PRAISE FOR THE CHRISTMAS CARROLLS

'A Christmas book about kindness and cheer to make even Scrooge's heart melt.'

Dame Jacqueline Wilson

'Fizzing with energy and festive cheer, The Christmas Carrolls is a heart-warming must-read for the Christmas period. Mel's writing sparkles like the star on top of a Christmas Tree.'

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Abi Elphinstone, author of *Sky Song*

'As warm and cosy as drinking hot chocolate in your favourite Christmas jumper. A festive feast of fun.'

Maz Evans, author of *Who Let The Gods Out?*

'This book will fill your hearts and souls with joy, sparkle and most of all ho - ho - hope!'

Laura Ellen Anderson, author of Rainbow Grey and the bestselling Amelia Fang series

THE CHRISTMAS CARROLLS

For
Emma
x

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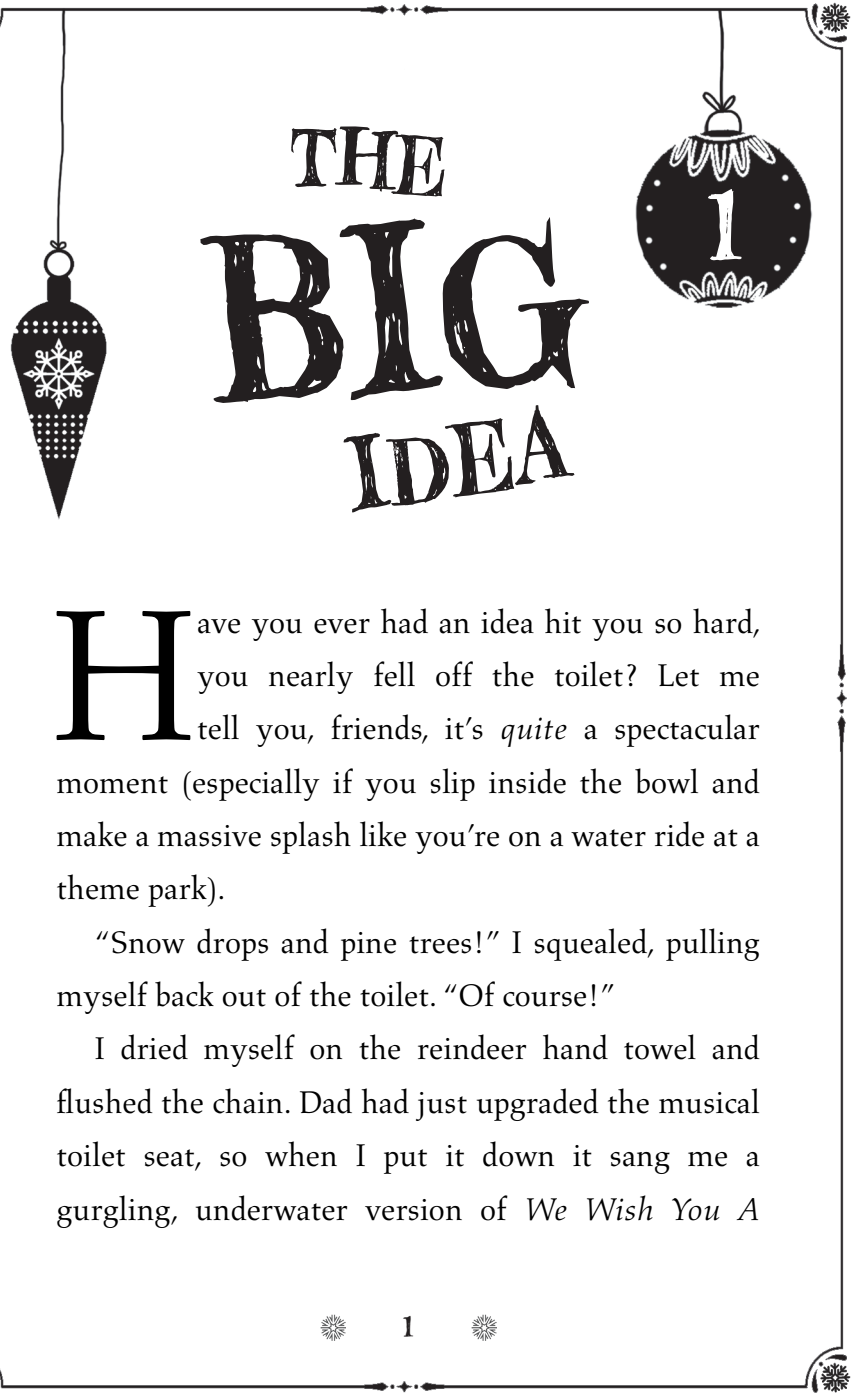
THE CHRISTMAS CARROLLS

A FANATICALLY FESTIVE FAMILY

MEL TAYLOR-BESSENT

ILLUSTRATED BY SELOM SUNU

HOLLY CARROLL
SNOW CARROLL
NICK CARROLL
ARCHER
IVY CARROLL
REGGIE



1 THE BIG IDEA

Have you ever had an idea hit you so hard, you nearly fell off the toilet? Let me tell you, friends, it's *quite* a spectacular moment (especially if you slip inside the bowl and make a massive splash like you're on a water ride at a theme park).

"Snow drops and pine trees!" I squealed, pulling myself back out of the toilet. "Of course!"

I dried myself on the reindeer hand towel and flushed the chain. Dad had just upgraded the musical toilet seat, so when I put it down it sang me a gurgling, underwater version of *We Wish You A*

Merry Christmas. I hummed along, counting down the days 'til Christmas as I washed my hands under the candy-cane taps. Dad still hadn't found a way to make them pour red and green water, but he did one time freeze every pipe in the house when he tried to make snow taps instead. Now *that* was a cold winter.

"Hols?" Dad's deep voice called from downstairs. "You ready?"

I hurtled out of the bathroom, grabbed some loo roll from the back of the cupboard, and spread myself starfish-style across the landing floor.

"Coming!" I squealed a few minutes later. I sprinted into the kitchen with toilet paper draped over my head, felt tip scribbles across my cheeks and a bauble-sized lump on my head after crashing headfirst into the banister.

"I'm OK!" I yelled, holding my arms out for balance. "I meant to do that."

Dad looked up from his mixing bowl. His dark cheeks were covered in icing sugar and he was wearing one of

Mum's famous gingerbread aprons. The frills and bells sat in all the wrong places, but I've always loved the way the deep orange colour made his eyes sparkle.

"Snowflake?" Dad beamed, the bell on the end of his Santa hat jingling. "What's going on?"

I cleared my throat and laid the toilet paper on the counter with a flourish.

"I give you . . . *Tushy Tinsel*," I exclaimed. "Why wipe with plain, boring toilet paper when you can experience Tushy Tinsel, the latest invention from Holly Carroll? It's sparkly, festive and fun, it brightens up any bathroom *and* it's extra tough because of the tinsel around the edges."

"Holly!" Dad gasped, his eyes widening. "This is christmariffic. It's festabulous! It's . . ."

"Worthy of going on the Invention Wall?" I grinned.

Dad inspected the toilet paper a little closer. "Ab-snow-lutely! I assume you've tested it to check that it works?"

I swallowed nervously.

"Hols?"

"Of course," I said, swiping the blotchy paper from his hands and hiding it behind my back.

"Good. You remember what happened the last time you tried to be a clever claus and skip the testing phase?"

I cringed. I had *technically* tested the Tushy Tinsel, but there was no way I could tell him that the red and green ink had smudged and now my bum looked like a baboon with a bad infection.

"Merry Monday!" Mum's shrill voice rang from the hallway. "What Christmas cheer will we spread today?"

She glided into the room carrying my baby sister, Ivy. They were wearing matching reindeer onesies and Ivy was snoring softly on her shoulder.

"Hols is just about to add her latest idea to the Invention Wall," Dad said, smearing a blob of butter across his brow. "Tushy Tinsel. Genius!"

I wrote it in my biggest, swirliest handwriting underneath last week's addition, the *Decoradder*, and stepped back to admire my handiwork. My list wasn't half as long as Dad's (his included the Christmacam – a Christmassy camera –, the Tinsel Tangler and the Unwrapping Gloves,

to name a few), but one of these days I was going to invent something so merrynifiscent, Father Christmas himself would name me the best gift-giver, invention-maker and cheer-spreader in the world. Maybe he'd give me a medal, or at least a personal inventing booth in his workshop?

"Hols?" Dad said, flicking through his *Big Book of Christmas Recipes*. "Can you check the snow-o-meter for me? Something tells me we might just be in for a fluttering of flakes."

"Didn't you say that yesterday?" I laughed, searching the fridge for an early-morning snack.

Mum grinned. "And the day before that, and the day before that."

Dad's brown eyes glazed over as he stared into the distance. "Did I ever tell you about the first time I saw snow?" he said. "When your grandparents moved us from Jamaica to the UK, and the plane landed in a snowstorm? We'd never seen anything like it! We walked straight off the plane, onto the runway and . . ."

"Had a snowball fight?" Mum and I said, finishing his sentence.

Dad nodded coyly, still lost in his daydream. "It was nothing short of magical," he breathed, spinning around and scattering half of his Snowflakes and milk across the floor.

As Mum rushed to grab the Chrismamop (Christmas tree mop), I pushed myself further into the fridge and found a bag of chocolate coins hidden behind the brussels sprouts and stinky spinach. I glanced over my shoulder to check they weren't watching – but just as I reached for the coins, my foot slid on the counter (that I was absolutely *not* climbing on) and I tumbled to the ground, bringing half the contents of the fridge with me. To be honest, I would've styled it out had it not been for the giant turkey leg that fell in slow motion from the top shelf and nearly took my head off.

"Hollypops?" Mum said, totally unaware of my near-death experience. "Have you done your morning chores?"

I shot her my most innocent *of course I have* smile, shoved everything back in the fridge (minus the chocolate coins, which happened to fall into my pyjama pocket) and ran into the hallway.

Our morning chores were always the same. Mum checked the light displays and made the beds, Dad cooked up a festive treat in the kitchen, Ivy – well, she was just learning how to walk, but I'm sure she'll have Christmas Carroll chores in no time – and I was in charge of the entrance decorations, which meant checking everything from the snow-o-meter outside to the fake snow sprinkled around the staircase spindles.

Now, I don't know if it's because I developed superhuman speed or because I wanted to hide somewhere and scoff my chocolate coins in peace, but I rehung the tinsel on the tree, straightened the snowman doormat, opened today's door on the Christmas calendar and dusted the giant ice lanterns before Mum finished her first Christmas carol of the day. Next, I checked the lights on the miniature

Christmas village that covered half of the floor, pulled the red velvet curtain open that hung across the door, and stepped outside to check the snow-o-meter.

The snow-o-meter (as if you didn't already know!) is a special thermometer that measures the likelihood of snowfall. Dad taught me how to read it when I was three years old. "The bigger the snowflake, the deeper the snowfall," he'd say, and sometimes we'd even bust out our special snow dance to encourage the skies to open.

With an optimistic spring in my step, I leapt over our Christmas Carroll doormat, opened the door and skipped outside.

Oh.

There wasn't a single cloud in the sky. No chill in the air. Not a single snowflake on the snow-o-meter. My shoulders slumped.

I suppose it was July, after all.

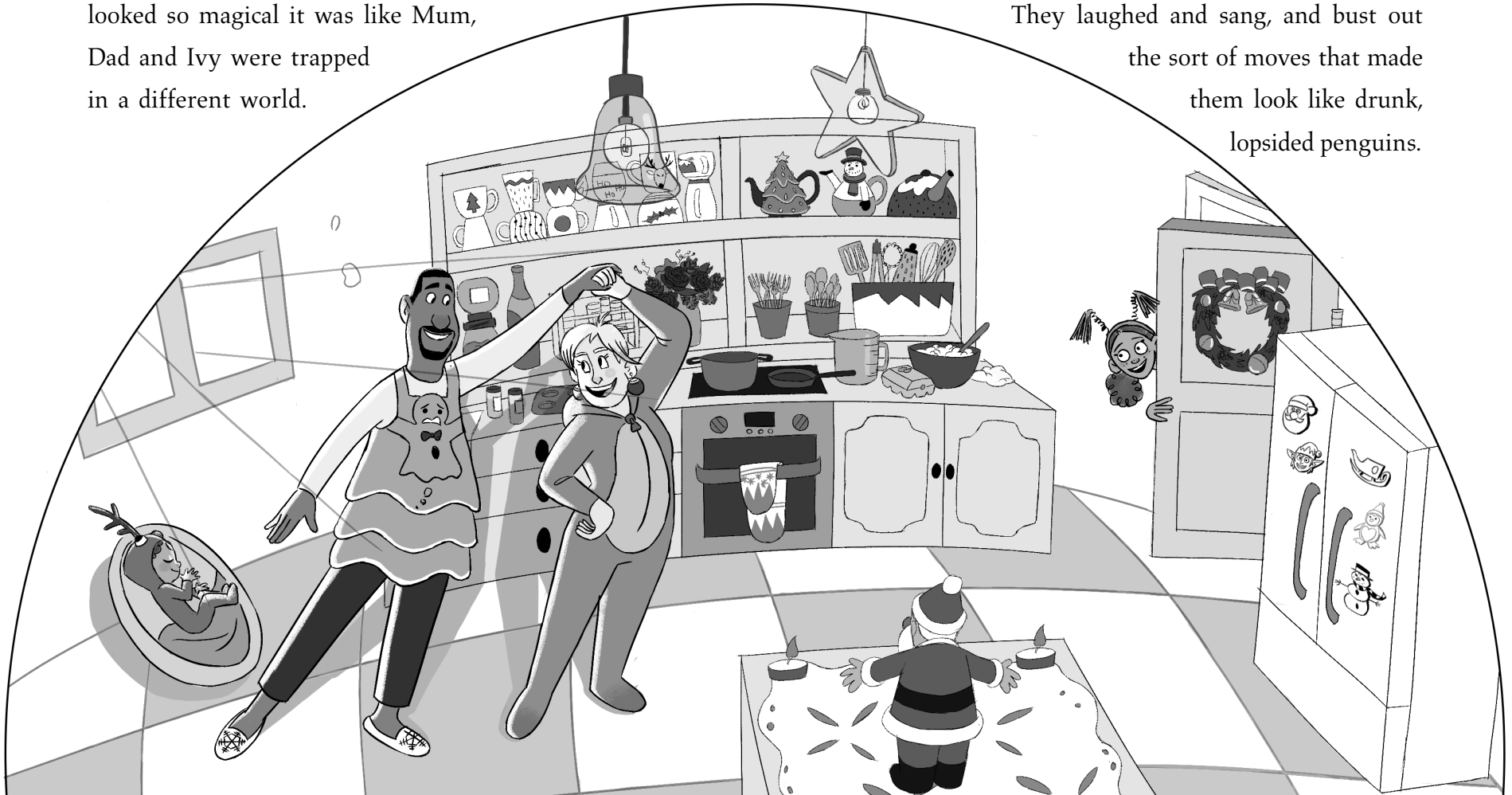
After pleading with the snow-o-meter for a good five minutes (surely my powers of persuasion would work one of these days?) I walked back into the

hallway, popped a chocolate coin in my mouth and poked my head around the corner of the kitchen.

There, the sun streamed in from the window and mixed with the clouds of icing sugar that hung in the air. It turned the room into a real-life snow globe, and looked so magical it was like Mum, Dad and Ivy were trapped in a different world.

A world filled with snowfall and sunshine, flashing fairy lights, and constant jingling bells. It was a world where every day felt like Christmas.

Just then, Dad grabbed Mum and twirled her around the kitchen in time to the festadio (festive radio). They laughed and sang, and bust out the sort of moves that made them look like drunk, lopsided penguins.



"Let's spread cheer wherever we go," Mum sang.

"Let's spread cheer with a ho, ho, ho!" Dad added.

Ivy woke from her sleep and added her tiny "oh, oh, oh" two seconds too late.

I smiled to myself. It was another perfect morning in the Christmas Carroll household . . .

or

so

I thought.

CODE 9627

We were having a pretty normal week before the events that changed my life forever. In Maths, Mum taught me about symmetry using lights and decorations on a tree. In English, I wrote a letter to the Royal family to convince them to make 25th June (Half Christmas) an official holiday. And in Art, we designed a fireproof hat for Santa, some hoof warmers for his reindeer, and a new wrapping paper that was so bright I reckon the elves could use it as a tracking device. It was the same week that Dad made giant elf sculptures out of ice to help him forget about the heatwave, and the same

week that Ivy catapulted herself from her highchair in an attempt to fly like a reindeer. In my down time, I made a new Christmas cushion, practiced my high C for *O Holy Night* and gave some serious thought to changing my name. I was thinking of something along the lines of Santarina or Christmarella (or something really exotic like Gladys). It was all inspired by Mum, you see. She legally changed her name when she was at university and now everyone just calls her –

"Snoooooow!"

Mum ran out of her bedroom wearing an enormous Christmas pudding hat.

"Code 9627. Code 9627!" Dad shouted. His voice was getting more and more highpitched.

" Code 9627?" I squealed, sliding on to the landing in my light-up Santa slippers. "Really? What is it? What's happening?"

"Are they finally making Christmas last an entire week?" Mum said. "Did the Prime Minister get my letter?"

"Better!" Dad cried, barely able to contain his excitement.

"Is Santa looking for new elves?" I suggested. "Can we apply?"

"Even better!"

"Are we getting snowfall in summer?"

"Are they announcing a new reindeer?"

"Have enough people signed my petition to plant Christmas trees in every garden in the world?"

"Better, guys! Much, much better!"

My mind was in overdrive. Code 9627 was only used in the most exciting, life-changing circumstances. Mum and Dad had only used it twice before – when Ivy and I were born. Was that what Dad was trying to tell us? Were they having another baby? How come Mum didn't know about it? Were they going to call it 'Tinsel' or 'Mistletoe', or my personal favourite, 'Nutcracker'?

Dad stepped forward and took Mum's hands. "It's Sleigh Ride Avenue," he whispered. "Number twelve. It's up for sale."