

*For Winston and Cassius, Thomas and Alice, Lili and Evelyn,
and their mums Sarah, Amy and Vikki.
You can't make old friends.*

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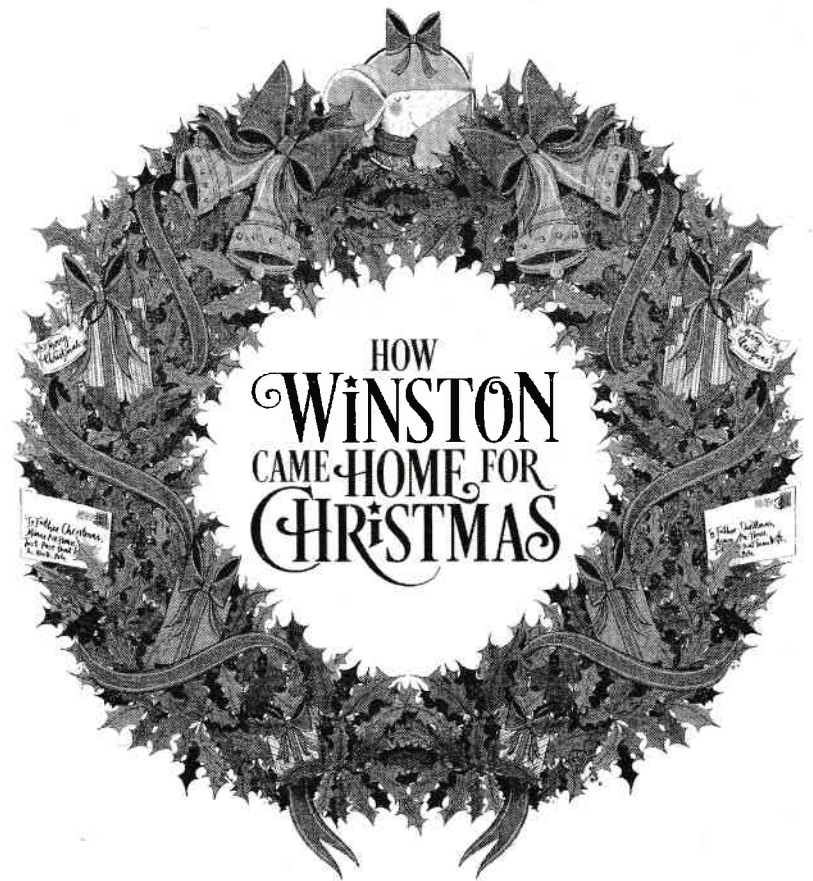
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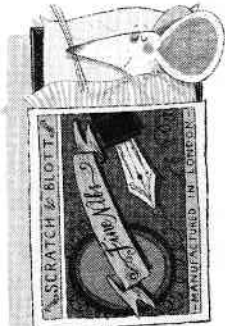
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AN INVISIBLE RIBBON

It was five days until Christmas and the snow had come. Soft and white, it covered the earth, making it shimmer and sparkle like the edges of a dream.

It was five days until Christmas and on the wide, open, snow-covered plains



someone was sneaking away from the herd, their hoofs crunching lightly on the powdery ground beneath them, their fur glittering and glowing like starlight.

It was five days until Christmas and high in the frozen sky great wings unfurled and flapped and soared in the falling snow. Bright yellow eyes blinked wide open, keeping a close watch on the world below.



It was five days until Christmas and the moon was shining, pearly and bright, through a high window on to a maze of dusty shelves. In the quietness,

the only sound that could be heard was that of little footsteps pattering down the book-lined corridors.



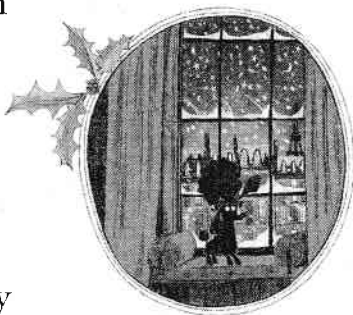
It was five days until Christmas and in the frosty night air delicious smells wafted about like sorcerers' spells. In the shadows, two amber eyes opened, peeking out from their hiding place to check that the coast was clear. They wanted, more than anything, to step out from the dark and into the twinkling lights, but did they dare?





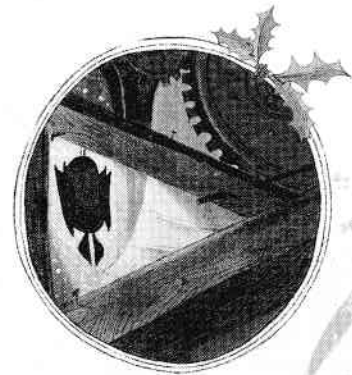
It was five days until Christmas and in dimly lit flour-dusted rooms, paws were washed thoroughly with soap and hot water, eggs were cracked, sugar was poured and ovens were lit . . .

It was five days until Christmas and in a room above the busy noise of a city someone walked round in a circle three times before settling down for the night. They closed their eyes, but after a moment a long lilac ear arched up into the air, shifting this way and that like a periscope, listening.



It was five days until Christmas and hidden amongst a tangle of ancient oak beams someone was waiting patiently. They allowed the cold winter wind to shiver around their wings. The view really was marvellous from up here in the rafters – especially as it was upside down.

It was five days until Christmas and in a dark and cluttered room someone was lying awake. They'd been awake for hours now. It was the same most nights, but something about this night in particular felt different. It was as if there was something magical in the air.





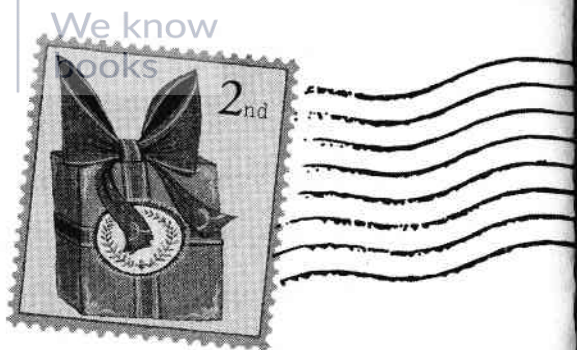
Carefully, they crept out
of their little bed
and slipped noiselessly
past a row of other
little beds. There were
seven of them, but only
six of them were being
slept in.

The figure tiptoed
carefully so as not to wake the
sleepers, then clambered up over
boxes in the flickering candlelight
until they reached a window.
They began to hum a little
song softly to themselves as
they looked at the crisp,
white, frozen world outside.

Something Very Important had been lost,
and they knew for certain that it was out
there somewhere. They hadn't known where
to look before, but now they had a clue.
Would it help them find what they were
looking for?

It was five days until Christmas and a
strand of winter magic was spiralling and
twisting through the air. It was like an
invisible ribbon that snaked and criss-
crossed over the world, wrapping itself
round each of the creatures in a neat bow,
tying them together.

Nobody knew it yet, but the invisible
ribbon was leading them somewhere. It
was pulling them into a snow-covered
Christmas adventure.



A DISTANT LULLABY

It was five days until Christmas and in the snug attic bedroom high above the toy shop on Mistletoe Street a boy called Oliver was tucked up in bed. His face was washed, his pyjamas were on and the many blankets on his bed were pulled right up to his chin.

But he was not asleep.

A little torch was shining and Oliver's nose was stuck in a book. He was reading aloud in his best reading voice to a very small mouse who was perched on his shoulder. The mouse had large ears, a long tail, and was wearing a smart little jumper. His name was Winston and this was, he thought with a big, happy sigh, his Most and Very Favourite Time of the Day.

The shop downstairs was closed for the night, all was calm and quiet, and the two best friends were nibbling biscuits and cosily catching up on their exciting adventure story.

The book was terrifically thrilling and Winston found himself holding his breath as he listened to Oliver reading.