



The  
PUFFIN  
BOOK of  
Christmas  
Stories

Compiled by WENDY COOLING





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*Some other books edited by Wendy Cooling*

THE PUFFIN BOOK OF STORIES FOR FIVE-YEAR-OLDS

THE PUFFIN BOOK OF STORIES FOR SIX-YEAR-OLDS

THE PUFFIN BOOK OF STORIES FOR SEVEN-YEAR-OLDS

THE PUFFIN BOOK OF STORIES FOR EIGHT-YEAR-OLDS

WENDY COOLING taught English in London secondary schools for many years before moving to BookTrust, a charity that supports reading to children and adults. There she created the Bookstart project giving books to babies to encourage parents and carers to share books from the very beginning. Wendy has edited many short story and poetry anthologies for children, and continues to travel the world talking about children's books and reading. She was honoured to receive an MBE from the Queen and an Eleanor Farjeon Award for services to children's literature. Wendy lives in London – and she still loves reading!



Stories chosen by  
WENDY COOLING

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**PUFFIN**  
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## Contents

The Christmas Party ( <i>from A Northern Childhood</i> ) <i>George Layton</i>	I
The Silver Horse <i>Ursula Moray Williams</i>	19
Just Like an Angel <i>Gillian Cross</i>	26
Why the Chimes Rang <i>Raymond MacDonald Alden</i>	45
The Box of Magic <i>Malorie Blackman</i>	54
Christmas Is Coming ( <i>from The Country Child</i> ) <i>Alison Uttley</i>	70
The Story of the Christmas Rose <i>retold by</i> <i>Norah Montgomerie</i>	78

## Contents

Not Just for Christmas	<i>Rob Childs</i>	88
Marley's Ghost ( <i>from A Christmas Carol</i> )		
<i>Charles Dickens</i>		106
Simon and the Snow	<i>Gino Alberti</i>	122
Baboushka	<i>retold by Caitlin Matthews</i>	127
Hetty Feather's Christmas	<i>Jacqueline Wilson</i>	135
Christmas With Auntie May	<i>Trish Cooke</i>	145
<i>A Victorian Christmas</i>		155
<i>Acknowledgements</i>		161



## The Christmas Party

from *A Northern Childhood*, set in 1976

GEORGE LAYTON

OUR CLASSROOM looked smashing. Lots of silver tinsel and crepe paper and lanterns. *We'd* made the lanterns, but Miss Taylor had bought the rest herself, out of her own money. Oh, only today and tomorrow and then we break up. Mind you, if school was like this all the time, I wouldn't be bothered about breaking up. Putting up Christmas decorations and playing games – much better than doing writing and spelling any day. I watched the snow coming down outside. Smashing! More sliding tomorrow. I love

Christmas. I wish it was more than once a year. Miss Taylor started tapping on the blackboard with a piece of chalk. Everybody was talking and she kept on tapping until the only person you could hear was Norbert Lightowler.

‘Look if I get a six and land on you, you get knocked off and I still get another go!’

The whole class was looking at him.

‘Look, when Colin got a six, he landed on *me* and *he* got another . . .!’

Suddenly he realized that he was the only one talking and he started going red.

‘Thank you, Norbert, I think we all know the rules of Ludo.’

Miss Taylor can be right sarcastic sometimes. Everybody laughed. Even Miss Taylor smiled.

‘Now, since it is getting so noisy, we’re going to stop these games and do some work.’

Everybody groaned and Tony and me booed – quietly so Miss Taylor couldn’t hear. She hates people that boo. She says people who boo are cowards.

‘Who is that booing?’

We must have been booing louder than we thought.

‘Who is that booing?’

## *The Christmas Party*

Miss Taylor looked at Tony. I looked at Tony. They both looked at me. I put my hand up.

‘It was me, Miss.’

Tony put his hand up.

‘It was me an’ all, Miss.’

She looked at us.

‘You both know what I think of booing, don’t you?’

We nodded.

‘Yes, Miss.’

‘Yes, Miss.’

‘Don’t ever let me hear it again.’

We shook our heads.

‘No, Miss.’

‘No, Miss.’

She turned to the class.

‘Now, the work I have in mind is discussion work.’

Everybody groaned again, except me and Tony.

‘I thought we’d discuss tomorrow’s Christmas party!’

We all cheered and Miss Taylor smiled. We have a Christmas party every year, the whole school together in the main hall. Each class has its own table and we all bring the food from home.

‘Now, does everybody know what they’re bringing from home for the party tomorrow?’

I knew. I was bringing a jelly. I put my hand up.

‘I’m bringing a jelly, Miss!’

Everybody started shouting at once and Miss Taylor moved her hands about to calm us down.

‘All right, all right, one at a time. Don’t get excited. Jennifer Greenwood, what are you bringing?’

Jennifer Greenwood was sitting in the back row next to Valerie Burns.

‘C’mon, Jennifer, what are you bringing for tomorrow?’

She put her hand up.

‘Please, Miss, I’m bringing a custard trifle, Miss.’

Norbert Lightowler pulled his mouth into a funny shape and pretended to be sick.

‘Ugh, I hate custard. I’m not gonna have any of that!’

Everybody laughed, except Miss Taylor.

‘Well, Norbert, if I was Jennifer I wouldn’t dream of giving you any. Right, Jennifer?’

Jennifer just giggled with Valerie Burns. Norbert was looking down at his desk.

‘And, Norbert, what are you bringing tomorrow?’

‘Polony sandwiches, Miss, my mum’s making ’em, and a bottle of mixed pickles, Miss, homemade!’

## *The Christmas Party*

Miss Taylor said that would be lovely, and carried on asking right round the class. Tony said that he was bringing a Christmas cake. I was bringing the jelly that my mum was going to make, and Colin Wilkinson was bringing some currant buns. Valerie Burns said that she was bringing some lemon curd tarts, and Freda Holdsworth called her a spiteful cat because *she* was bringing the lemon curd tarts, and Valerie Burns *knew* she was bringing lemon curd tarts because she'd told her and she was a blooming copycat. Anyway Miss Taylor calmed her down by saying that it was a good job they were both bringing lemon curd tarts, because then there would be enough for everybody, and everybody would want one, wouldn't they? And she asked everybody who would want a lemon curd tart to put their hands up, and everybody put their hands up. Even I put my hand up and I hate lemon curd. Well, it *was* Christmas.

After everybody had told Miss Taylor what they were bringing, she said that there'd be enough for the whole school, never mind just our class, but we should remember that Christmas isn't just for eating and parties, and she asked Tony what the most important thing about Christmas is.

‘Presents, Miss!’

‘No, Tony, not presents. Christmas is when the baby Jesus was born, and that is the most important thing, and when you’re all enjoying your presents and parties this year, you must all remember that. Will you all promise me?’

Everybody promised that they’d remember Jesus and then Miss Taylor started asking us all how we were going to spend Christmas. Freda Holdsworth said she was going to Bridlington on Christmas Eve to stay with her cousin, and on Christmas Eve they’d both put their stockings up for Father Christmas, but before they’d go to bed, they’d leave a glass of milk and some biscuits for him in case he was hungry. Norbert Lightowler said that that’s daft because there’s no such thing as Father Christmas. Some of the others agreed, but most of them said course there is. I just wasn’t sure. What I can’t understand is, that if there *is* a Father Christmas, how does he get round everybody in one night? I mean the presents must come from somewhere, but how can he do it all by himself? And Norbert said how can there be only *one* Father Christmas, when he’d seen *two* down in town in Baldwin Street and another outside the fish market, and Neville Bastowe said

## *The Christmas Party*

he'd seen one in Dickenson's. Well, what about the one my mum had taken me to see at the Co-op? He'd promised to bring me a racer.

'Please, Miss, there's one at the Co-op an' all. He's promised to bring me a racer.'

And then Miss Taylor explained that all these others are Father Christmas's brothers and relations who help out because he's so busy and Freda Holdsworth said Miss Taylor was right, and Norbert said he'd never thought of that, but that Paul Hopwood, he's in 2B, had told him that Father Christmas is just his dad dressed up, and I said that that's daft and it couldn't be because Father Christmas comes to our house every year and I haven't got a dad, and Miss Taylor said that if those who didn't believe in Father Christmas didn't get any presents, they'd only have themselves to blame, and I agreed! Then she asked me what I'd be doing on Christmas Day.

'Well, Miss, when I wake up in the morning, I'll look round and see what presents I've got, and I'll play with them and I'll empty my stocking, and usually there are some sweets so I'll eat them, and when I've played a bit more I'll go and wake my mum up and show her what I've got, and then I'll wake my Auntie Doreen – she always stays

with us every Christmas; and then after breakfast I'll play a bit more, and then we'll have Christmas dinner, and then we'll go to my grandad's and I'll play a bit more there, and then I'll go home to bed, and that'll be the end!

Miss Taylor said that all sounded very nice and she hoped everybody would have such a nice Christmas, but she was surprised I wasn't going to church. Well, I told her that there wouldn't really be time because my grandad likes us to be there early to hear Wilfred Pickles on the wireless visiting a hospital, and to listen to the Queen talking, and then the bell went for home-time and Miss Taylor said we could all go quietly and told us not to forget our stuff for the party.

I went with Tony to get our coats from the cloakroom. Everybody was talking about the party and Barry was there shouting out that their class was going to have the best table because their teacher had made them a Christmas pudding with money in it! I told him that was nothing because Miss Taylor had given everybody in our class sixpence, but he didn't believe me.

'Gerraway, you bloomin' fibber.'

'She did, didn't she, Tony?'