another glass of milk, eats another cookie and sets off. Time passes very quickly when you have so many demands, so Santa finishes delivering the presents at dawn.


Of course Santa Claus did not forget about George, so after finishing his job he makes a detour to the footballer's house. There he talked to him and explained the situation. He hastens as children would wake up to open their gifts. They hit the road. The sleigh climbs above the clouds at an impressive speed in one second to reach the boy's door. He lands on the main street, and Messi gets out holding the child's presents wearing a Santa hat. Santa Claus disappeared and Messi knocks on the door of the house. It is even opened by the boy who begins to cry for joy. The two of them are playing, talking, and then Santa returns to take the footballer back to his family.

Don't give up hope because you can always fulfill your dreams even in a totally unexpected way.

Alice in Winter Wonderland


**Maria Desiree
Dinulescu – Luft**

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“Such a strange dream.” said Alice while still trying to figure out where her dream got her to this time.

“It is not a dream! It is snowing. Can't you feel that it is cold?” She heard someone behind her say.



Alice looked behind her and a black cat was there. She then looked at the sky still being convinced that it was all a dream because a cat could not talk and she could not feel cold at all. Then the cat began talking again.

“I know I am a black cat and people think that I only bring misfortune and a series of unfortunate events if I cross paths with a human, but I don’t think you should ignore me. After all, I am one of Santa’s little helpers!”

After the cat said that, a green hat appeared on its head and the Santa’s helper started singing:

“Jingle bells, jingle bells,
I help Santa all the way!
Hey!
Jingle bells, jingle bells,
You are on Santa’s land
And I would like to lend a hand.
Yay!”

Alice was confused again but, since she thought all of it was a dream, she decided to go along with it. She bent down to pet the cat which started purring.

“So, what are you doing as ‘one of Santa’s little helpers’? Are you a transformed elf?” She asked.

“No. I am an ordinary cat with a hat. What makes you ask that?”

Alice saw the tag on the black cat’s hat. It said:

“Erwin.
If found, send a letter to Santa.”

“Well, Erwin... I do not think that cats can talk, at least not usually.”


Alice said while trying to find her purse in the snow. It contained a little notebook and a pen. She wanted to make sure that the cat will get home safe, but she did not know if the tag said the truth.

“Of course, they can talk! We are in fact Santa’s helpers along with the dogs and other pets! All that elf-nonsense was created by you, humans!”

Said Erwin in a friendly tone while starting walking towards a snowy hill at which he pointed with his tiny paw.

“Come with me. And no, I did not run away from Santa. His house and workshop are down that hill.”





“Santa is not real, Erwin... I think that someone played a cruel prank on you buddy... I found out the truth last year when I caught my father putting the presents beneath the tree.”

Alice said being discouraged.

“But I will follow you. Maybe we find your real owner.”

She added while taking her purse from the snow.

“Now humans cannot give gifts to each other on Christmas? That is strange.”

Alice walked with Erwin asking him a bunch of questions. She asked him why he could talk, why did he say that he is Santa’s helper and why does he believe in Santa.

“Why do I believe in Santa? Because he believes in me. He believes that I can behave and when I do not, he does not bring me down. He lifts my spirits even on Christmas when he is really busy, as you can see...”

The cat said while pointing with his paw at a tiny house with a huge building nearby. It had a plate on which these words were scribbled:

“SANTA’S WORKSHOP

BEHAVE NICELY, HO! HO! HO!”

“When people are asleep, we come here and craft toys using Christmas magic.”

“I am sure is a...”

She was interrupted by Erwin.

“It is him! SANTA! SANTA!”

He shouted while running towards the same bearded, old man in a red suit as all the tales say.

“Hello! I brought your cat back, Santa.”

She said with tears of happiness in her eyes and then woke up.

When Alice opened her eyes, she was sad to see that it was night and that she knew it was all a dream until she heard a laugh from the window and looked in the direction of the sound. It came from the sky. There was a flying sleigh with reindeers passing by her house and the same Santa Claus was in it with a bag of presents.

“Merry Christmas, Alice!”

He said while waving at her.

She still remembers to this day that Christmas, because she learned to hope again.





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