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**SERIES EDITOR: JOHN McRAE**

Everybody loves Christmas. Or do they? Not Lauren Parker! She hates Christmas and thinks it is silly.

But something happens to make her change her mind.

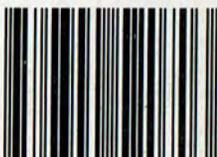
In this Christmas story for the 1990s, you will find all the favourite themes – the bad boss, the poor unwanted child, the past and the future, love and tears ... and, of course, the happy ending.

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E.A.R.L. CHRISTMAS ANGEL CHIARO

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# Christmas Angel



**DELIA CHIARO**



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# **Christmas Angel**

**Delia Chiaro**

**Series Editor: John McRae**

**Edward Arnold**

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## Chapter 1

### Christmas Eve in London

It is December 24th and, like every Christmas Eve, the streets of London's West End are full of people. Everybody is hurrying around. Everybody is looking for a last-minute present for someone they love. Small children take their mothers' hands and pull them into *Hamleys*, the big toy shop in Regent Street. Inside the shop, they stand perfectly still with their eyes and mouths open wide in front of dolls, electric trains, and model aeroplanes. Tonight, no boy or girl in the whole of London will be able to sleep. They are too excited. They are thinking about the stocking full of toys, sweets and chocolates which Father Christmas is going to leave them.

But not only children are excited. In every department store, young men in smart suits try expensive perfumes on their wrists. Tomorrow morning dozens of young girls all over London are going to open boxes which contain bottles of *Nuit de Paris* or *Chanel No 5*. In return, the young men are going to receive after-shave, a tie or a shirt. Older men buy their wives big boxes of chocolates. In return, their



wives buy them pairs of socks.

At every bus stop there are long queues of people who are carrying boxes and bags of shopping. It is very cold and there is a lot of traffic but the people standing in the queues look happy. They know that the next two days are the happiest days of the year. Everybody is going to relax. Everybody is going to eat and drink too much. Everybody is going to watch silly programmes on television and everybody is going to play games with all the family.

Some people, however, do not like Christmas. Lauren Parker, for example. She thinks Christmas is nonsense. In fact, she would like to eliminate Christmas from the calendar. Today Lauren has a headache and she cannot understand why the whole of London is in Regent Street during her lunch break. She cannot understand why every single person wants to spend as much money as possible. This year, she thinks, Christmas is particularly silly. Right now, her headache is a big problem. This afternoon she must finish an important piece of work. However, it is almost impossible to get near *Boots* the chemist's because there are so many people out shopping. A crowd of men, women, and children with bags and parcels are blocking the entrance. A man dressed in red with false white hair and a beard is stopping children as they enter the shop. Lauren thinks he is a very bad imitation of

Father Christmas.

'And what do *you* want for Christmas, young lady?' Father Christmas asks.

'A new *Melinda Sue* doll,' a small girl replies.

'Ho, ho, ho . . .'

A pretty young woman takes a photograph of Father Christmas with the small girl. A few minutes later she sells the photo to the girl's mother.

Lauren wants to enter the store.

'Excuse me please,' Lauren says angrily as she pushes through the small crowd. 'I'm in a hurry.'

'All right, all right!' A fat lady carrying a large teddy bear lets Lauren through. 'Smile, love, it's Christmas Eve!'

'Christmas!' Lauren replies. 'Nonsense!'

'Miserable old bag!' the fat lady says.

Lauren's headache is getting worse. She needs to buy some aspirins. She has difficulty getting to the counter. There is a long queue at every cash desk. Every customer buys lots of things and Lauren waits for ten minutes. She becomes very angry.

'Really,' Lauren thinks. 'I can't understand why all these people are buying perfume! What a waste of money! And that shop assistant! She's so slow! Perhaps she had something alcoholic to drink before coming to work! . . . Excuse me, Miss,' Lauren says loudly. 'Could you please hurry up; some of us must get back to work!'

'Just a minute, love,' the girl replies with a smile.

'Call me Madam if you don't mind,' Lauren says.

The girl giggles loudly.

'You've been drinking! I shall see the manager immediately,' Lauren says angrily.

'You can see who you like, love,' the young girl says. 'It's Christmas Eve! He's been drinking too!'

The people in the queue are amused. Lauren is furious.

' . . . and don't call me "love"'. Christmas indeed. Nonsense!' As she walks away she hears someone say:

'What a miserable old bag!'

The store was very hot. Lauren is glad to get back outside in the cold London air.

'I think I'll get back to the office . . .'

Suddenly, she feels someone's arms around her.

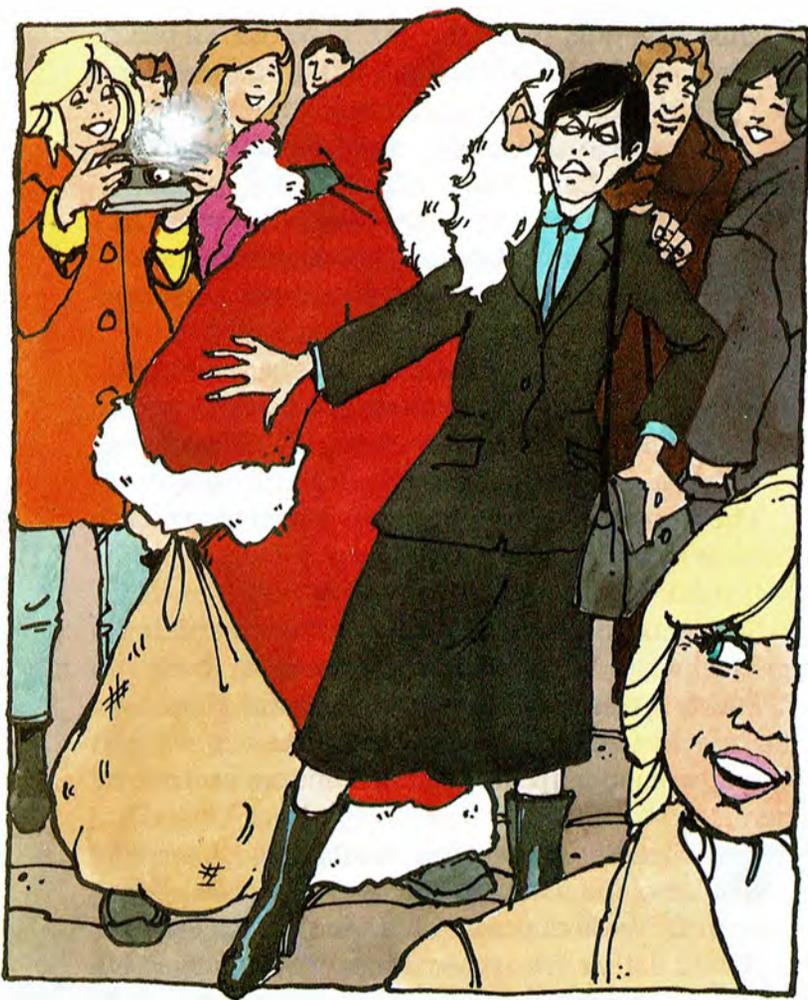
'And what do *you* want for Christmas, love?'

Father Christmas kisses Lauren on the cheek. As Lauren hits him across the face, she can see the young woman with the camera standing in front of her.

'Say cheese!' The woman shouts.

She hears the woman repeating 'Say cheese!' but she cannot see her because of the flash of the camera.

'Ow!' Father Christmas shouts. He touches his face with his hand, 'You miserable old bag, it's Christmas!'



‘Christmas! Nonsense! How dare you attack me!’  
‘I didn’t attack you. I just gave you a small kiss!’  
The young woman is holding a photograph.

‘That’s two pounds please, love!’

‘Don’t call me love,’ Lauren says as she walks away. ‘And you can keep your stupid photograph.’

Lauren is even angrier now. Her headache is much worse, she is tired and has a lot of work to do in the office. She really cannot understand why people become so silly at Christmas.

On her way back to the office, snow begins to fall lightly. The children she passes are excited. Outside the tube station a newspaper seller shouts:

‘White Christmas! Read all about it!’

‘Really,’ Lauren thinks. ‘With all the problems in the world, the papers write about the snow . . . what nonsense!’

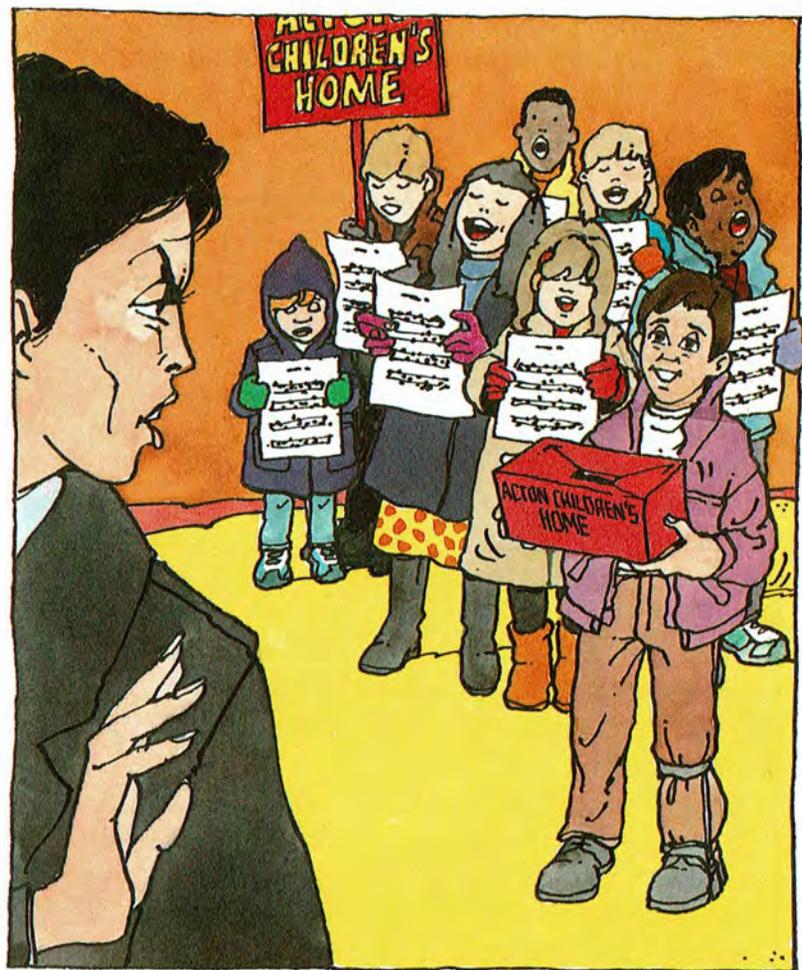
Two young girls wearing mini-skirts and, in Lauren’s opinion, too much make-up, are standing near the newspaper seller. One of them holds up a piece of mistletoe.

‘Give us a Christmas kiss, love,’ she says.

The boy selling newspapers smiles and kisses her. Lauren’s face becomes red.

‘Really!’ she thinks. ‘What silly nonsense!’

Across the street, outside Lauren’s office block, a group of children are singing Christmas carols. A small boy with large brown eyes walks up to her and



shakes a red box. Lauren notices that he cannot walk properly like other children. He is handicapped. The red box reads: ACTON CHILDREN'S HOME.

Lauren hears the clinking sound of coins.

'Not today children,' Lauren says severely.

'Please Miss . . . it's Christmas!'

'Nonsense!' Lauren replies.

The boy looks at her sadly with wide eyes. Lauren walks on.

'The government should take care of these kids,' she thinks. 'I pay enough taxes as it is!'

Lauren enters the building and quickly forgets the children.

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## Chapter 2

### The Office Party

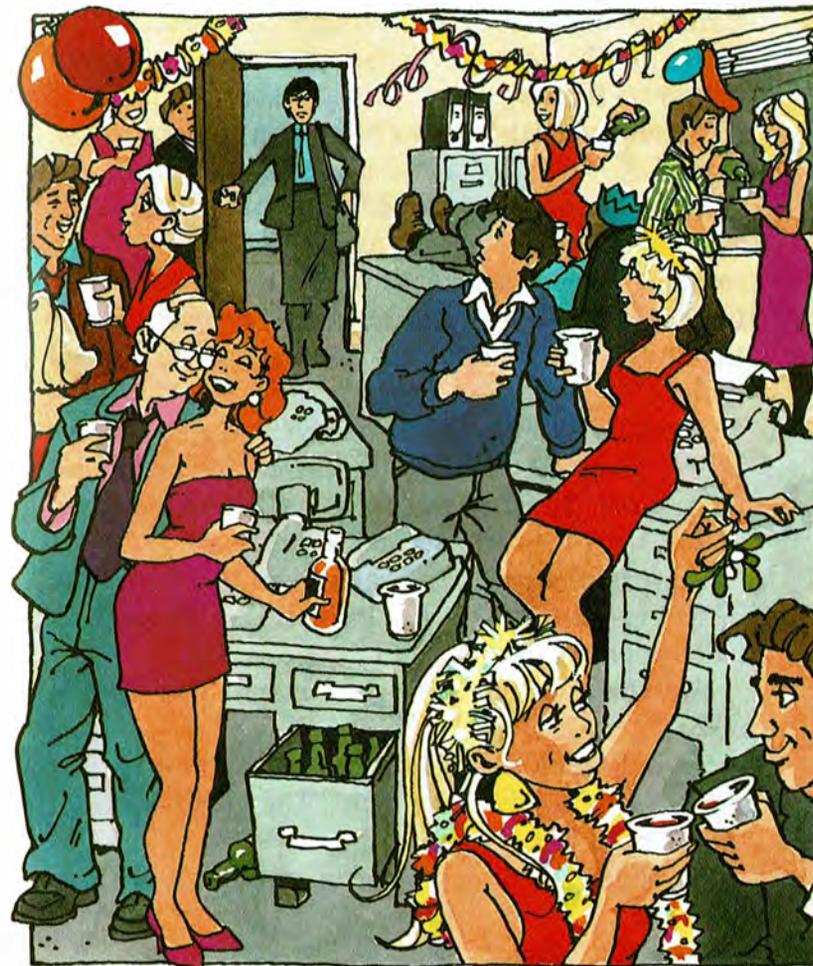
Lauren takes the lift to the third floor.

'Right,' she thinks. 'Now I can get to work.'

She can hear a loud noise coming from her office.

'I wonder what that noise is?'

Lauren opens the door. She sees that things are different. Telephones, typewriters and word processors have gone. The grey and white office furniture is covered in balloons and tinsel. There is a Christmas tree in the middle of the room. Loud music is coming from a cassette player. People are talking loudly and there is a lot of smoke. At first, Lauren does not recognize the people. Then she sees that they are the people who work for her, her staff. The secretaries are not wearing their usual black suits. They are dressed in short red dresses. Lauren notices that their hair looks different too. They suddenly have long blonde hair. Even Frank, the office boy, looks different. He looks older and more sophisticated, like a model from a fashion magazine. Everybody is holding a glass. Everybody is drinking, eating, laughing. Mr Farlowe, the marketing manager, is



standing very, very near the stupid typist with the red hair from the accounts department.

Lauren is angry.

'What on earth do you think you're doing?' she shouts.

Nobody answers because nobody can hear her. The music and the talking are too loud.

'Will you please give me an explanation . . . ' As Lauren becomes angrier, the music becomes louder. Lauren sees Mr Farlowe kissing the red-haired typist.

'Really!' Lauren says to herself. Now she is very angry. She walks over to the cassette recorder and turns it off. She then stands on a chair and shouts:

'Get back to work at once! All of you!'

There is silence. Then Frank says:

'Merry Christmas, Miss Parker!' As he speaks a balloon bursts loudly.

Everybody laughs. Except Lauren. Her face is severe.

'If you are not back at work in ten minutes, you will not have a job on the 27th!' The staff know that their boss is not joking.

'Mr Farlowe, I want you in my office in three minutes.'

'Yes, *hic*, Miss, *hic* Parker,' he says.

As she walks into her office she hears someone say:

'Miserable old bag . . . I'm going to find a new job after Christmas.'

'Yeah!' another voice agrees. 'It's half past one on Christmas Eve. Nobody's working except us.'

Lauren turns round quickly.

'Don't wait till after Christmas. You can go now. You're both fired,' Lauren says to the two blonde secretaries. 'Your papers will be ready at three o'clock.'

Nobody says a word. Lauren goes into her office and closes the door.

## Chapter 3

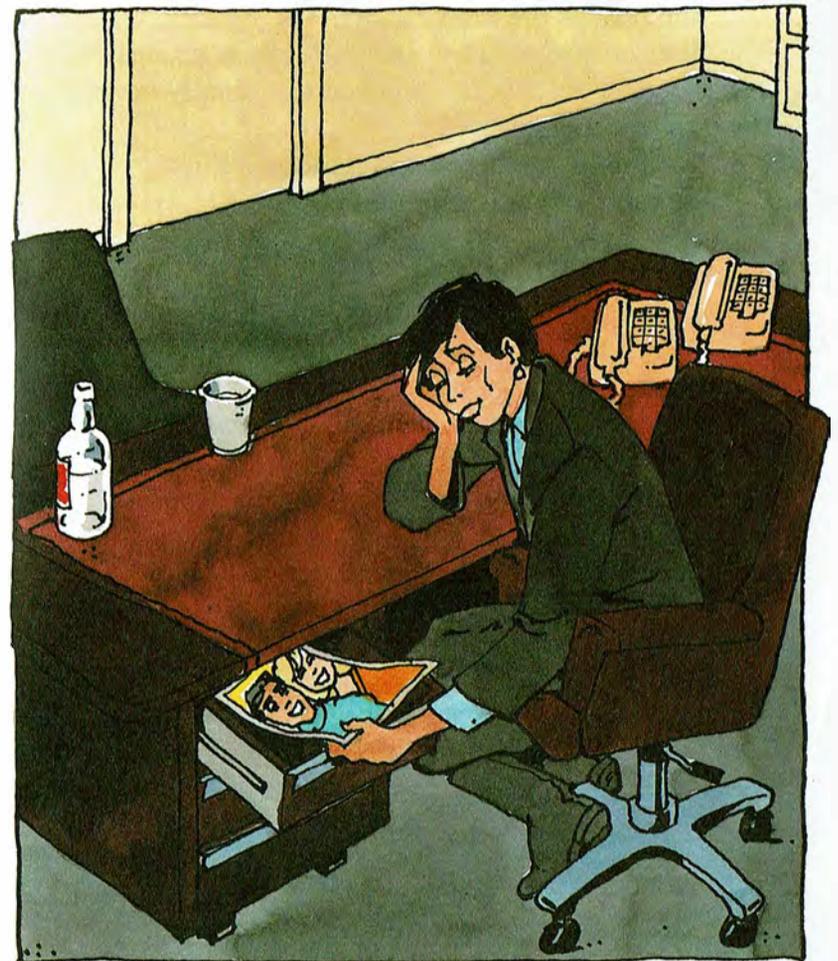
### Christmas in the Past

Lauren's headache is now worse than ever. She had her first headache a year ago. Joe left her a year ago. She sits down and opens a drawer in her desk and takes out a photograph. A couple smile at her from the photograph. They are happy. Joe and Lauren were married. Then they understood that they could not have children. The rest is history. Lauren does not look like the smiling girl in the photograph any more. The long black hair is now cut short like a boy's hair. The girl in the photograph is wearing pretty clothes. The new Lauren prefers the style of the hard business woman. She is now much thinner too. But the biggest difference is that Lauren does not smile very often any more.

'I need a drink,' Lauren thinks. She picks up a half-empty glass that someone left on her desk. She drinks it. She then drinks another. And then another.

She closes her eyes. She sees a little boy with big brown eyes:

'Please Miss . . . it's Christmas!'



She pushes the image away.

She remembers how she met Joe at a Christmas party. He looks at her all evening. Finally he walks up to her and says:

'You have very beautiful hair!'

'Thank you,' Lauren replies.

'My name's Joe, you're Lauren Parker, aren't you?'

That is how it all started, Lauren thinks.

They go to a pub on the river. They talk and talk.

At midnight Joe kisses her:

'Merry Christmas, darling,' Joe says.

Two months later they are married.

Lauren picks up a bottle of vodka and pours herself another drink as she remembers Joe.

'Christmases were different then, weren't they?' a voice says.

'Yes,' Lauren replies.

She did not know that someone else was in the office with her. She looks up.

'Who are . . .'

She immediately recognizes the man in the room. He is the young man who kissed her outside *Boots* half an hour ago. He is still dressed like Father Christmas.

'Who are you? What do you want?' Lauren asks.

'I'm Nick. I'm your special angel,' the boy says.

'Nonsense! You just want me to buy that stupid photograph!'



'I really am an angel! Look . . .'

Lauren cannot believe her eyes. Nick begins to fly slowly around the office. Lauren thinks she is dreaming. She closes her eyes and opens them again. Nick is still there.

'I've drunk too much vodka,' Lauren thinks.

'It's not the vodka,' Nick replies. 'I really am an angel! This morning the boss told me to come down and visit you because you are so miserable!'

'I'm not miserable! What nonsense!' Lauren says. 'And who's your boss?'

'Oh, I don't think you know her . . . you see, I need a better job, a promotion. I want to become one of her important personal angels. I can only do that if I help someone here on earth first!'

'This is nonsense!' Lauren says. She pours herself another glass of vodka.

'Why are you so miserable? It's Christmas, Lauren,' Nick says.

'Christmas is nonsense!' she replies.

'No it's not. Christmas is lovely. It's all about loving, giving and . . .'

'Nonsense!'

'But it was like that for you once, wasn't it?' Nick continues.

'Yes, once but not any more,' Lauren says. 'Now please leave. I have work to do.'

'Me too,' Nick says. 'If I don't help you, I can't get my promotion!'

'This is ridiculous . . .'

Nick takes Lauren's hand, 'Come with me,' he says. 'We're going to visit the past!'

Lauren is tired. She still has a terrible headache. She lets him take her hand. Nick takes her towards the door. He does not open the door. Neither does Lauren. They both walk *through* the door.

'I'll wake up in a minute,' Lauren thinks. 'It's just the effect of all that vodka!'

On the other side of the door, Lauren sees a small girl with long black hair. She is wearing pyjamas. The small girl is hiding behind a door. She is looking at a man. It is her father. He is putting a lot of different toys into a stocking. The girl is smiling.

'But that's me!' Lauren says.

'Yes.'

'And there's my mother!'

A beautiful young woman enters the room.

'Lauren will love these toys,' she says to her husband. Then she says in a low voice, 'Lauren's behind the door! She can see us!'

'If Lauren isn't asleep, Father Christmas will take all these toys away!' her father says.

Young Lauren quickly returns to bed.

'But my mother and father aren't alive,' Lauren says to Nick. 'How can I can see them like this now?'

'I told you, I'm a real angel! Come,' Nick says, as he takes Lauren through the clouds.

'Where are you taking me?' Lauren asks.

'You'll see.'

This time Lauren sees herself as a grown-up woman. She is in bed, asleep.

'Good morning, darling,' Joe says. 'Merry Christmas!' Lauren opens her eyes.

'Thank you . . . she's beautiful!' Lauren says with a smile.

'You mean *he!*' Joe laughs. They both laugh. Joe gives Lauren a beautiful red kitten.

'Merry Christmas!' Lauren says. 'We must call him . . .'

'How about Holly?' Joe says.

'Come,' Nick says. He takes Lauren through more clouds.

'Now where are you taking me?' Lauren asks.

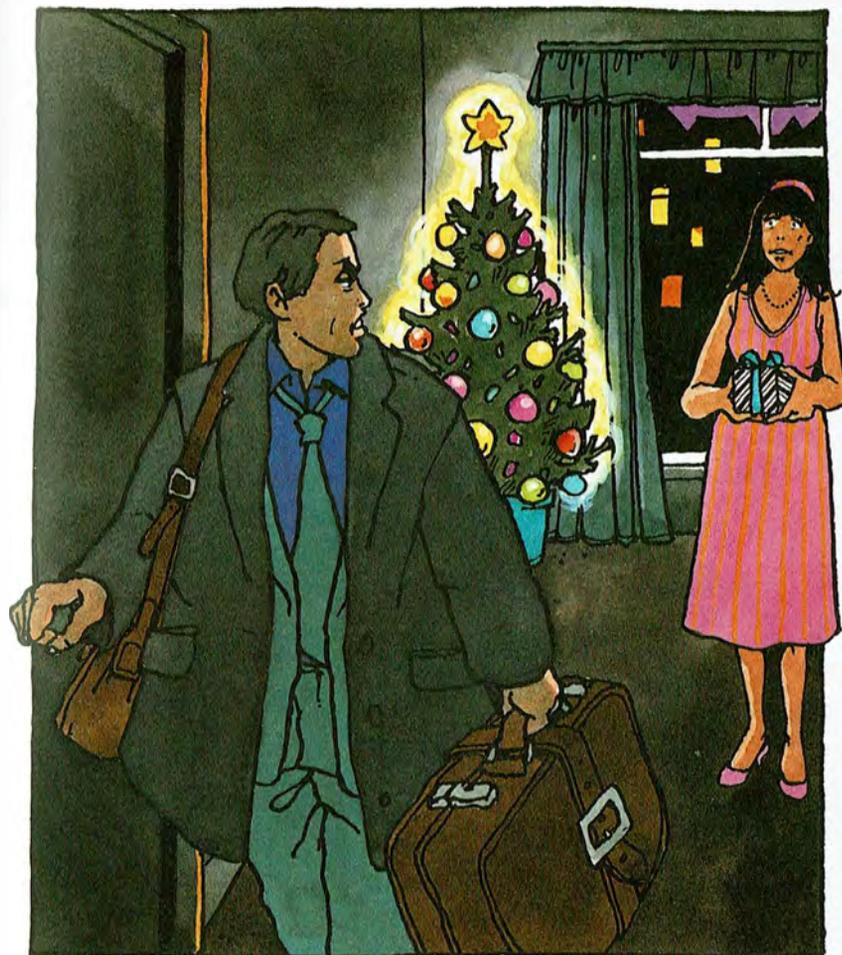
'You'll see.'

Now Lauren sees herself crying. It is Christmas Eve one year ago.

'I don't want to live with you any more,' Joe is saying. 'I want a divorce so that I can marry Sandra. I want children. Sandra can give me children.'

Lauren is holding a small box. It is her Christmas present for Joe. But Joe leaves her without opening it.

'Is this why you hate Christmas?' Nick asks.



'Yes,' Lauren replies. 'Joe suddenly stopped loving me. It's not my fault that I can't have children!'

'So you decided to work a lot . . .' Nick begins.

'Yes, what else could I do? If Joe doesn't love me . . . ' Lauren begins to cry.

'Come,' Nick says as he takes her hand.

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## Chapter 4

### **This Christmas**

Nick takes Lauren back to the office. The two secretaries are talking. They are leaving their jobs.

'What are we going to do now?' Mandy says.

'I really don't know,' Linda replies. 'It isn't easy to find another job!'

'I know. But anything is better than working for that old bag!'

'I suppose you're right!'

'Let's go home. At least we've got someone waiting for us at home!'

'Yes. The old bag only has four walls and an empty room!'

'That's not true, Mandy Philpott!' Lauren shouts.

'They can't hear or see you, Lauren,' Nick says.

'But it is true. She's right!'

Lauren does not speak.

'Come,' Nick says and they walk through more clouds.

In Lauren's flat it is cold and miserable. There are no decorations and there is no Christmas tree. Lauren can see herself sitting at her desk working.

There is a sandwich on the table, a glass and a bottle of vodka.

‘Why are you alone on Christmas Eve?’ Nick asks.

‘Because I have no family,’ Lauren replies.

‘And why don’t you decorate the flat? Or buy a tree? Nobody just eats a sandwich on Christmas Eve! And look at you! You’re working! It’s Christmas!’

‘So what!’ Lauren says. ‘It’s just another day for me. Decorations are a waste of money! And what’s wrong with a sandwich?’

‘Yes, but you’re alone!’

‘I don’t need anybody!’

‘You can make friends . . . you’re young . . . you could find a boyfriend . . .’

‘Nonsense! Nobody wants a woman who cannot have children.’

‘Come with me,’ Nick says, as he takes her through more clouds.

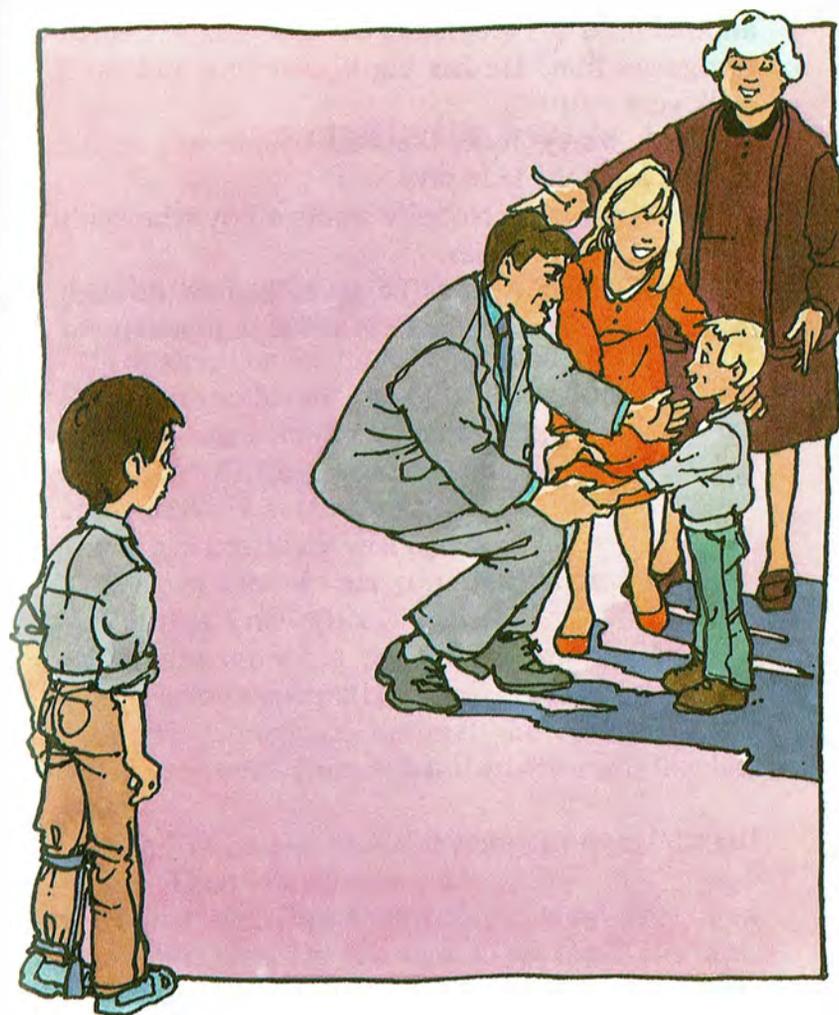
This time Lauren and Nick arrive outside a big house. The sign outside reads: Acton Children’s Home.

‘I know that name,’ Lauren thinks.

Inside a young couple are taking a little boy by the hand.

‘Jeremy, these are your new parents,’ a lady says.

The boy is happy. He is smiling. The couple, his new mother and father, are happy too. There is



another little boy looking at the new family. Lauren recognizes him. He has big brown eyes and can't walk very well.

'Don't worry Jack, the next couple will maybe choose you,' the lady says.

'No they won't. Nobody wants a boy who can't walk!' the child replies.

'Come,' Nick says as he takes Lauren through more clouds. Her headache is worse than ever.

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## Chapter 5

### Christmas in the Future

'I really don't understand what you're trying to do,' Lauren says to Nick.

'You don't understand,' Nick replies. 'Look . . .'

Lauren sees her office again. The red-haired typist is now sitting behind Lauren's desk.

'Miss McCarthy, what do you think you're doing at my desk?' Lauren shouts.

The girl continues writing.

'She can't see or hear you,' Nick says.

'But that's my office!'

'Not any more . . . not a year from now.'

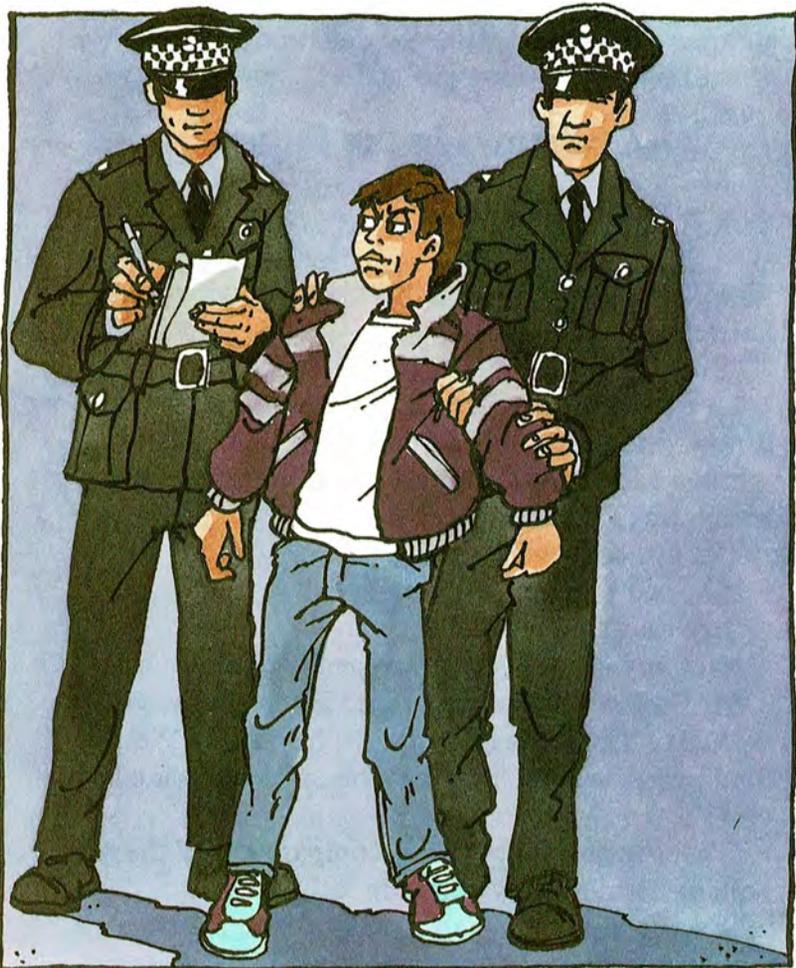
Mr Farlowe enters the office. He kisses the girl.

'Merry Christmas, darling!' he says. 'We are doing very well. Think what the office was like last year!'

'Yes, I'm glad we took this company over,' the girl replies. Then Mandy comes in.

'Excuse me, Mrs Farlowe, the New York area manager is here. Do you want to see him?' she says.

'What's happening?' Lauren asks. 'If I'm not in my office, then where am I?'



'I don't think you really want to know,' Nick says.

'Yes, I do.'

'Come . . .'

Now Lauren can see a young boy. He is about thirteen. Two policemen are speaking to him.

'Come with us,' they say.

'It wasn't me, honest!' the boy says.

'Oh no . . . it's never you, little Jack!' one of the policemen replies. 'This time you go straight to a remand home!'

'I know him,' Lauren says, 'It's the little boy from the children's home . . . but why . . . ?'

'The answer is simple. He ran away because nobody wanted him,' Nick replies. 'He now has the wrong type of friends and steals cars.'

Lauren thinks that Jack's big brown eyes are the same as always, the same as now.

'I don't care about a delinquent like Jack,' Lauren says.

'No?' Nick replies. 'I think little Jack could help you a lot. Come . . .'

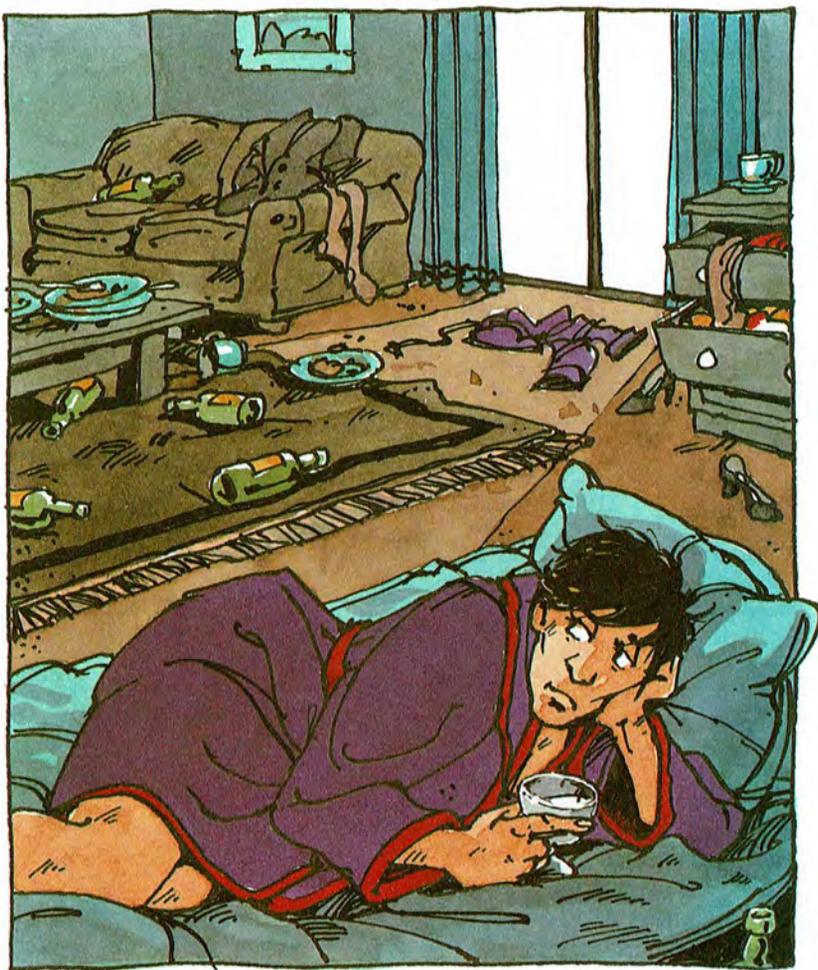
'I really don't see how,' Lauren says.

This time the clouds take Nick and Lauren back to her flat. It is very untidy now and dirty too.

'This isn't my house,' Lauren says. 'I don't live here any more I'm sure!'

'Oh yes you do,' Nick answers.

'Where am I then?'



Lauren is on her bed. There are many empty bottles around her. She gets up and walks towards the table but she falls over. Her hair and her clothes are dirty. She gets up and pours herself a drink.

‘That can’t be me!’ Lauren says.

‘I’m afraid it is,’ Nick answers. ‘That’s what can happen to miserable people who only think about themselves.’

‘But Nick . . . I don’t want to be miserable . . . can’t I do something to make things different?’

‘That depends on you, my love!’

‘Maybe you can help me. I don’t want to be miserable for the rest of my life. Really I don’t . . . Nick, Nick . . . where are you?’

‘You wanted to see me, Miss Parker?’ Mr Farlowe asks.

‘What?’ Lauren looks around the office. Nick is not there. ‘Did you just see a man dressed like Father Christmas?’

‘Pardon?’

‘You know, a white beard and a red . . .’ Lauren stops. She rubs her eyes. She sees an empty bottle of vodka in front of her. ‘I must have been dreaming!’ she thinks.

‘Mr Farlowe, I want to tell you that kissing a typist is not the sort of . . .’ As she speaks, in her mind, Lauren sees a little boy with large brown eyes saying:

‘Please Miss . . . it’s Christmas.’



‘Mr Farlowe, please bring the rest of the staff in here.’

‘At once, Miss Parker.’

The office staff enter the room sadly, with long faces. When they are all present, Lauren looks at them severely.

‘Things are going to change,’ she says. ‘Mandy, Linda . . . I’m sorry . . . please forgive me . . . the jobs are still yours, if you want them . . . with a higher salary of course . . . a higher salary for all of you . . . you too, Frank . . . and don’t come back to work before January 2nd . . . it’s Christmas!’

Nobody speaks.

‘I’m not joking . . . please help me to become a nice person . . . a real person . . .’

‘Merry Christmas, Miss Parker,’ Frank shouts.

‘Call me Lauren . . . or even . . .’

‘Merry Christmas, love!’ Mandy says.

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## Chapter 6

### A Merry Christmas

After the office party Lauren takes the underground to Acton.

'Merry Christmas!' Lauren shouts to all the people she passes. 'Merry, Merry, Merry Christmas!'

She dances through the streets. She feels happy. She does not even have a headache any more.

At the children's home, they tell her that it is Christmas Eve and that she must make an appointment. But Lauren insists. She wants to adopt a child. That child is Jack.

'Please, please,' she asks the nurse. 'Just let him spend Christmas with me . . .'

'I'm sorry Madam, but that is against our rules,' Mrs Thirsk insists. 'Adoption is a serious and complicated process. And Madam . . . well . . . you aren't . . . married!'

Lauren is not worried. She is a strong woman and she will fight hard to have Jack.

'Can I at least see him, please?' she asks.

'I think so,' Mrs Thirsk replies.

Jack is in the playroom with the other children. They are playing with a couple of adults.

'Nick!' Lauren cries.

'Sorry, love, my name's . . . but you're the girl who didn't want to be kissed!'

'Nick!' Lauren repeats.

'Sorry but my name's Angel, and this is my sister Kate . . .'

'I'm sorry about this afternoon,' Kate says. 'We need money desperately for kids like these, Jack, Ben, Suzy . . . and the others.'

'I can't stop thinking about Jack,' Lauren says to Angel. 'I want to adopt him . . . are you sure you're not called Nick?'

'Funny,' Angel replies, 'But I had a brother called Nicholas. He died when I was a little boy. Mum says we looked like each other.'

Lauren feels strange.

She goes over to Jack.

'Hi!'

'Hello, Miss!' Jack says.

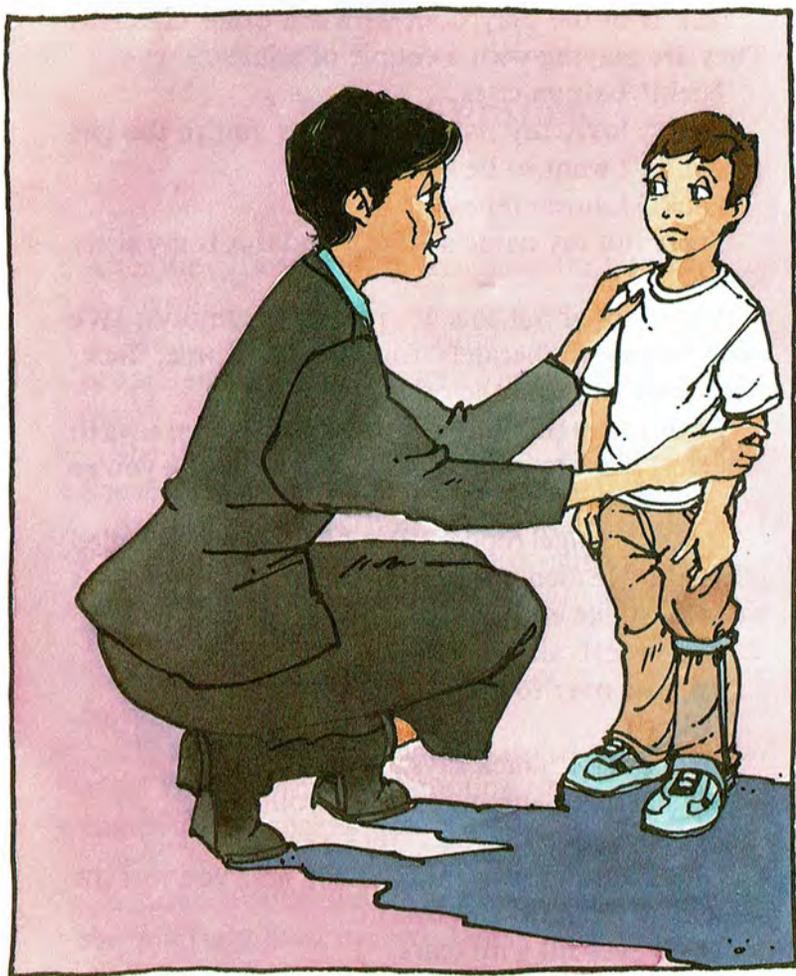
'My name's Lauren . . . I like you a lot . . .'

'But I've got a bad leg,' Jack says.

'Oh,' Lauren says. 'I think I can love you just the same . . . What do you think?'

Jack's eyes fill with tears.

'I can't take you home tonight . . . but I want to . . .'



Angel puts his arm around her and kisses her on the cheek. He steps back.

'Don't hit me again!' he says. 'But you know that Jack will need a Daddy too before you can adopt him?'

'I don't care. I'll have Jack one day, if it's the last thing I do!'

Little Jack smiles happily, his eyes full of tears. They are tears of happiness.

'Actually,' Angel says, 'I'm offering myself as a potential father for Jack. What do you think, Jack?'

Jack continues smiling and looks at Angel and Lauren with love.

Angel kisses Lauren's cheek again. Lauren is very happy too.

'Say cheese!' Kate says. There is a flash of light. For a moment Lauren thinks she sees a smiling Father Christmas.

'Thanks for the promotion, Lauren, and good luck!' Nick says.

'No, no! Thank *you* Nick!' Lauren replies.

'What did you say?' Angel asks. 'Angel, Angel, my name's Angel!'

'Don't worry, I won't forget!'

## Glossary

**delinquent** A young criminal, or thief.

**giggle** You giggle when you make a repeated laughing noise.

**not joking** Being very serious.

**properly** Normally.

**remand home** An institution for young criminals.

**tinsel** A shiny, metallic Christmas decoration.

**to be fired** To lose your job.