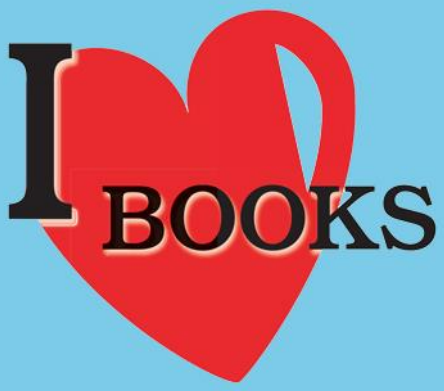


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Opening extract from

I'll be Home for Christmas

Written by

Benjamin Zephaniah, Non Pratt, Marcus Sedgwick and others

Illustrated by

William Grill

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I'll Be HOME for CHRISTMAS



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Introduction

Home means something different for everyone. Many of us are fortunate enough to count our home as a place of stability, love and safety; others are not so lucky. Fiction can be our first exploration of hardships that are very much part of the real world. By using fiction both as a means of raising money for Crisis and increasing awareness of the struggles faced by those who experience homelessness, this collection bridges the gap between the real and the imagined.

As part of the creation of this book, **Lisa Williamson** has generously donated her time to Crisis, giving a creative-writing workshop to members at the Crisis Skylight Centre in London. In turn, some of the Crisis members shared their stories with her. This exchange of ideas and experiences has in part formed the inspiration for Lisa's story, 'Routes and Wings'.

Stories of hardship and resilience are also the basis of **Benjamin Zephaniah**'s poem, 'Home and Away', and 'The Letter' from our competition winner, **Tracy Darnton** – a story that is powerful in its simplicity. 'Amir and George', a moving story from **Sita Brahmachari**, focuses on the experience of losing your home and coming to terms with a new one as a refugee, a situation that is tragically common in our world today.

Campaigns like Crisis at Christmas provide moments of hope in the face of adversity and this anthology is not without Christmas spirit. There are stories filled with the warmth of the festive season, from **Katy Cannon**'s 'Christmas, Take Two' to **Non Pratt**'s 'Ghosts of Christmas Past' and **Juno Dawson**'s 'Homo for Christmas'. In not one of these stories is happiness easily found, yet it is recognized as all the more precious when it arrives.

Other stories in the collection are far from cosy. **Melvin Burgess**'s 'When Daddy Comes Home' casts a sceptical look at politicians and truthfulness and **Marcus Sedgwick**'s 'If Only in My Dreams' presents us with the uncertain future of our planet. These are stories that will stay with you well beyond their final

lines, as is **Tom Becker's** chilling vision of the demons unleashed by grief in 'Claws'.

Yet even in the most difficult of circumstances and the most imperfect of homes, there are moments of beauty to be found. **Julie Mayhew**'s 'The Bluebird' sees a girl yearning for escape, **Kevin Brooks**'s 'The Associates' reveals tenderness in friendship and **Holly Bourne**'s 'The Afterschool Club' shows us that there is more to most people than there first appears.

In **Cat Clarke**'s story, 'Family You Choose', a group of self-confessed 'waifs and strays' are family for one another despite their differences, with heart-warming results. Here we present to you a family of sorts; a collection of wholly individual, beautifully written and thought-provoking stories, each one a member of the rich and varied family of UKYA writing. How fortunate we are.

Ruth Bennett, Commissioning Editor
Stripes Publishing – June 2016

A Note from the Publisher

In September this year, Stripes will celebrate its tenth birthday. We wanted to mark this important milestone in a meaningful and imaginative way. In publishing *I'll Be Home for Christmas* our aim is not only to provide crucial financial support to Crisis, but also to raise awareness of the charity's work among young adult readers, particularly at this time of year. Most of us take it for granted that we will share Christmas with family and friends, but for an alarmingly high number of young adults this isn't the case.

Stripes is primarily known for its illustrated fiction, so this has been an amazing opportunity for us to reach out to the YA community in the UK. We have got involved in some of the fantastic initiatives celebrating YA fiction, including the Young Adult Literature Convention (YALC) and *The Bookseller* YA Book Prize.

We also ran a competition to find a new voice in YA and are delighted to welcome Tracy Darnton to the anthology.

I am hugely grateful to all the exceptionally talented authors for their involvement in, and their commitment to, *I'll Be Home for Christmas*, and for their wonderful contributions – they have produced such a diverse and inspiring range of stories and poetry and each one has offered a unique response to the theme of home. We've eagerly awaited the arrival of each piece; some have made us laugh, some have made us cry – all have made us think…

And a massive thank you to William Grill for his stunning cover – it superbly captures the essence of the book and is the most delightful wrapping paper this Christmas anthology could have.

This has been a truly rewarding and exciting experience for all of us at Stripes – and a fantastic way to celebrate ten years of publishing. We go forwards into our next decade with renewed dedication and energy.

Jane Harris, Publisher
Stripes Publishing – June 2016