





## 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.'*

**Jennifer Bell, author of *The Uncommoners***

*'Gloriously festive, brilliantly funny and utterly endearing. I loved it.'*

**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



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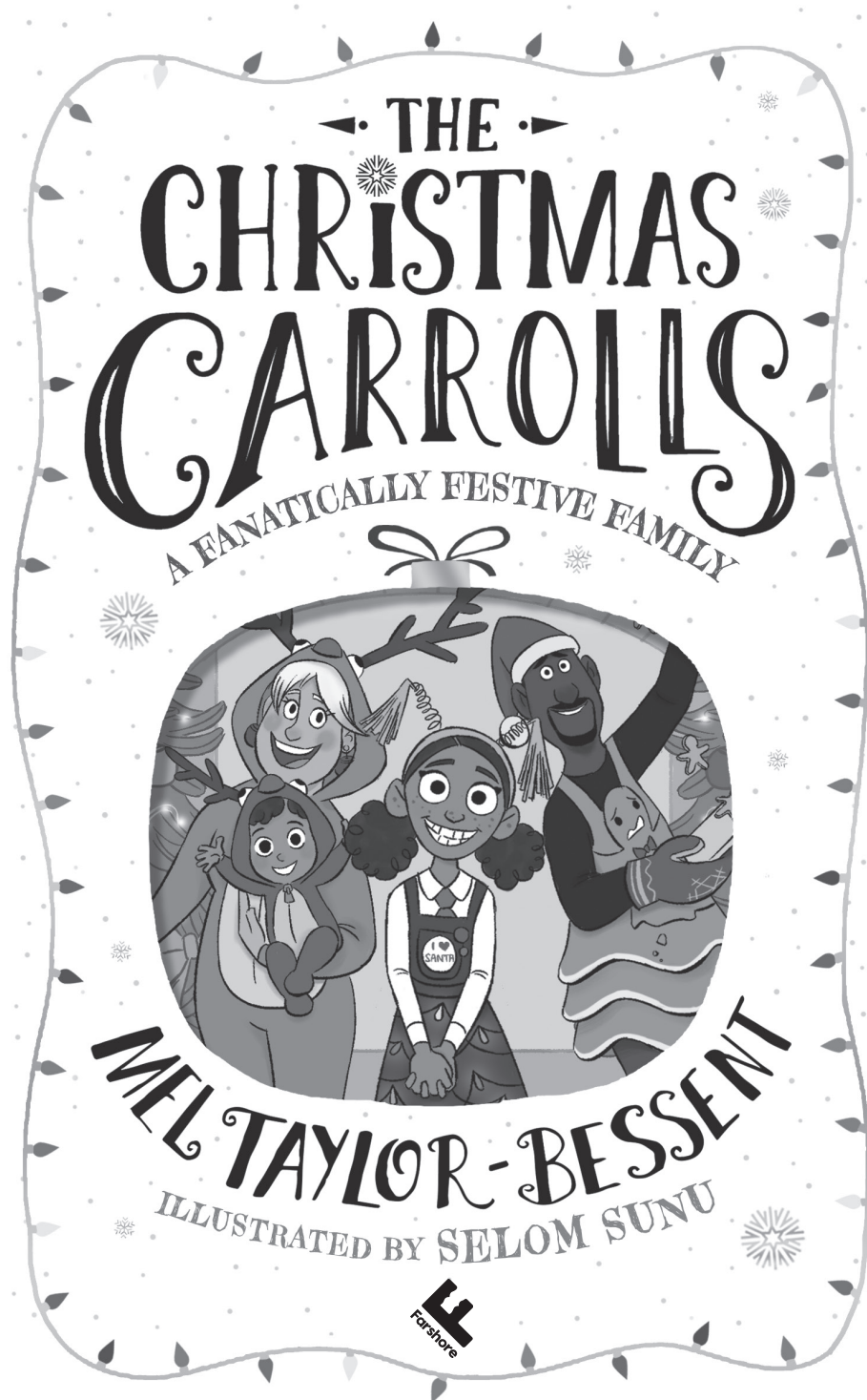
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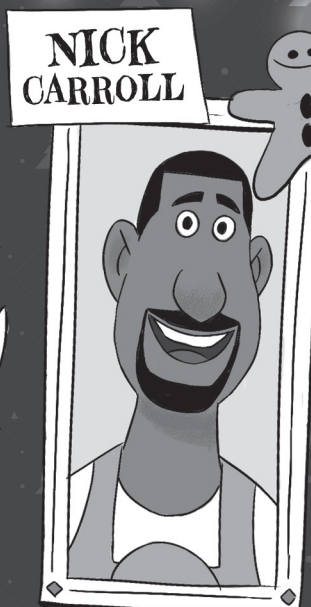




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REGGIE





# 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 merry-nifiscent, 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

**W**e 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 25<sup>th</sup> 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



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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.”



The colour in Mum's face drained. Her eyes grew as big as baubles and her mouth fell open. Then, with a tiny squeak, she fell into Dad's arms.

She came to with the help of a hot chocolate, two miniature gingerbread men and a rousing rendition of *The Twelve Days of Christmas* by me and Dad. I even added in a freestyle rap to mix it up a bit. "Yo, yo, yo, ma name is Holly. Some people think I'm a bit of a wal—" I'll, er, tell you the rest later.

Sleigh Ride Avenue? Was Dad sure? I thought that was a place they made up in their heads. A dream road in a dream town in a dream life that didn't actually exist. But there was Dad saying that an actual house on Sleigh Ride Avenue had come up for sale, and that . . . hang on, what *was* he saying?

Within minutes, the kitchen table was covered in files and paperwork, Dad was on the phone wearing his 'Head Elf' jumper, and Mum was stocking the car up with boxes of mince pies. I kept asking them what was going on, but they were in such a tizzy,

I couldn't get their attention. Instead, I stood on the table, wearing one sock, my tinsel-lined Hollyhood (which was my very first invention), and a Christmas tablecloth as a superhero cape.

Mum always says I should *fill every moment with cheer*. So whenever I'm not coming up with inventions with Dad, studying with Mum, or spreading cheer to other people, I do what I do best: fashionise. Yes, fashionise. I bet you think I'm really clever for coming up with my own word, don't you? You should try it some time. I might even add it to the dictionary. It'll say something like: *Fashionise: to make high-end fashion from everyday items. Word created by invention-maker and expert cheer-spreader, Holly Carroll.*

My best fashionised item of all time was undubidedly (one of my top five made-up words!) the Hollyhood. When I was six years old, I cut a velvet hood off one of Dad's least-worn Santa costumes and attached it to one of Mum's stripy scarves. Then I spent weeks sewing twenty five pockets to it and finding little treasures to

hide inside. You could think of it like a fancy wearable advent calendar, but instead of opening a door to find a chocolate, you reach inside a pocket and find some Christmas pudding, your favourite toy, or all the secrets of the universe!\* After admiring my latest fashionising efforts, I watched Mum whizz in and out of the house, communicating with Dad via manic hand gestures and eye movements.

“Yes, that’s Carroll. Nick Carroll,” I heard Dad say. “And don’t you worry, kind sir. We will be buying the house today.” He stuck a thirty-point plan to the fridge door and scribbled notes on the back of his hand. “We’ve no need to view it, my good friend. Do you know how long we’ve waited for a house to become available on this road?”

I jumped down from the table and ducked and rolled around the room like a ninja spy. Dad was so engrossed in his phone call, he didn’t notice me swipe a christmallow (Christmas marshmallow) from the plate on the side and pop it into my

mouth. The gooey, creamy, sludginess slid across my teeth and stuck to my tongue. It tasted of lemon and maple syrup and nutmeg and cream and . . . sorry, I’m getting distracted.

I tiptoed to a huge file that Dad had placed on the counter. *Dream Homes* was written on the side and there was a small newspaper clipping on top. The title said: **The Ten Most Christmassy Road Names In The World** and there at number three was **Sleigh Ride Avenue, England**.

**Sleigh Ride Avenue is a small road in a quiet suburb of London. With houses dotted at even distances and plenty of land around each one, property on this street is highly sought after, and with one of the most festive street names in the world (second only to North Pole Way in the Arctic and Christmas Street in the United States of America), these homeowners rarely move from the street. Only two houses have come up for sale in the last fifty years.**

Dad smiled triumphantly into the phone and gave me a thumbs-up. "My wife is setting off shortly. She has mince pies for everyone and she'll sign the contract as soon as she arrives."

Wait, wait, wait. We were actually buying the house? We were going to live on Sleigh Ride Avenue? Us? The Carrolls? That dream home on one of the most Christmassy streets in the world was going to belong to *our* family? Fireworks erupted in my head. My heart exploded with joy. My scalp started to itch from the melting candy cane I'd lost somewhere inside my Hollyhood.

"Holly!" Dad called. "Grab the christmacam, will you? This is a Christmas Carroll highlight if ever I saw one."

I was one step ahead of him. I grabbed the christmacam from the shelf in the hallway and took a quick elfie before turning the camera on Dad.

"This is one of the best days of my life!" he beamed. He coughed and turned his attention back

to his phone, his voice dropping a few decibels. "No, thank you, young man. I'll stay on the phone until my wife arrives. It's only a two- or three-hour drive, and I've got lots of questions to ask in the meantime." He placed his laptop on top of the *Dream Homes* file and strode out of the room.

I glanced at the laptop and saw an email with a few bullet points and an empty box with the words 'photo coming soon' written inside.

**Number 12 Sleigh Ride Avenue:**

- **A five-bedroom home with unique features**
- **Comes with a mature garden, double garage and off-street parking**
- **Viewings recommended**

An image of a road lined with bushy fir trees and snow-tipped chimneys came into my mind. I imagined every house having immaculate gardens, billions

of fairy lights and driveways made from glazed gingerbread. We were going to spread so much cheer. We were going to be surrounded by people who loved Christmas as much as us. We were going to become the most Christmassy community the world had ever seen.

I took a deep breath. Was this really happening? I'd dreamt of moving house forever. Of moving somewhere with actual neighbours and other houses down the street and waking up to different Christmas decorations besides our own. Don't get me wrong, I love our house with the fields and sheep and cows surrounding us, but to get real neighbours with real names that we can wish a Merry Day to will be better than . . . than gravy on chocolate cake!

As I span around the table in glee, Mum hurtled through the front door and whizzed into the kitchen, accidentally knocking me sideways. Then, with all the grace of an overweight yeti on ice-skates, I stumbled into the Christmas tree in the corner and sent a shiny

silver bauble crashing to the floor.

"You OK?" Mum said, grabbing her keys and map of *Santa's Shortcuts*. "This is going to change everything for us, Snowdrop. *Everything*. I hope you're ready?"

My heart did a weird fluttery flip thing, like it had turned inside out and back again.

