Merry Christmas, Hamish!

Hamish Ellerby lay in bed and squeezed his eyes shut. If there was one thing he knew for certain, it was that he was about to have the best sleep ***ever***.

Lots of kids can't sleep on Christmas Eve. They're too busy thinking about Santa and presents and whether their uncle Jeremy will eat all the Brussels sprouts and stink out the front room again.

But Hamish never had any trouble sleeping. He just wanted the night out of the way. It was very late and tomorrow would be a BIG day.

Everyone would be up at six am, for a start.

In the Ellerby household, Hamish and his older brother Jimmy would fling themselves out of bed and rush to the tree in the living room.

They'd sit and wait and stare at the presents.

And then they'd sit and wait and stare some more.

At five past six, Jimmy would quietly feel the wrapping and make wild guesses about what they might contain.

'I think Mum's got me a piranha!' he'd say, holding up what was quite obviously a book. 'Or maybe it's a motorbike!'

Then the two boys would sit and wait and stare some more.

At about quarter to eight, Dad would ***finally*** get up and have a really long wee which the whole house would hear. Sometimes these wees were so long that Hamish thought his dad must be just standing there, drinking a never-ending bottle of water, constantly refilling himself. Meanwhile the boys would be inching closer to the presents, ready for . . .

PHEEEEEEEEEP!

Mum would blow her Special Christmas Whistle, and Hamish and Jimmy would dive forward, tearing their presents open and making wild whooping sounds, even if all that was inside was just a packet of nuts or a thimble.

Then Dad would drive to the 24-hour garage to buy batteries for all the things he'd forgotten to buy batteries for and pick up some Chocolate Mustn'tgrumbles or a newspaper to give to Mum as an extra present, while she made her special Christmas fry-up.

After that it would be playing and cartoons, a visit to Madame Cous Cous's International World of Treats, and then, just before lunchtime, all the residents of the town would head to the school hall to sing songs and wish everyone a happy Christmas. That was a nice bit. They'd all sing the official Starkley Christmas Song, written by Hamish's teacher, Mr Longblather. It didn't rhyme very well or make much sense, because Mr Longblather was better at teaching geography than music. It went:

OH STARKLEY IS A
LOVELY LITTLE TOWN,
ONE WHERE WE SMILE AND
WE NEVER REALLY FROWN,
BUT THAT'S NOT ENTIRELY TRUE,
BECAUSE SOMETIMES
WE FROWN,
BUT THE POINT IS THAT

IT'S CHRISTMAS!

Doesn't sound too bad, does it?

Except that it goes on.
And on.
It goes on for about fifteen minutes!
Just the same words over and over!

Then, ***at last*** – it would be off to crowd around the town clock. The clock was the symbol of Starkley. Starkley just wouldn't be Starkley without it. Everyone would pretend to listen to the mayor making a speech, and then he'd switch on all the brightly-coloured lights all around it, and everyone would clap and eat biscuits and go home for a big Christmas dinner.
It was going to be GREAT! So Hamish knew it was vital he fell asleep as quickly as possible, to get the boring night bit out of the way.
But just as his eyes had gone droopy, and his arms limp, and his pillow was starting to go soggy from all his drool . . .
'Hamish!' came a voice in an urgent half-whisper. '***HAMISH!***'