

PATRINGTON CHARISTMAS 2020

by Claire Holmes

It was the night before Christmas. Tom checked his list:

Hung stocking check

Left a snack for Santa check

Left a snack for the reindeer check

Brushed teeth check

Got snuggled up in bed check

His Mum read him his favourite Christmas story and tucked him up in bed. “Sweet dreams” she said and went downstairs leaving the door slightly ajar and the landing light on.

Tom felt cosy and warm, excited but also a little worried. He thought he’d been good but you could never be sure. He didn’t think he had done anything really bad and no-one was perfect but he had found it difficult to concentrate on his school work when they were home schooling during lock down. It wasn’t like at school, because all his toys were around him, distracting him. He could practically hear them whispering to him as he tried to do his maths “leave that, come and play”. His parents had at times been stressed out trying to juggle working from home, helping him with his school work, helping his sister with her work and generally trying to keep life as normal as possible. They had done a good job, but it wasn’t normal. People kept talking about a new normal and he wasn’t really sure what the new normal was. He’d asked, but no-one else seemed to know either. What was

a new normal Christmas like? Would Santa still come even if he had been good? The thoughts whirled in his mind as he tried to go to sleep.

It was the night before Christmas and Santa was flying his sleigh. There was a thick fog and he could see nothing of the ground below him. Santa looked at his sleigh navigation to see where they were. They should be travelling just over Patrington but the screen was frozen, literally frozen with icicles hanging over the screen and on the screen itself nothing but a picture of a carrot whirling around. The sleigh navigation had lost their position.

Santa pressed the voice activated reindeer control on the sleigh and saw up ahead that Rudolph's nose was glowing to show he was listening. "Hey Rudolph, What is our current position?". "Location unavailable" came the answer. Santa tried again, "Hey Rudolph, What is our current position" "Location unavailable" came the response again.

Santa decided to land the sleigh. Last time he flew in poor visibility with no sleigh navigation available he had thought he was travelling over the cricket club but wasn't and he had had a very near miss with the spire of St Patricks's church. The Revd. Laird was in the process of having scaffolding erected for essential ongoing repairs to stonework and it would be a great shame if the spire got knocked over!

As he came out from under the fog Santa realised he had been right to check his position because he was very close to Church Lane. Wanting to avoid the church he brought the sleigh down quickly. A little too quickly bearing in mind how much fog there was. Rather

than hovering for a little while over where they intended to land, allowing them to come down quietly and gracefully, they began to come down over the roofs of houses. They clattered on the roofs of Church Street before realising they didn't have enough of a runway to land and continued to Greenshaw Lane. They were still travelling too quickly on touch down to stop completely and so they had to run across the roofs on Greenshaw Lane and take one last jump before coming to a complete stop on the roof of the village hall.

When they came to a stand still the backend of the sleigh was hanging off the end of the roof ever so slightly and the reindeer had to pull to make sure it was brought level. It made a horrible grinding noise as it slowly slid along to safety. Santa got down from the sleigh and went to inspect it to see if there was any damage.

Tom had been fast asleep in his bed on High Street when he heard the clatter on the roof. He looked out of his window. He couldn't see what it was but he could hear the jingle of bells. It was coming from the direction of the back of his house.

Tom jumped out of bed, put on his slippers and dressing gown and went to investigate. From his back garden and through a break in the fog he saw Santa's sleigh and his reindeer resting on top of the village roof. He saw Santa Claus stood on the roof with his hands on his hips looking at the sleigh. Santa had his back to Tom but of course Santa knows when he is being watched. He needs to know, to make sure he isn't seen when he is working. Santa must have felt Tom's eyes on him because he turned, held his hand up to his eyes

and looked down straight at Tom. Tom waved and saw Santa ever so slowly raise his finger to his nose.

As Santa was inspecting the sleigh he saw that the banging and the clattering of the sleigh had loosened some of the nuts and bolts which kept the skids on. To travel with the sleigh as it was now would be very dangerous. Bits might drop off as they were flying and who knows where they might fall. Also, the runners of the sleigh had become bent as it had been dragged onto the roof. Santa rang Elf recovery and was stood looking at the damage and wondering how long it would take them to get there when he felt Tom's presence.

With a magic touch of his nose Santa was transported to Tom's back garden, next to Tom. It was very cold. "Now then Tom what brings you out here in the cold at the cross over from Christmas eve to Christmas? You should be tucked up in bed with visions of sugar plums dancing in your head" Tom told him that he had heard the noise. "Sorry about that" said Santa "I'm not in the habit of waking children. I'm normally as quiet as a mouse but I've had a bit of sleigh trouble you see.

As they were stood talking Tom saw parachutes falling from the sky. Each parachute looked like it was made of wrapping paper and had an elf suspended beneath it. Despite their paper like appearance the elves had no difficulty guiding their parachutes down on to the village hall roof. The reindeer were less impressed than Tom, as the parachutes fell on the reindeers covering their eyes.

With another touch of his nose they were back on the village roof. One of the elves whistled and shook his head. “We can fix it Santa” he said “but you don’t have time to wait for us to fix it and then do the Patrington delivery. You need temporary transport”. “No worries” said Santa. Santa took a red card out of his pocket. It sparkled like it was made of rubies. Santa threw it into the air and it blew away into the fog.

Around Tom the fog started to move. It was swirling all around. In the distance Tom heard a whistling noise. The air around him felt different, he had a tingle all over his body and the fog was starting to seem thicker. He couldn’t quite work out how it was changing.....it was like it was sticking together. Instead of being a blanket over everything it was more like shapes..... no not shapes clouds.....no not clouds puffs of smoke.... no not smoke – it was steam...great big puffs of steam.

As he realised that it was steam he heard a loud long whistle, then another. He had to hold his hand up to his eyes as a huge steam train came into view. The whole body of the train was completely covered in red lights, the chimney and the trim were gold lights. It was magnificent. It was also loud, bright and to Tom’s disbelief in the middle of Greenshaw Lane! Tom looked all around to see if other children were looking out of their windows, he couldn’t believe that anyone could sleep though such a thing but not a curtain moved.

An elf looked out of the cab and waved to Tom “all aboard the Patrington Express” the elf yelled.

Santa picked up his sack from the sleigh. As Tom looked to see how they would get onto the train it was then he saw that it didn't have steps because it hovered in the air with a carpet of steam underneath it. Santa held out his hand for Tom to take it and together they ran and jumped onto the open cab of the train.

From the chimney of the train came puffs of steam which seemed to come out of the chimney into the air and then form an arc over the train, arching down the rear to become a carpet underneath. Inside each puff as it came out of the chimney Tom could see pictures, children driving racing cars, children scoring a goal and being hoisted onto their team mates shoulders, children punching the air looking incredible proud of themselves. The Elf driver saw the look of amazement on Tom's face. "She's a beauty" isn't she said the Elf. "She is" said Tom "I have never seen a train that flies by magic".

"Oh its not magic that flies the train" said the Elf. "Magic made the train but she's powered on dreams. That's why she is lit up the way she is. She can only move at night-time because she only works when everyone's asleep and dreaming". "How do dreams move a train?" Said Tom. "Isn't it obvious?" said the Elf. Tom shook his head, "Dreams are the most powerful thing on earth. Dreams can do anything, they can move mountains and if you can move a mountain then a train is no problem at all for a dream to move".

The train started to glide down Greenshaw Lane, over the junction with main street passed Newtons Fish and Chip shop, onto Northside and then down Station Road to Winestead.

Tom saw the village in which he had been born and grown up from a whole new perspective.

The pair of them went from house to house within the Parish delivering presents. Tom didn't know whether this was Santa's new normal or not but he didn't think they were as quiet as mice as the train gave a large long whistle at each street that they came to halt at and sometimes [if it was a long street] half way too but no one stirred.

Each house had its own unique way of entering sometimes they went down the chimney, some left out a special key, some didn't leave anything and Santa gave a touch of his nose. "Why do you go into each house differently?" asked Tom. "Christmas is let in through the heart and the mind" said Santa "it doesn't matter to me how I get in a house, it only matters to the people in the house and so I go in the way they invite me to because it is their heart's desire that is the real key to every home".

Santa gave Tom a bag and as they went from house to house Santa gave out the presents and then where people had left carrots for the reindeer he passed them to Tom. Despite the fact that there were many many carrots the bag never seemed heavy to Tom. They shared any drinks and snacks that had been left.

When they had been to every house in every part of the parish Patrington, Patrington Haven and Winestead they began their journey back to the village hall. On the way back down Station Road the train seemed to recognise where the old station used to be and it pulled in

for a stop. In the window of the Station Hotel, Tom saw that there were two cups of hot chocolate and two brownies on a plate that the staff there had left for Santa, one for now and one for the road. Santa gave the second mug to Tom and the pair of them sat there enjoying the hint of spicy gingerbread in the chocolate, whipped cream on top and tiny pillows of marshmallows. Tom didn't know if it was the comfort of the hot chocolate or his hard work that evening but as he looked into Santa's eyes and they both gave a big smile Tom couldn't help but let out a great big involuntary yawn.

With a last touch his nose Santa took them back to the sleigh. The elves had finished their work. Tom and Santa gave the reindeers the carrots they had collected and Tom patted them as they ate. As he patted the reindeer Tom seemed to grow tireder and tireder. His eyes felt heavy. He looked at Santa and tried to say he was tired but he was so tired that the words just would come out. Santa was smiling and waving at him.

The next thing Tom knew his sister was shouting his name "Tom Tom" are you coming downstairs. Tom went downstairs where his family were waiting for him. Tom felt confused. Had he really had the night he thought he had or had he been asleep. Underneath the tree was a gift addressed to his sister and one to him. The tag on his glittered just like the card Santa had thrown into the air to conjure the train.

Tom opened his gift. It was a wooden train. Not just any wooden train. A red train with a gold chimney and trim just like the one he had flown on with Santa last night. "Nice Train" said his sister "it doesn't do anything though" and walked off. Tom smiled. To

look at it you would think it didn't do anything. But Tom knew that the train wouldn't work if you just looked at it. The train was powered by dreams. When he used his imagination to dream the train would go anywhere he wanted it to. Tom didn't feel nervous about the new normal anymore because he knew that it would be whatever he dreamt it would be....