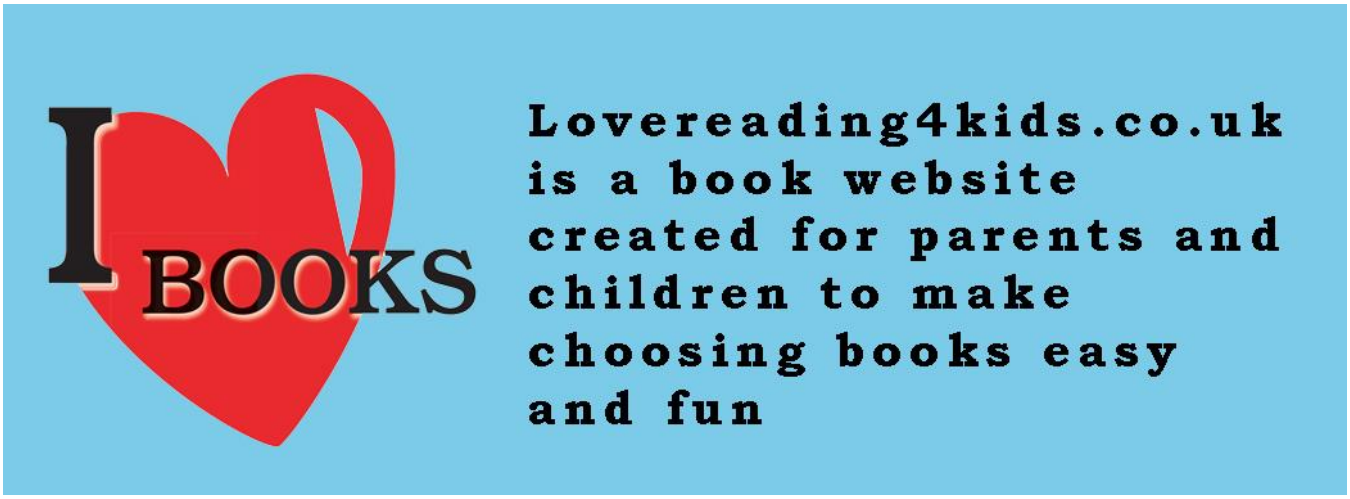


Opening extract from

All Wrapped Up

Written by

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Published by

HarperCollins Children's Books

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First published in Great Britain by HarperCollins *Children's Books* in 2015
HarperCollins *Children's Books* is a division of HarperCollins*Publishers* Ltd,
HarperCollins Publishers
1 London Bridge Street
London SE1 9GF

The HarperCollins website address is: www.harpercollins.co.uk

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ISBN 978-0-00-816344-0

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Typeset by Palimpsest Book Production Limited, Falkirk, Stirlingshire
Printed and bound in England by Clays Ltd, St Ives plc

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My name is Harriet Manners, and I love Christmas.

You can tell I love Christmas because I start celebrating it in the middle of August.

I do it subtly, obviously.

A tinsel brooch here, a life-size plastic reindeer with flashing nose there.

"*Harriet*," my stepmother said this year when I wheeled it into the hallway.



"*Annabel*," I replied, making my face as angelic as possible. "Did you know that the majority of male reindeers lose their antlers in winter? That means that Rudolph was almost definitely a girl. Don't you think we should be reminded of this *every day of the year*?"

Annabel laughed and put the reindeer back in the garden shed, along with my 'Jingle Cat – Meowy Christmas' album and the cinnamon incense sticks I'd hidden behind the radiators.

So I think the answer was no.

In September I constructed a battle of pink versus white sugar mice on the living room carpet, and October was spent sticking thick wads of cotton wool along the edge of every external windowsill so it looked like it had just been snowing.

"*Harriet*," Annabel repeated, which means November was spent cleaning it all off again.

Now it's the middle of December and I'm finally *allowed* to start marking the occasion, I'm so excited I feel like a shaken can: except instead of soda, Christmas is fizzing straight out.

I have made a neat list of my favourite Christmas animals, and my favourite Christmas foods, and my favourite Christmas songs, and my favourite Christmas lists.

I've created a gift plan with associated shopping map, and a detailed Q and A to hand out on Christmas morning so I can accurately deduce how much people *really* like their presents.

Together, my best friend and I found a

traditional mince pie recipe from a Tudor recipe book written in 1543 and cooked them perfectly. (Then threw them all away, because there's a reason mince pies are now vegetarian.)

I've made Christmassy pie charts and PowerPoints, line graphs and crosswords.

I've even had a couple of epic festive-themed fights with my parents, because laughing at a letter I wrote to Father Christmas when I was five years old is just *not* entering into the appropriate spirit of things.

And – most importantly – I've decorated.

In fact, thanks to school having just broken up for the Christmas holidays, my house is starting to look like something Santa would visit incognito out of sheer embarrassment.

I have Christmasified *everything*.