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Opening extract from

Rover Saves Christmas

Written by

Roddy Doyle

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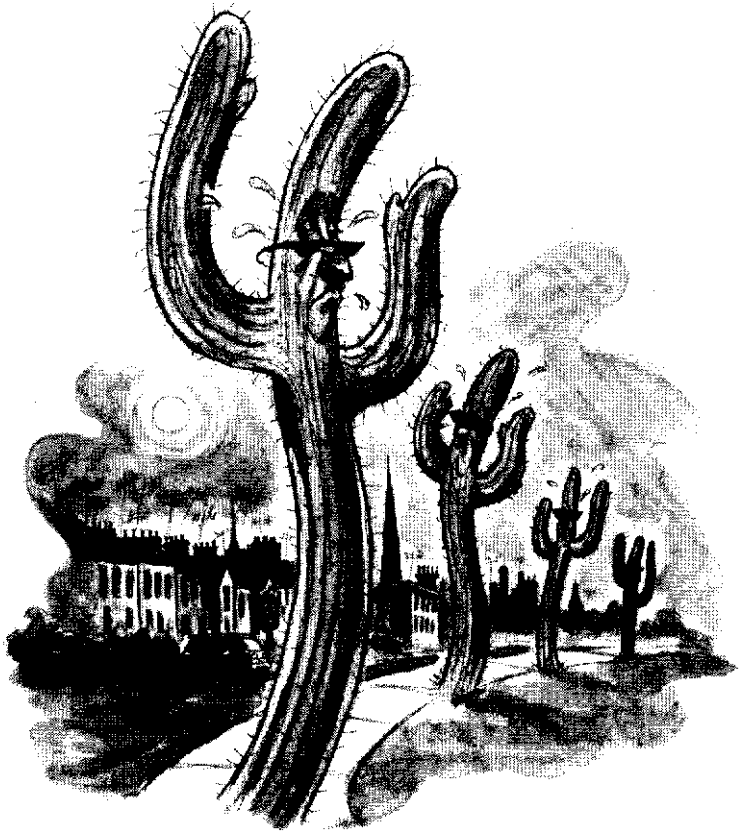
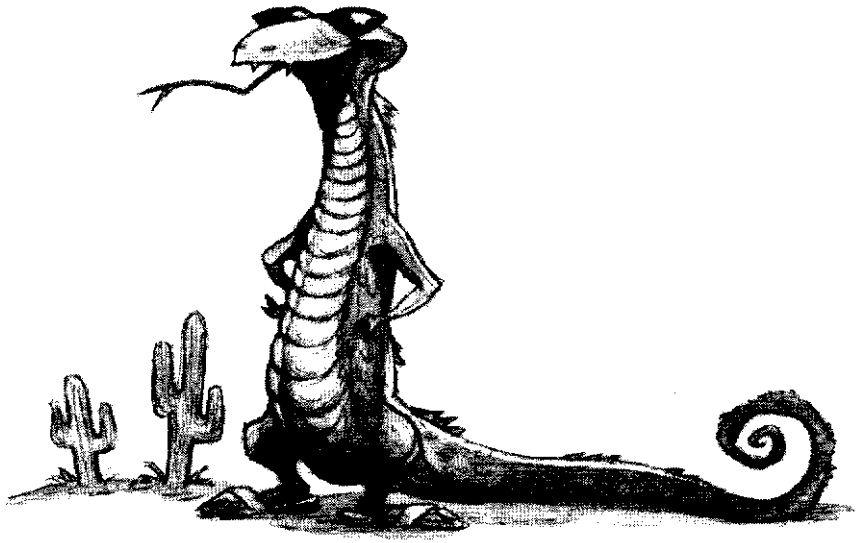


CHAPTER ONE



It was Christmas Eve in Dublin and the sun was splitting the rocks. The lizards were wearing flip-flops and the cacti that line the streets of the city were gasping.

"Water!" gasped a cactus.

"Diet water!" gasped his girlfriend beside him.

The River Liffey had dried up and the tyres on all the city's buses had melted. Robbie and Jimmy Mack were

frying an egg on a shovel and—

Hang on.

Yes?

Dublin isn't like that at Christmas. Start again.

OK.

It was Christmas Eve in Dublin and it had been snowing for weeks. Snowflakes the size of mice fell from the grey sky and the cacti that line the streets of the city were very cold and confused. Jimmy and Robbie Mack were trying to scrape a frozen egg off a shovel and—

Stop.

Yes?

Dublin isn't like that either. Stop being silly or I won't buy the book.

Sorry.

It was Christmas Eve in Dublin and it was raining. It had been raining for weeks and the cacti that line the streets of the city were sick of it.

"I'm full," said a cactus.

"I'm fat," said his girlfriend beside him.

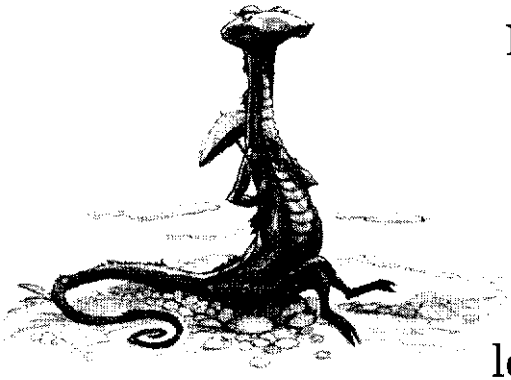
Robbie and Jimmy Mack threw eggs at each other because there was no snow to make snowballs. One egg skidded on the wet grass and rolled under a wet, dripping bush. It stopped beside a lizard.

The lizard looked at the egg. He didn't want to eat it.

"Why not?" said the egg.

He was too cold to eat it. He was stiff and damp and miserable. He turned bright red, because he hoped that that would make him warm. But it didn't.

"What a lovely colour," said a voice beside him.



It was a lovely voice. It was the loveliest voice the lizard had ever heard. He looked, and saw the loveliest lizard he had ever seen. And he stayed red, because he was blushing.

"You look warm," said the loveliest lizard.

"Oh," said the lizard. "Actually, I'm very cold."

And, gradually, he stopped being red and became a much colder colour, grey.

"Are *you* not cold?" he said.

"No," said the loveliest lizard. "I have the right name."

"What do you mean?"

"Well," said the loveliest lizard. "I change my name whenever the weather changes. When it's very hot I choose a name from a hot country,

and I feel fine. And when it's very cold or wet, like now, I choose a name from a colder country. What's *your* name?" she asked.

"Omar."

"Nice name," she said. "But not right for this weather. Try calling yourself 'Hans'. That's a nice cold name."

"OK," said Omar.

He coughed, and spoke. "My name is 'Hans'."

"How does that feel?" said the loveliest lizard.

Hans lowered his tummy down to the cold, wet grass.

"Nice," he said. "Very nice."

He rubbed his tummy on the grass. He began to glow; he was becoming silver. "Very, very nice. What's *your* name?" he asked.

"Heidi," said the loveliest lizard.

"Hi-dee-hi, Heidi," said Hans.

"Hi-dee-ho, Hans," said Heidi.

Hans flicked his long tongue and

caught a fly that was resting on a wall far away, in Morocco.

"Wow," said Heidi.

"Care to share some spicy wings?" said Hans.

Hans chewed and smiled at Heidi. Heidi chewed and smiled at Hans. They were full of fly and falling in love. But this story isn't about Hans and Heidi, although they're in it. And it definitely isn't about the fly. (He was tumbling down into Heidi's tummy, humming a sad song called "Torn Between Two Lizards".) The story is about Robbie and Jimmy and a dog and some other people and what they did on Christmas Eve.

It starts on the next page, Chapter Two. And that means that you just wasted your time reading Chapter One. Sorry.

CHAPTER TWO

Jimmy and Robbie Mack were very excited and very bored. It was Christmas Eve and they wanted the day to end, so they could go to bed and wake up the next morning.

Christmas Day.

The best day in the whole year.

They'd been thinking about nothing else for months.

"What do you want for breakfast?" their mother had asked Jimmy last October.

"Christmas," said Jimmy.

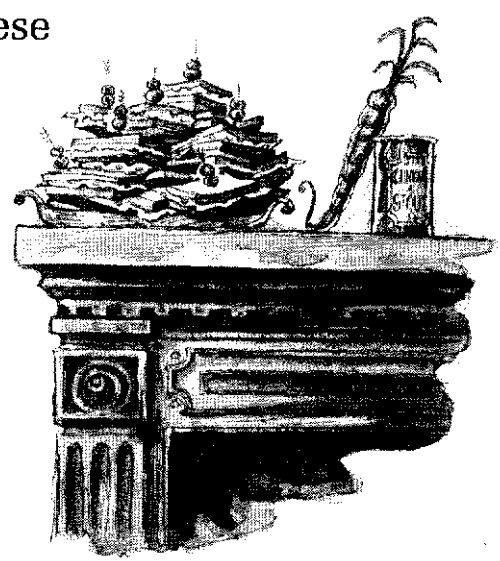
"What is the capital of France?" their teacher, Mister Eejit, had asked on the last day before the holidays.

"Presents," said Robbie.

Robbie and Jimmy had been extra-specially good for the last few weeks. For example, they had helped their Granda to find his false teeth. They were super-glued to the roof of his car. (Jimmy and Robbie had glued the teeth to the roof but it is much more important to know that they had helped poor old Granda to find them. And, by the way, they got the teeth off the roof with a can opener.) They'd

spent all their pocket-money on presents for the people they loved – *Banjo-Kazooie* for their mother, a new uniform for Granny's Action Man, a special pair of scissors for their father for cutting the horrible big hairs that grew out of his ears and nose, a T-shirt with BARNEY SMOKES BIG FAT CIGARS on it for their baby sister and a brand new can opener for Granda. (The old one was stuck in the roof of his car.)

They had tied their stockings to the ends of their beds. They had made twenty-seven cheese sandwiches and left them in a huge pile on the mantelpiece for Santa. They had cut the crusts off the sandwiches because Santa never ate the crusts. And they



had left one of their mother's cans of Guinness on the mantelpiece beside the sandwiches, and a carrot for Rudolph.

But there were still hours and hours to go before bedtime.

"How long now?" said Jimmy.

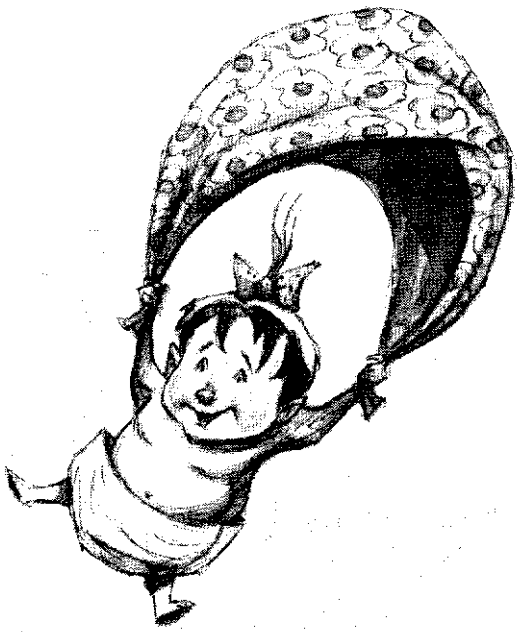
"Thirteen hours and thirty-seven minutes," said Robbie.

"I think I'll make another sandwich for Santa."

"I think I'll peel Rudolph's carrot."

The brothers were walking to the back door. They were soaking wet and hungry and excited and bored and their little sister jumped out of an upstairs window of the house next-door.

CHAPTER THREE



Kayla Mack floated down under a parachute she'd made from half her best friend's mother's best dress. And Victoria, her best friend, followed her, hanging on to the other half of her mother's best dress.

It used to be a beautiful dress, and now it was two beautiful parachutes.

WARNING!

Don't try this at home, kids. Jumping out of upstairs windows is not a good idea. You could break your arm or your leg or your head or, if the window is shut, you could even break the glass. Also, in real life, dresses don't make good, safe parachutes, and half-dresses are even worse. So, don't jump, kids. Use the stairs. And, while we're at it, if you ever cut your mother's best dress in two, don't make parachutes out of it.

Just throw it in a corner and blame the cat. Leave the scissors beside the cat's mat and blow-dry his or her hair to make it look like he or she has been jumping out of aeroplanes all day. However, before you blame the cat, first make sure that you actually have one.

Now, back to the story.

It used to be a beautiful dress, and now it was two beautiful parachutes.

"Oh, man!" said Jimmy.

"Good on yourself, Kayla!" said Robbie.

They watched Kayla flying over their heads, carried on the wind. Her feet just missed the branches of an apple tree, and she landed in the centre of the garden, bang in the middle of the flower bed.

Robbie and Jimmy ran to congratulate her.

And then they saw the elf.

Because Kayla had landed on him.

"Get off me, please," said the elf.

"Who are you?" said Kayla.

"I'm too busy to answer that question," said the elf.

He looked very unhappy and wet. He was wearing a black leather jacket, with HELL'S ELVES printed on its back.

He got out from under Kayla, and Victoria landed on him.

"Get off me, please," said the elf. "I'm a busy man."

"Who are you?" said Kayla.

"Bum-bum," said Victoria.

"I told you," said the elf. "I'm too busy to answer."

"Who are you?"

"Bum-bum."

The elf took a notebook from the pocket of his jacket.

"Are you two being cheeky?" he said. "You'd better not be."

"Who are you?" said Kayla.

"That does it," said the elf. "You're going into me book. What's your name?"

"Who are you?"

"Bum-bum."

"What's your name?" said the elf.

"Who are you?"

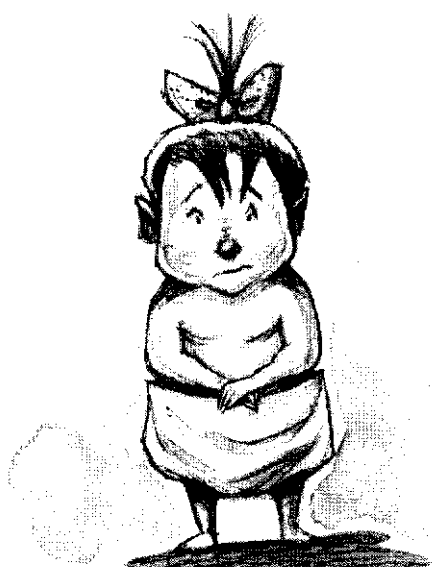
"Bum-bum."

The elf took a pencil out from behind his very big ear. By the way, his other ear was very big too, and there was an earring hanging from it – a very small silver ear.

"Who are you?" said Kayla.

INTERRUPTION

You're probably wondering why Kayla kept saying, "Who are you?"

Well, the answer is easy.

She couldn't say anything else.