

## A Present from Father Christmas

Chewing on the end of her pencil, Megan thought about what she should write. She poked her little tongue out of the side of her mouth and screwed up her eyes for a few seconds. Then, she raised her eyebrows and began to write neatly on the paper.

Calling to her mum, she said, 'I don't want you to check it for spellings or anything, please?'

'OK. If that's what you want, it can be a private letter,' her mum replied from the kitchen.

Taking a crisp white envelope from the pile, Megan slipped her letter inside. Sealing the envelope, she addressed it 'Father Christmas, North Pole'.

'Wow. You were quick.' Her mum made her way back into the dining room. 'We can post that along with the last of the Christmas Cards.'

Later, Megan skipped along next to her mum. 'I can't wait for Christmas now,' she said, with a grin. 'It's going to be brilliant.'

Unfortunately, unbeknown to Megan, as she skipped, one envelope slowly separated itself from the pile and gently fluttered to the side of the pavement. Megan skipped on, blissfully unaware.

Soon they were at the post box. Megan reached up and stuck the whole lot through the slot together. Hearing the satisfying 'plop' as they fell to the bottom of the box, she sighed, confident now that Christmas would be just as she had imagined.

The next day, at school, Megan sat with her best friend, Sophie. Their conversation soon turned to Christmas. Being nine, they were growing suspicious of Father Christmas's authenticity. However, there was still a part of them that longed for him to prove himself, so they could still have a truly magical Christmas experience.

'I've tested Father Christmas this year,' Megan told Sophie.

'Huh? What've you done?'

'Well, I told Mum that I was going to ask Father Christmas for a bike, like that purple one that Janey has.'

'Oh, I know the one. It's got silver on it too. It's gorgeous.'

'Yes ... but ... that's not what I wrote on the letter!'

Sophie looked confused. 'I don't get it. I thought you wanted the bike?'

'I would *love* the bike, yes. But there's something I want more, and that's what I wrote in my letter. If I get the bike on Christmas morning, I'll know Mum buys the presents and pretends, just like we thought. But ... if I get what I wrote on the letter, then I'll know for sure that Father Christmas is real.'

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As Sam pulled into his driveway he noticed something in the headlights.

*What have we here then?* Out of the car now, he bent over and picked up the object. It seemed to be a small envelope. It was too cold to be mucking about in the dark, so he stuffed it in his jacket pocket and quickly put his key in the front door.

Once inside, Sam hung up his jacket and made himself a nice warming mug of coffee. He loved having his own home at last. Let's face it, at thirty-one, it really had been time for him to move out of his parent's place. The only problem was that he worked long hours, so he hadn't

had a chance to get to know any of the neighbours in his new street. At times like this he felt a little lonely.

Remembering the envelope, he retrieved it from his pocket. Now he was in the light, he could see immediately that it was a small white letter with a child's handwriting on the front. It was addressed to Father Christmas at the North Pole. Reading the words brought memories of childhood Christmases flooding back.

*Should I just pop it in the post box or try to return it to the child so they can post it?* Remembering how much he liked to reach up and press lift buttons or make the pedestrian crossing work when he was a lad, he felt sure this child would want to post the letter for themselves. He decided it was worth a shot. He ought to try to return it to the writer.

*I'll steam it open and see if there's a return address.*

Popping the kettle back on, Sam carried out the extremely delicate procedure of opening the envelope without tearing it. Glancing at the letter he saw that, sure enough, there was an address at the bottom. It was from a girl called Megan Green, it appeared she lived ten doors down.

Sam always left for work long before the kids went to school and returned after they'd all come safely home again, so he couldn't put a face to the name. He decided to pop it in to her and explain where he'd found it, when he left for work in the morning.

But, before he put the letter back in the envelope he'd just have a sneaky peak.

*What are kids asking for from Santa these days? Probably iPhones and tablets. All things we couldn't have imagined owning when I was a kid. Blimey, I remember being over the moon to get Buckaroo, one year!*

He did feel a bit nosy reading the letter, but, the child had such lovely handwriting and it was so sweet to see a genuine letter to Santa that he couldn't help himself, and he read on ...

Dear Father Christmas,

My name is Megan Green. I am 9. My mum is called Emma She is 33. I think you know that my dad died 3 years ago. Mum has been sad for a long time. She is a bit happier now and I think she would like to meet a man with a smiley face, like my dad. Please can you send my mum a boyfriend for Christmas?

Thank You.

Love from Megan Green  
58 High Dean Road

As he re-stuck the envelope with glue, Sam thought what a moving letter it was.

*I'll make sure that Megan gets this back safely tomorrow.*

The next morning, Sam had a bit of a nightmare start to the day. His alarm went off as usual, but he pressed 'stop' instead of 'snooze'. So, instead of his much-needed reminder nine minutes later, he got nothing! Hence, after twenty-five more minutes of glorious sleep, he awoke with a start and grabbed his phone. *I pressed the wrong flippin' button again!*

The morning continued to go wrong for Sam when he realised he had no shirts ironed and no matching socks.

*Mum sure did spoil me. I'm useless at sorting myself out!* Sam dashed out of the house, by now incredibly late for work.

Even though he knew there wasn't really time, he felt he'd still like to return Megan's letter. So, throwing caution to the wind, he dashed down the road, heading towards number 58.

However, as he approached the house, the front door unexpectedly opened and a little girl came out, chatting to someone behind her. Sam was about to ask her if she was Megan, when he caught sight of the woman who was accompanying her. She was tall with golden blonde hair. Sam thought she looked like an angel with the sun reflecting off her hair in the crisp winter light. She laughed at something Megan said and her face broke into a proud smile. Sam was so surprised by how beautiful she was that he suddenly felt ridiculously shy and decided to retreat. However, as he returned to the car, a plan popped into his head.

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Christmas morning arrived. As Megan looked at the presents under the tree, she immediately spotted the large, bulky one, wrapped in white paper, dotted all over with tiny holly sprigs. Her mum confirmed what she already suspected, that one was for Megan, and it was from 'Father Christmas'. Megan was pleased to see that Mum had got her the perfect purple bike. She loved its colour and the silver bell, and she was keen to get on and have a try.

Glad to see her daughter so pleased with the bike, Emma headed to the kitchen to make a late breakfast.

Once on her own, Megan sat quietly for a moment. On the one hand, she was very pleased to have such a wonderful bike, but ... on the other, she felt rather sad. This proved, once and for all, that what she and Sophie had suspected was true. Mum had bought the bike, not Father Christmas. There was no Father Christmas who lived at the North Pole and gave all the children the things they really wanted.

After breakfast, Megan and her mum got dressed in their best clothes.

'We look like princesses, don't we, Mum?'

'Yes, darling. Grandad will be so proud of us when he comes to pick us up for our Christmas lunch.'

Emma thought of her own mum, busy in her kitchen right now, making her fabulous roast potatoes. Then she thought of her late husband, of how he would say every Christmas to his mother-in-law, 'Margaret, you make the tastiest, crispiest roast potatoes in the world. It wouldn't be Christmas without them!'

Emma smiled at the memory. It was nice to be able to remember Daniel without the hurt. Just after his death she couldn't think of him without thinking of that damn motorbike. She was unable to remember the good times, without constantly wishing she'd insisted, 'NO! I don't want you to buy it, it's too dangerous.'

She'd noticed lately that she could remember him more in a good way. Like the roast potato memory. Just recently she'd started thinking of him without feeling such despair.

*I guess it's true what they say, "time is a great healer".*

There was a knock at the door and, assuming it was her dad, arriving to pick them up, Emma rushed to the hallway. Throwing open the front door, she shouted, 'Merry Christmas!'

She was instantly embarrassed to see that it wasn't her dad, after all. Instead it was a man whom she didn't know. However, it didn't take her long to notice that he had beautiful, deep blue eyes.

'Hi. I'm new to the street ...' Sam said, '... and I ... um ... well, I thought before I head off to celebrate with my family, I'd wish a few of the neighbours a Happy Christmas. I'm afraid you've drawn the short straw! I have some mince pies.' He held up a festive red box. 'But I don't want to impose.'

'Oh right. Well, impose away, I love mince pies.' Emma lead Sam into the lounge. 'This is my daughter, Megan. I'm Emma by the way.'

'It's great to meet you both. I'm Sam.' He bent down to comedically shake hands with Megan.

Emma took this opportunity to have a good look at her handsome neighbour. He was grinning at Megan, and Emma noticed that his eyes twinkled and there was a wonderful warmth to his face.

As Sam looked up and caught her admiring him, Emma blushed and made a grab for the mince pies. 'I'll go and put the kettle on and see if I've got some cream to go with these. Megan, why don't you show Sam the presents you got for Christmas?'

As Megan showed Sam all the bits and bobs she's received in her stocking, Sam smiled. She was so excited, even by the smallest of things, and Sam couldn't help remembering how wonderful Christmas feels when you're nine.

Megan looked into Sam's eyes and saw a kind, caring man. She felt that she liked him already. Noticing that the smile on his face spread all the way up to his lovely blue eyes, she stared hard into them. 'Hang on a minute,' she said, with a grin. 'I think I know why you're really here.'

Sam put his finger to his lips and said, in a whisper, 'Let's just put it this way – Father Christmas says "hello!"'