

The Midnight Messenger

Summer Issue

Mr Likesalist's Seasonal Scribblings

Father Christmas's chief elf gives the latest goss

Hooray for the summer! But while most magical folk are happily off on their hols, strange and not very pleasant things have been happening at the North Pole. Mr Likesalist tells us more...

Christmas House is very quiet this summer. I don't mean it isn't busy. No indeed, it's as full of magical folk as ever. I mean it's literally quiet. So quiet in fact, that you can even hear the mice pattering along behind the walls and under the floor.

I'm scribbling this at a table in one of our biggest toy-making rooms but even though it's full of elves, the only creature I'm able to talk to is a large, white wolf. As you've do doubt guessed, something very strange has happened and I'm afraid it's the fault of a rather nasty group of goblins who have caught us all off guard.

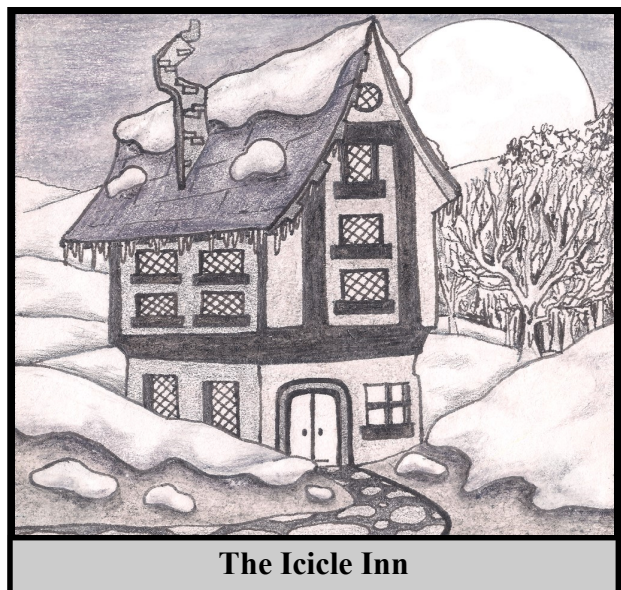
Things started to go wrong on the day after Easter. Most folk in Christmas House took the day off to finish eating their Easter eggs and have a lie in bed, but not me. I never get a proper rest! Father Christmas called me into his office early in the morning, looking far too bright and cheerful for the time of day, and asked me if I'd mind delivering a letter for him to one of his wolf friends from the Watching Wood.

Well I said yes of course, because I'm nothing if not accommodating, and luckily he made it clear that I didn't have to go into the forest itself. The Watching Wood is a creepy, dangerous sort of place you see, although some say it's beautiful. Rudolph, for example, because he's one of those types who can't see the bad in anything. There are always folk who think like that. You have to feel sorry for them really, as they're just a bit thick.

Anyway as I was saying, instead of

having to enter the forest, all I had to do was go to a place called the Icicle Inn, which is a large hotel for magical travellers on the edge of the trees. It isn't very far from Christmas House - about a mile or so that's all - and Father Christmas told me that the wolf the letter was for would meet me there.

I set off early with my snow shoes on and strode happily through the gardens of Christmas House, past the ice sculptures and the fields of Christmas trees, then out of the gate and on across the sparkling snow. Although it was cold, it was a gor-



The Icicle Inn

geous day and the sky was bright blue. It was clear too, without the chaotic mess of clouds. I do like a nice clean sky. I spent most of the journey whistling little walking tunes to myself and thinking how lucky I was to be out of my office and by the time I arrived at the Icicle Inn I was in a very good mood indeed.

The inn itself was looking particularly pretty that morning too. It is built of witch's wattle and daub, which can change colour to suit the weather, allowing it to

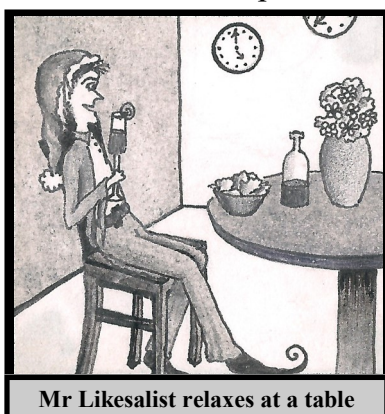
blend beautifully with the surrounding snow. Everlasting icicles hang in rows from all the doors and windows, twinkling in the sunshine if it's daytime or in the starlight if it's night. Behind the inn, the twisted, icy trees of the Watching Wood stretch away as far as the eye can see, which can be a little unsettling in the dark, but not so bad on a sunny day.

In the distance I could also see the thin line of the Glittergush, a long river which runs down from the mountains and all the way through the Watching Wood, snaking through the trees like a silver ribbon before it disappears underground. Like all the rivers here it's completely frozen over, but they do say that somewhere in the middle of the forest, in amongst the darkness where the oldest trees grow, the ice disappears and the river runs free. Not that I've ever really believed that – I mean the Watching Wood is definitely a very old and magical place – but a river that isn't frozen up here in the North Pole?! Nonsense.

I was still thinking about it though, as I arrived on the Icicle Inn's doorstep and shook the snow from my shoes. Anyone with any sense would agree with me, I told myself. All the rivers up here are thick with ice and one that isn't is just a silly rumour made up by people with too much imagination and not enough to do.

What I didn't realise as I stepped inside, was that I was about to be proved wrong.

I sat down at a small table in a warm, friendly-looking room. A fire crackled in one corner and in another an indoor fountain sprang up in little watery arches from the floor. I could tell it was an enchanted fountain because the water disappeared before it hit the ground. The white walls were lined with bookshelves and colourful clocks which told you what time it was in all the different Magic Lands, and the soft, ticking sounds they made were very relaxing.



Mr Likesalist relaxes at a table

As soon as I sat down a small fairy server flew over to me and asked if I'd like anything to eat or drink, so I ordered myself a snowdrop salad and a very small glass of rainbow wine. Then, I looked around.

It was quite busy for a Monday. There were tables and chairs of all shapes and sizes filled with folk of all shapes and sizes to match. Most of them were chattering away or reading, and all around them fairies fluttered to and fro with trays of drinks and food and little notebooks tucked under their arms, ready to write down any new orders on the way.

Two large, marmalade cats lay stretched out in front of the fire and a golden-eyed pixie danced from table to table, selling a selection of spells and freshly-picked flowers.

On the far side of the room, I noticed a group of goblins huddled on a bench beside the wall, whispering quickly to each other as if whatever they were talking about wasn't for other people's ears. One of them caught me watching them, and being the polite kind of elf I am, I pretended to look away. Out of the corner of my eye I could still see them though, whispering again. They'll be up to no good, I thought to myself, for I have never really liked goblins and don't trust them at all. Still, I thought it best to mind my own business.

I ran my eyes across the room a second time. In spite of all these faces, there was no wolf to be seen. I checked my watch and took Father Christmas's letter out of my pocket. The wolf was obviously late. How irritating! I mean, the Chief Elf of Christmas House has better things to do than hang about waiting for wild animals who obviously have no idea about the importance of being on time.

I stared crossly at the fluffy white carpeted floor, wondering whether I could find someone trustworthy to leave the letter with, when something caught my eye which nearly made me fall off my chair.

The floor was staring back.

Or at least that's what I thought at first glance. Two bright blue eyes appeared out of thin air, and as I watched, a piece of floor seemed to be moving towards me. I stared and stared, but it was only when the eyes got right up to my table that I began to see what was really going on.

The wolf stood up. He was completely

white, exactly as white in fact, as the fluffy carpet. He had been crouching down against it, shuffling along on his belly so that I couldn't see where he ended and the fluffy floor began. If he had closed his eyes, I never would have seen him at all. It was only now that he was standing with a bookshelf behind him that he had become visible. He jumped up onto a large chair beside mine and held out a paw.

"Hello Whitelight!" I said, shaking his paw and smiling because it so happens that I knew this particular wolf quite well. He had sometimes visited Christmas House and was one of Father Christmas's favourite guests. "I didn't know it was you I'd be meeting."

"No. Well that's because I'm here in secret," he replied with a growl.

My skin prickled a little because Whitelight is a ferocious looking fellow and even though he's known to be wise and well behaved, a wolf is a wolf after all. I covered my nerves up with a grin and quickly handed over Father Christmas's letter, glad that I would soon be on my way.

Whitelight did not smile back. He took the letter but instead of reading it, he put it away. "Never mind that now!" he hissed, "There are more important things – not very pleasant things – going on here today. Tell me, have you seen those goblins over there?"

"Yes of course," I replied, glancing over at them for the second time that morning and wondering why Whitelight seemed so agitated.

"Don't look at them!" he snapped, "Or they'll know we're talking about them. They're a secretive lot, these goblins, and they haven't stopped whispering about you since you walked in."

"Me?" I squeaked in surprise.

"Yes. You. And if you'll stop interrupting I'll tell you why." He went quiet for a moment and looked at me as if daring me to say another word.

I shut my mouth and bit my tongue.

"Good," said Whitelight, apparently satisfied that I was ready to sit and listen, "then I'll explain. They're plotting – I've been lying next to them on the floor with my eyes shut for over an hour. They had

no clue that I was there so I was able to listen to everything they had to say. One of them, that sickly looking green fellow in the corner, has been telling the others that he has a cousin in the Watching Wood who has cooked up a plan to get into



Whitelight explains what he heard

Christmas House. As you know, they're always trying to find a way to steal the Christmas presents and normally it doesn't matter one bit because they're protected by so many magical creatures.

I nodded enthusiastically, I'm ever so proud of all the different folk who come together to protect Christmas House. "You'd better believe it," I said. "As well as us elves there are fairies and ice witches and yetis and the Snow King and oh, hundreds more. Even the North Wind watches over us—"

"Yes, yes," grunted the wolf. "But this is different. This time I think they've got something. It has to do with the river – the Glittergush. You're aware that when it leaves the Watching Wood it dips down underground and runs right under Christmas house?"

I nodded.

"And that you lot over there – elves and whatnot – all use it to drink from?"

I nodded again.

"Well..." and here Whitelight's growl turned into an angry snarl, "...they're going to poison it."

At this point I must have turned a similar colour to Whitelight himself. I felt quite faint. Whitelight nudged my glass of rainbow wine towards me and I took a long sip and tried to get over the shock.

"But how?" I asked as I began to think it over, "No one can get into that river and poison it because the ice is too thick. Why, it would take a dragon to melt it! And the only dragon around here is Cracklebone, the one we have living under Christmas House." Then all at once a new thought struck me.

“Unless...”

Whitelight nodded as I trailed away. He had guessed what I was thinking.

“Yes,” he said. “There’s an unfrozen bit of river deep in the heart of the Watching Wood.”

“It can’t be real?!”

“As real as you and me. I know. I’ve seen it.”

“But what can we do? When is it, when are they planning this horrible thing?”

Whitelight sighed.

I watched him, waiting for an answer.

“That’s the problem,” he said eventually. “That’s why they haven’t stopped talking about you since you walked in.” He nodded in the goblins’ direction. “They thought everyone would be in Christmas House this morning – it was part of the plan. You see, they’ve already done it. Probably while you were on your way here, to meet me.”

We set off back to Christmas House at once. To save time, Whitelight gave me a ride on his back. Now, I don’t know if any of you Midnight Messenger readers have ever ridden a wolf, but I have to say it was a hair-raising experience and I didn’t enjoy it at all. As well as the fact that my stomach was already churning with dread at what we would find, Whitelight sped across the snow so quickly that my hat blew clean away. He twisted and turned without warning as his clever feet found the quickest path and I had to hang on to his fur for dear life.

By the time we got there I felt as though I’d just got off a roller coaster and my ears were like blocks of ice. He rocketed through the front door and into the hall. Then he stopped. And both of our mouths dropped open in horror.

All around us Father Christmas’s helpers stood as still as statues. They were half way through doing things: an elf sliding down the banister with a chocolate egg in his hands, another one standing by a window reading a book, Madam Munch our fairy chef was in the middle of the hallway with a breakfast tray and even the cat was frozen solid where he slept on his favourite chair.

Room after room we went through, and everywhere it was the same. I waved my hands in front of the helpers eyes, and Whitelight even tried to scratch one to see if it would make a difference, but it was no good, nobody moved an inch. They were all still

and cold and hard, it was as if they had been frozen from the inside out.

When we reached Father Christmas’s office, I knocked loudly on the door hoping somehow he’d been spared, but there was no answer. I took a deep breath and turned the handle. The door creaked open and there he was. Frozen solid. Sitting in a rocking chair with his mouth wide open, about to eat a mince pie. Whitelight and I looked at each other in despair.

“What magic could be strong enough to affect Father Christmas?” I breathed.

Whitelight shook his head. “I don’t know,” he answered gravely. “But it’ll be something those goblins found in The Watching Wood. Make no mistake, there’s magic there that’s as old as the hills. My guess is that they went deep into the forest where the Glittergush isn’t frozen and dropped some potion or other into the water. Then everyone here drank it as usual and this is the result.”

“But what are we going to do?” I wailed. “We can’t leave them like this! And have you noticed that there doesn’t seem to be a single present left in the house?”

“What did you expect?” shrugged the wolf. “I should think they’ve taken all the presents away back into the trees by now and are sharing them out between them. Or arguing over them at any rate – goblins never have been much for sharing you know. Anyway, we can’t do a lot about that – first things first, we have to find a way to reverse this freezing spell. See you later.” And he turned around and leapt out of the nearest door.

“Where are you going?” I called after him.

“To fetch the Northern Witch!” he howled from outside. “She’s the only one I know of who has a chance of sorting this out!” I turned to a window and watched him run off into the snow. Then I sat down to wait.

He was back surprisingly fast. It was



The Northern Witch arrives

hardly more than an hour later when I heard a sharp knock on the front door and opened it to find the Northern Witch hovering above the doorstep on her broomstick with Whitelight by her

side and a scowl on her face.

“Goblins!” she muttered to herself as I showed her inside, then went on to describe what she thought of them in a lot of not very polite words which I’d rather not write down.

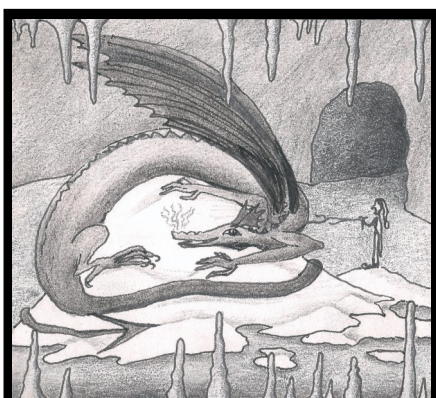


Down the stairs with the Northern Witch

“I need a dragon,” she told Whitelight. Then she turned to me and asked me to show her down to the caves under Christmas House where Cracklebone lives. Luckily we were able fly there on her broomstick, otherwise it would have taken ages because the only other way to is to go down a dark winding staircase which is thousands of steps long.

As it was, we shot down in minutes then through a long corridor and into the caves. I noticed the Glittergush streaming past beneath us, calm and cold and beautiful, heading even deeper underground. I sighed, I had always loved coming down here and sitting beside the river, but now I eyed it with suspicion. I don’t suppose I will ever trust the water from it again.

Anyway, we landed in a large cavern,



Cracklebone gets woken up

where Cracklebone lay sleeping as usual on his pile of gold. It was very hot because Cracklebone’s skin gives off a lot of heat even when he’s asleep and I had to

nudge him with a long stick to wake him, for fear of burning my hand. He opened one lazy eye and looked at me.

“What do you want?” he drawled and a thin plume of smoke whistled from his nose and twisted itself around his head. I explained what had happened as quickly as I could, while the Northern Witch nipped back to the banks of the Glittergush and peered into the dark water, chanting under her breath. She

hurried over to us.

“Yes, it’s been poisoned alright,” she said, “they’ve dropped a very ancient freezing potion into it upstream and whoever drinks from it turns into ice about an hour after.” She turned to Cracklebone. “I can brew a tonic to fix it, but I need a special ingredient.”

Cracklebone raised an eyebrow. “Oh yes?” he smouldered.

“One of your claws.”

I could tell by his frown that Cracklebone wasn’t especially happy about this, but nevertheless he lifted up one of his giant feet and snapped off a claw.

The Northern Witch riffled through her bag and took out a pair of tongs to pick it up. Like the rest of Cracklebone, it was still very hot. Then she fished around for a cauldron and some bottles and began to mix up a potion. When she added the claw it dissolved completely and the potion turned bright red. At last, she took it over to the river and tipped about half of it in. To my amazement, I saw the red liquid travel the wrong way up the river, against the current and out of the cave.

“That should do it!” she said, then tried to thank Cracklebone but he dozed off while she was still talking. “Ah well,” she laughed. “Dragons are always bored by everything that’s not about gold.” We got back on her broom and flew up the stairs.

For the rest of the day the witch, Whitelight and I spent our time tipping spoonfuls of the red potion on every single frozen person in the house, one drop each. It would take about two hours to thaw, the witch told us, then flew off back home and left us to wait...

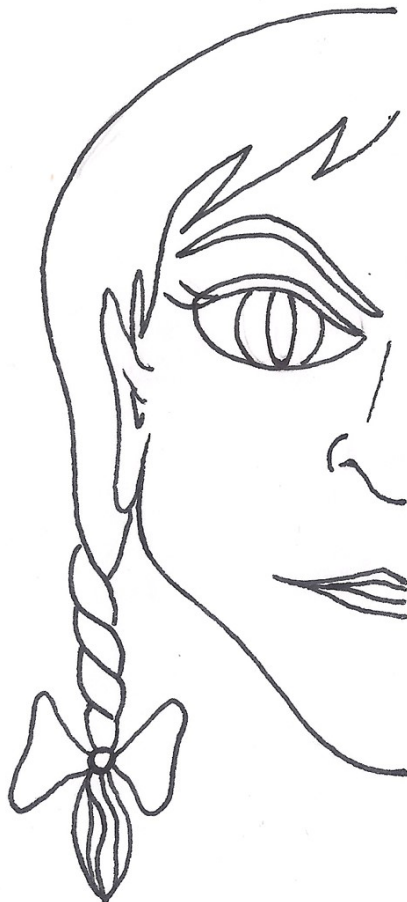
...Which takes me back to the beginning – to the place where I started telling you this story – a house full of silence with a wolf sitting opposite me, twiddling his paws.

I expect Father Christmas will be the first to wake up because we dropped the potion on him first. Goodness knows what he’ll say about all the presents having gone. I don’t think he’ll let those goblins keep them, do you? In fact I bet he’ll send someone to find them straight away. I do hope that this time, just for once, it isn’t me!

Mr Likesalist

Finish off the goblins

Mr Likesalist has been trying to draw pictures of the goblins he saw at the Inn, so that he can show Father Christmas which ones they are when he wakes up. **Can you help him by completing their faces?**



Postcard from the Easter Bunny

The Easter Bunny has gone away for break after Easter, but he sent a post card to the Midnight Messenger offices to say hello to everyone. Have a look at it below and find out what he's been getting up

Dear Everyone,

After a busy Easter I've hopped off to visit some of my old friends - the Cornish piskies. For those of you who haven't heard of them - Cornish piskies are fairy folk who live in the south of England, they are smaller than elves but bigger than fairies and they live in the ground in holes under hedgrows - which suits me very well. They don't have wings, but they do like jumping and they can jump right up into treetops in one leap. Yesterday one of them challenged me to a jumping competition, from a cliff to a small rocky island a little way out to sea. I'm afraid I missed and landed in the water - but it was lots of fun anyway and a very nice dolphin picked me up and carried me back to shore.

Lots of love, The Easter Bunny x

P.S. Can you count the caterpillars hiding by the piskies? (Below)



Tooth Fairy tours the world's teeth



We have sent the Gossipping ghost rushing around after the Tooth Fairy this summer...

I've followed the Tooth Fairy all over the place this month and I'm exhausted! She has been dashing around at top speed, checking children's teeth while they sleep to make sure they're all nice and clean. She likes to check up on these things after Easter and is slowly making her way around the world.

This week she's been whizzing around France and next week she'll be in England, then Wales, then Scotland, then Canada, America, China, Australia and Greece. So look out if you live in any of these places, and make sure you brush before bed!

Flutterdust the moth is flying her around as usual, (she's a bit old these days to do all that flying herself), and I have to say that he looks almost as tired as me.

"Every muscle in my wings is aching!" he muttered yesterday at dawn, but the Tooth Fairy insists the exercise is good for him, not least because he spent the whole of Easter wolfing down as much chocolate as he could lay his legs on.

"All this flying will work it off and get

him fit again!" she said.

She herself never seems to tire. She is cheerful and lively from dusk until dawn and the only time she isn't happy is if she finds teeth which aren't as white as they should be. She has had to scribble a couple of cross little notes to leave under pillows, reminding children who don't brush properly that she can't make use of teeth if they're rotten. Luckily there have only been one or two. I did offer to wake the offenders up and scare them for her, but she didn't think that was a very nice idea at

"...make sure you brush your teeth before bed!"

all and got quite annoyed with me.

"Frightening people is a horrid thing to do!" she snapped, "Just because you're a ghost, it doesn't mean you can go around being badly behaved."

That's me told then. But I think I might go and scare someone anyway, as soon as I have finished this article - I need to relax and have some fun. I'll just make sure it's someone bad. I hear there are some rotten-hearted goblins about in The Watching Wood at the moment. Perhaps I'll go there.

The Gossipping Ghost

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF...

...CRACKLEBONE THE DRAGON

What time do you get up and start your day?

I don't get up if I can help it. I like to lie on my bed of gold all day and guard it from thieves.

In the morning, what's the first thing you do?

Open an eye and check none of my gold is missing.

What do you do for lunch?

I like a cup of molten lava and a rock cake. Santa's fairy chef, Madam Munch, sends me

down a daily supply from the kitchens of Christmas House.

When you're not working, what do you do to relax?

Dragons don't work or relax. They simply guard gold. However, sometimes in the dead of night I like to get out of my cave, fly over the mountains and scare a few trolls.

What time do you go to bed?

I hardly ever leave it.

If you could do any other job instead, what would it be?

I'm very fond of being a dragon actually, and if I had to be something else it would have to be something just as frightening and big. I don't know - a sea monster perhaps.

