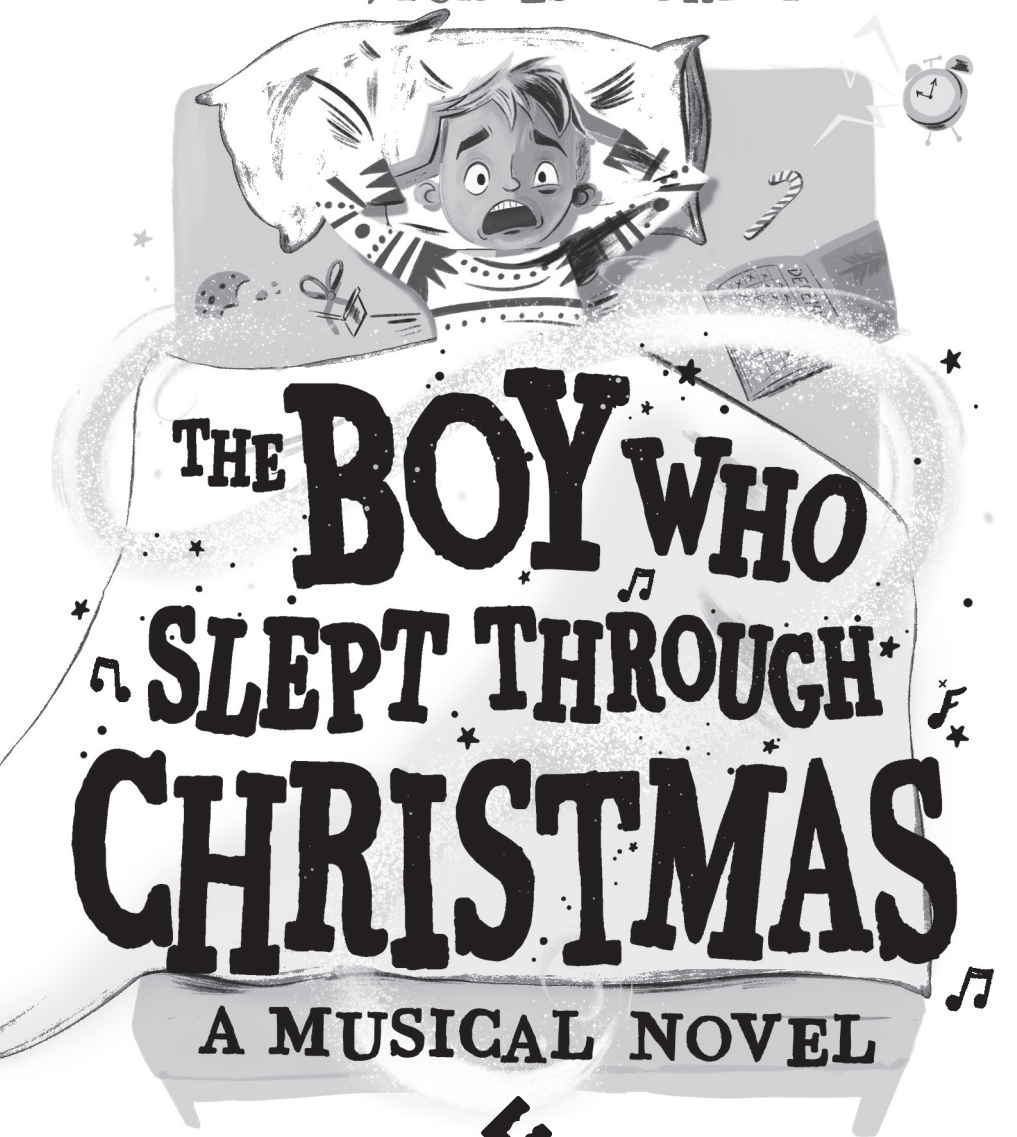
MATT LUCAS

Illustrated by FORREST BURDETT



THE BOY WHO SLEPT THROUGH CHRISTMAS

A MUSICAL NOVEL

Farshore



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THE BOY WHO SLEPT THROUGH CHRISTMAS

HAS A MUSICAL SOUNDTRACK!

As you read the story, look out for this symbol:



And the QR codes, which you can scan to listen to the songs online as you read! All of the words to the songs can also be found at the back of this book so you can sing along if you like.

www.theboywhoslept.com/songs

CHAPTER ONE

BEFORE WE BEGIN . . .



Hello.

This is a story about the worst thing that could ever happen *actually happening*.

And when I say 'the worst thing that could ever happen' I don't mean just a bad thing.

This is not a tale about someone who missed the bus and had to walk home for a good half an hour across a muddy field in a spot of drizzle without an umbrella because they weren't expecting rain and they got their nice new trainers all covered in muck and their socks were soaked and they could hear the soggy squelch with every step and also they nearly slipped on a molehill but they didn't but they could have done.



Nor is this a story about someone who was so busy telling somebody else that they needed to look where they were going that they themselves walked straight into a lamp post and their elbow hurt for a good ten minutes after and when they got in they had to run to the freezer and grab a bag of frozen peas to put on the elbow and thankfully it's a bit better now and the swelling should go down by Thursday.



And this certainly isn't about the time someone packed themselves a lovely picnic and took it to the beach on the sunniest day of the year and they literally just put their ham sandwich down on their lap for five seconds so they could put on some more sunscreen because everybody knows it's very important to keep putting on sunscreen and then a very rude seagull indeed swooped down and pinched the ham right out of the sandwich (which everyone knows is the best bit) and all that was left was a plain bread sandwich that tasted of nothing at all except maybe a hint of sunscreen.



No.

This is a story about something far, far, far, far, ***far*** worse.

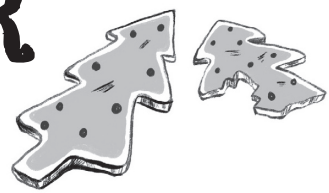
In fact, you might need to grab a box of tissues. (Or if you can't find any, some toilet roll will probably do.)

CHAPTER TWO



THE BEST CHRISTMAS EVER





Leo *loved* Christmas.

I know you probably love Christmas, but Leo might have loved it even more than you. No offence.

In fact, Leo loved Christmas so much that he usually started thinking about next Christmas at the beginning of July, and the only reason he didn't start until then was because he was busy spending the first six months of the year still thinking about last Christmas.

Leo wasn't the only one in his family who looked forward to Christmas, of course. His younger sister Jessie would get excited about the presents, as all kids do. Maybe this year she'd get the mermaid costume she'd asked for,



and perhaps a Wendy house and some building bricks.

Even his moody teenage brother, Connor, couldn't dampen Leo's festive spirits. Connor would try to wind Leo and Jessie up, saying that Christmas was soppy and anyway Father Christmas had squillions of presents to deliver and would be far too busy to visit ***their*** home this year, but there was no curbing Leo's enthusiasm. As Christmas approached, the opening of the Advent calendar door each morning filled him with cheer and his anticipation only grew from there.

Christmas made Leo feel good. It was like a big, warm, happy hug.



And anything that made Leo feel good was a very fine thing indeed, because it had been an extremely challenging time in the Parker family of late. This year would be the first Christmas without someone rather special. Leo's lovely mum had been ill for a while and, a few months ago, she had died. In his sadness, Leo had briefly pondered if Christmas might be virtually impossible this year (or indeed, any year) without Mum, but then he remembered how she had made him *promise* to have the best time possible, always, even if she wasn't there. So Christmas would be going ahead and – more than that – Leo resolved that, in tribute to Mum, this would quite simply be the best Christmas ever.



But now Mum was gone, who was going to put it all together? Mum had known how to do everything just right. Together she and Leo would put up the lights, decorate the tree, write the cards, hang the stockings, sing songs and prepare the feast.

Dad said he would help this year, but Leo doubted he would be able to take much time off.

Dad had been a factory foreman, but, not long after Mum had died, he'd received a letter informing him that the factory where he worked was to be knocked down so that a block of swanky new flats could be built. All the staff had lost their jobs. Whenever they drove past the old factory, there was less and less of it, until one day all that was left was a mound of rubble in a skip.

Ever since, Dad had had to make do with lots of different part-time jobs – often working through the night so he could be around for the family during the day. Though he never said anything about it, Leo could sense that Dad still wasn't earning quite as much as he used to. There were little signs, like not renewing the subscription to the TV sports channel (even though he loved rugby) and not getting the screen on his phone fixed (even though it was so cracked you couldn't tell who was calling).

With Mum gone and Dad working flat out, and Jessie too young to be of much use and Connor rarely leaving his bedroom, Leo came to the realisation that making the best Christmas ever would be his responsibility.

So when Leo made a detour on his way home from school and stopped off at Littleman's department store in the town to *meet Father Christmas himself*, he amazed not

only the mums and dads and children in the queue but also an elf and the jolly bearded man himself with a most unusual request . . .

'Nothing?' enquired a stunned Father Christmas. Had he been sipping on mulled wine or hot chocolate or whatever it is Father Christmas drinks, I daresay he would have spat it out.



'Nothing *at all*?' queried his green-hatted young assistant, who, a moment earlier, had cheerily introduced himself as Elfred, raising his voice so that he could be heard clearly above a Tannoy announcement pointing out to shoppers that the coffee shop was now offering a half-price Stan the Shortbread Snowman™ with the purchase of every spiced chai latte.

'No, honestly, I'm fine this year, FC,' said Leo. 'You'll recall that last year I received a little electric piano with sixteen orchestral sounds pre-programmed. Well I play it virtually every day and almost all the keys still work on it so don't worry about me this year, please. I don't need any presents to have the Best Christmas Ever.'

Now Father Christmas had been Father Christmas for quite a long time and, even though he encountered many children each year, he was sure he would remember if one had asked for no presents before. Try as he might, he couldn't think of it ever happening. Quite the opposite – most children avidly watched the TV commercials as Christmas approached and knew about every brand new whizzing, fizzing, jumping, flying toy you could buy.

Talking of which, the top five best-selling items this year were:

- **FLIPPIN' FROGS!** – a game where you had to try to catch as many hopping amphibians as you could in a little plastic net (except the batteries ran out after about two minutes)
- **BABY KEITH** – a doll that required its owner to frequently change its edible nappy (the chocolate filling was delicious, but the nappies were a little chewy)
- **XK45B** – a remote-controlled heavy-goods vehicle that could allegedly withstand *any* kind of crash (only the wheels wouldn't stay on and the paint came off on your fingers)
- **OH NO THERE IS YET ANOTHER ALIEN IN MY HOUSE!** – a collection of reasonably-priced extra-terrestrial figures (except there were about two thousand of them in total, ensuring all but the richest parents nearly went bankrupt)

And last but not least . . .

- **THE BOOMERBALL** – a ball that, no matter where you kicked it, rolled right back to you (as long as it stayed within a signal range of half a metre)

Child after child would expectantly hand Father Christmas a lengthy wishlist of these and other goodies.

Even the girl ahead of Leo in the queue had asked for six Pixie Ponies (which, the advert said, cried rainbow-coloured tears of joy when you brushed their hair) when surely one would have been quite enough.

In fact, everyone in the queue – bar Leo – was greedily asking Father Christmas for more presents than the sleigh could carry. Not only that but they spoke down to the great man like a Roman emperor might have treated a lowly servant. Don't get me wrong – I like kids, but not all of them, and certainly not these horrors. In fact, you can learn more about Leo, his family AND the monstrous behaviour in the grotto, if you dare, by opening the camera on your phone or tablet and pointing it at the QR code on the next page, then clicking on the link. You see, I wrote a song all about it. Also, the words to the song – and all the other songs in this story – are at the very back of the book, if you want to sing along (and I hope you do).

By the way, when I say 'the camera on your tablet,' I don't mean the sort of tablet you swallow. If you point at the code with one of those, I'm not sure very much will happen at all, other than you might get some funny looks from people. No, when I say 'tablet' I mean one of those electronic devices that your parents shove in your hands at a restaurant to keep you occupied while they



talk about boring grown-up things, which is all well and good until the battery runs out halfway through and then you have to listen to them droning on about the local bi-election, whatever that is.

Anyway, here is that QR code I was telling you about. And, of course, if you are already reading this book on a tablet, just click the link here. Sorry for the faff.

OUR CHRISTMAS TALE / DEAR FATHER C

Now, you might have thought that Leo, having conveyed his request not for presents but for nothing other than the Best Christmas Ever, might be just about ready to head home, especially given the glares of those impatiently waiting in line behind him to meet the red-clothed old fellow. However, Leo had other ideas. After all, he hadn't seen Father Christmas since last December. There was a lot of catching up to do.

'What about you? Did you have a good year? Did you get up to much?' he asked. 'You must have been

shattered after last Christmas. Did you get a break at all?'

Father Christmas and Elfred were again surprised. Most children were far too preoccupied asking for a dozen presents to enquire about Father Christmas, but Leo was keen to know everything.

'Um, well . . . Yes, it has been quite a year. The elves keep me occupied in the workshop,' chuckled Father Christmas. 'And . . . um . . .'

Elfred stepped in. 'I'm afraid we can't really tell you too much. Lapland runs very tight security, as you can imagine,' he added a wink.

Leo nodded. 'Oh, I *can* imagine, yes.'

A sour-faced lady tapped Leo rudely on the shoulder. 'Excuse me, there *are* other children here, you know? It's not all about you.'

Elfred smiled apologetically at Leo. 'We'd love to chat some more, but there's a bit of a queue building up.'

Leo understood. 'Of course. See you next year. Same time, same place?'

I'm sure Father Christmas and Elfred would have responded, but the sour-faced lady's even-more-sour-faced son was already staring down at the screen on his phone, reading out his wishlist.

'Laptop. Headphones. Speaker. Trainers. Drone. Hoverboard. Eighty-five-inch TV. Oh, and a new phone. This one's already six months old.'