

## The Season of Expectation

All the work was done. The gifts had been delivered.  
Santa Claus went 'ho ho ho' despite the raging blizzard.  
Soon he'd be back home. And Christmas lay ahead.  
No one more than he deserved an extra hour in bed.

Every eager child reached down to feel a lumpy sock,  
knowing that they shouldn't be awake till six o'clock.  
Good as gold they'd been all year – and so they felt assured  
Santa would have brought them a commensurate reward.

As the Red One hurried home despite the drifting snow,  
his beard was white as moonlight, his heart was all aglow.  
It made him very happy that so many girls and boys  
would soon be thrilled to bits to see their long-awaited toys.

Gradually, first in the East, the clocks began to chime.  
a hundred million children seized their stockings at one time –  
and *were* thrilled – for a second... Then, reality intruded  
as they saw the dreaded words: 'batteries not included'.

Down in Devon, Alexander yawned and found his sock.  
It was full of old LPs – roots reggae, dub and rock –  
and for a moment his delight was truly quite unmatched  
before he realised each and every record had been scratched.

Elizabeth was still asleep. As she began to wake up,  
she gasped and saw her stocking there, full of lovely make up –  
just as she hoped. Terrific! Then, her smile became a frown:  
the colour of the lipstick was called 'diarrhoea brown'.

Oliver was all on edge, and then his mind was blown  
to see he'd got a chess set carved from alabaster stone.  
'Magnificent!' But then he noticed something wasn't right.  
Not a single piece was black. Every one was white.

Sophie picked her stocking up and found she had a book.  
She flicked through all the pages, then fixed me with a look.  
'It's just my sort of thing', she said, 'a murder-mystery thriller –  
but the final page is missing so I'll never know the killer.'

And thus it was across the world: every single child  
and grown-up who'd been well-behaved suddenly went wild  
and started cursing loudly. There never were such ructions,  
as people tried in vain to follow manuals and instructions.

And even I, I have to say, suspected I'd explode  
when I discovered I required a fourteen-digit code.  
Then Sophie said, 'by EU law, it's under guarantee...  
Santa Claus will have to take responsibility.'

Santa Claus was nearing home when, Lo! his mobile rang  
and suddenly a hundred million herald angels sang.  
And then his sleigh began to slow. Some snow stuck to his clothes.  
The glow inside him faded. A tear ran down his nose.

‘Oh, Rudolf, what’s become of me? It makes me want to weep.  
I never should have bought that stack of records on the cheap.  
And as for that old chess set, and the colour ‘diarrhoea’,  
I’m so, so sad. I’ve gone and spoilt the season of good cheer.’

‘And look, we’re almost home. It’s cold. And there’s a fire inside.  
How I want to leave this mess, go back to bed and hide.  
Just when things are going well, the law comes in and wrecks it.  
I know it’s not the EU’s fault but I wish I’d voted *Brexit*.

But no! It’s not the law... It’s all my dubious suppliers.  
I’d like to disembowel them, like climate-change deniers!  
And now I find myself in an embarrassing position.  
But I can’t let the people down. I’m not a politician.

And so it was that Santa turned his sleigh round in the snow,  
Trying jolly hard to conjure up a ‘ho ho ho’,  
but every single disappointed person then was thrilled  
when Santa dutifully returned, and each sock was refilled.

So let this be a lesson to the people we’ve elected:  
It’s not for their own benefit that they’re the ones selected.  
Now they have a duty. For all across the nation,  
Girls and boys – and parents too – are filled with expectation.

*Happy Christmas 2019*