

**Felicity  
Frobisher and  
the Three-  
Legged  
Areturan Mouse  
Santa**

Marcus Chown

*Felicity Frobisher saves Christmas*

## **CHAPTER 1: Nobody thinks of the fish at Christmas**

On the first day of Christmas, Felicity Frobisher brought home an angel she had made at school. "That's nice, Felicity," said her mum. "Let's put it away in the loft where it'll be safe and won't come to any harm." And her mother wrapped it up in a candlewick bedspread and two rugs and put it in the bottom of a deep packing crate in the darkest, dingiest corner of the loft.

On the second day of Christmas, Felicity Frobisher brought home a miniature Christmas tree she had made at school. "That's nice," said her mum. "Let's take it to the South Inchley rubbish tip. There isn't much that's cheery out there and it'll be visible for miles and miles around." And they took it in the car to the outskirts of the town and left it in an ocean of wind-blown rubbish under a sky filled with screeching seagulls.

On the third day of Christmas season, Felicity Frobisher brought home a mobile with her name on it that she had made at school. "That's nice," said her

mum. "I know just where this will be appreciated." And they went to the river in the middle of town, and her mum tied a slab of concrete to the mobile and threw it off the bridge. "Nobody thinks of the fish at Christmas," said Felicity's mum. "Now they'll have something cheery to look at."

On the fourth day of Christmas, Felicity Frobisher was talking with her Inchley Manor classmate, Marigold Gloves, over the garden fence. "My mum is so caring and thoughtful with all the Christmas things I make at school," said Felicity. "What does your mum do with yours?"

"Come and look," said Marigold Gloves.

Marigold's Christmas angel was in a glass conservatory built especially for it onto the front of the house by Marigold's dad. The angel was on a turntable on top of a solid marble plinth, carved especially by Marigold's mum. As the turntable turned, it was lit by coloured spotlights, which turned it from baby pink to violet to pea green, then back to baby pink again.

Marigold's miniature Christmas tree was in the living room on top of a pyramid of presents wrapped in red and gold. And, when the door to the living room opened, it triggered a flurry of indoor fireworks and a fanfare of trumpets from a speaker that Marigold's dad had cunningly concealed in a coffee table.

Marigold's Christmas mobile was in her bedroom. It had its own webcam beaming pictures to [www.marigoldsbeautifulmobile.com](http://www.marigoldsbeautifulmobile.com), a website especially set up by Marigold's dad so that children all over the world who were not fortunate enough to be in the same room as Marigold's mobile could see it in its full glory whenever they were sitting at a computer connected to the Internet.

Seeing the enormous efforts that Marigold's mum and dad had gone to on Marigold's behalf, it occurred to Felicity for the very first time that that maybe her mum *was not as caring and thoughtful* with the things she brought home from school as she had believed. From her bedroom window, she looked down forlornly at the spectacular multicoloured light show going on in

Marigold's conservatory. It was drawing not only people from neighbouring streets but coach parties from far and wide. TV crews were jostling each other with their outstretched microphones, trying to be the ones to get an exclusive interview with Marigold. Felicity Frobisher drew the curtains and sat down on her bed - *very sad*.

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But what Felicity did not know was that the curator of the South Inchley's art museum had an unusual hobby. Ray Topless liked to scuba dive in industrial rivers in mid-winter. And, the day before, just as he was swimming under the bridge in the middle of town, a mobile attached to a slab of concrete plunged down through the murk in front of him. "Oh my goodness!" he bubbled into his mouthpiece. "*Where* did that come from?"

Safely back on the river bank, Ray Topless examined his find with rapidly mounting excitement. "I don't believe it!" he declared to a surprised woman walking by with her baby chihuahua. "It's a true work of

art!" Still in his wet suit and dripping, he jumped into his car and raced off into the centre of town. With only *seconds* to spare before the closing deadline, he entered Felicity Frobisher's mobile for the prestigious Turnoff Art Prize.

## CHAPTER 2: The Turnoff Prize

That night, as Felicity Frobisher and her mum and dad ate their tea on their laps in front of the television, Felicity said: "Mum, why do we never have any Christmas decorations or cards?"

"I told you before, Felicity," said Felicity's mum, impatiently. "Last year, I went Muslim - and you know us Muslims don't celebrate Christmas. This year they had to cancel Christmas when Santa's reindeer ate a box of chocolates - and you know how sick reindeer get when they eat chocolate. Now, *quiet, please* - it's the Turnoff Prize."

Felicity was not sure she was convinced by her mum's explanations. She took a mouthful of celery bake and looked at the TV screen. Veteran presenter Joan Bakewell-Tart was touring the artworks short-listed for this year's Turnoff Prize.

"Nice hair," said Felicity's dad.

"Yes," agreed Felicity's mum. "Good to see someone of her age who hasn't let herself go."

*Give me strength!* thought Felicity. Sometimes she despaired of her parents' lack of appreciation of the visual arts.

Joan Bakewell-Tart introduced the short-listed artworks, one at a time. There was a wigwam covered in the names of all the people the artist has wept with, by Stacy Ermin. There was a painting of two sausage dogs sleeping by a blue Californian swimming pool, by David Mockney. There was a giant pork pie preserved in aspic and sliced down the middle so you could see its insides, by Damien Dewhurst. "And, last but not least..." announced Joan Bakewell-Tart.

The TV camera panned to the next artwork. As it came into view, Felicity nearly choked on her celery bake. Her mum actually squeaked as her hand shot to her mouth. Her dad got up from his armchair and pointed dumbly in disbelief at the screen. For, there on the TV, for everyone to see, was...

*Felicity's Christmas mobile!*

"Now, over to you, Sir Nicholas," said Joan Bakewell-Tart. The broadcast cut to Sir Nicholas

Serotonin, chairman of the judges, who was standing on a platform holding up a shiny gold envelope. He opened the envelope and pulled out a crisp piece of white paper. Clearing his throat, he read: "And the winner of this year's Turnoff Prize is...

There was a loud drum roll.

"... is..."

"Come on!" urged Felicity's mum.

"... is..."

"Get on with it!" urged Felicity's dad.

Sir Nicholas Serotonin took a deep breath. "The winner is... *Felicity Frobisher!*"

### **CHAPTER 3: A freak space junk accident**

"How? Why? I don't understand," was all Felicity's mum could splutter over and over again as they were driven to the TV studio. Moments after the incredible announcement, the phone had rung and Felicity had picked it up. "This is the Turnoff Prize," said a TV researcher who had somehow managed to track down Felicity. "Can you come in to receive the award in person? We'll send a car right away."

The studio was in the centre of town and they arrived with only moments to spare. Felicity was hurried along a corridor to the back-stage area, and from there onto the stage itself. As Felicity blinked under the bright studio lights, there was a standing ovation from the audience of artists and art critics and footballers' wives. "Your Christmas mobile is a masterpiece, a *tour de force*," gushed Sir Nicholas Serotonin as he handed Felicity the Turnoff trophy - a giant gold off-switch. "Have you always been an artistic genius?"

“Er, no,” said Felicity. “I think I must have just got hang of it.”

“*Think I just got the hang of it! Did you hear that?*” exclaimed Sir Nicholas. The audience roared with laughter. “The *modesty* of the girl!”

In the “Green Room”, where all the TV people relaxed with champagne after the event, Felicity was congratulated by so many celebrities she found it difficult to remember all their names. The ones that stuck in her mind, however, were footballer David Peckham, who invited her for a kick-about at Wembley Stadium; poet Wendy Can’t-Cope, who said she had been inspired to write a major new cycle of poems *all about her mobile*; pop singer Elicia Keyring, who was desperate to duet with her at the “Glacé Cherry” festival; and nightclub owner, Peter Stringvest, who promised her a VIP pass to his club and “unlimited champagne for you and *all your girlfriends*.”

*What girlfriends?* thought Felicity, as she was kissed on both cheeks by the spray-tanned and wrinkly Mr Stringvest and his curvy blonde girlfriend (or was it his

great-granddaughter?) *And, aren't I a bit young for champagne?*

But, when everyone had gone, Felicity found herself sitting alone on a sofa in the Green Room with her mum. She held up the giant gold Off-switch of the Turnoff prize. "My Christmas mobile wasn't that bad, after all, was it, mum?"

Felicity's mum looked uncomfortable. She shook her head, embarrassed.

"And fish and seagulls don't really miss having Christmas decorations, do they?"

"No," mumbled her mum, looking even more uncomfortable.

"Then *why* did you throw my Christmas mobile in the river tied to a bit of concrete? *Why* did you take my miniature Christmas tree to the South Inchley rubbish tip? *Why* did you wrap my Christmas angel in a candlewick bedspread and two rugs and put it at the bottom of a deep packing crate in the darkest, dingiest corner of the loft?" Her mum hung her head in shame as Felicity continued. " *Why*, every year, do you tell me that

you have suddenly become a Muslim or that Christmas has been cancelled?"

Felicity pointed at the silver and gold tinsel draped around the walls of the Green Room, the rainbow coloured paper chains looped above their heads. "Every year, I wonder why people put up decorations *like these* if they know Christmas isn't going to happen," said Felicity. "You always say it's because they *can't bear to admit Christmas has been cancelled*. And I *believe you!*"

Felicity got up from the sofa and began pacing up and down the Green Room. "But the decorations are *real*, aren't they, mum? Because Christmas hasn't been cancelled, has it? It's *never* cancelled." Her mum, head bowed, looked down at the floor. "It's *you*, isn't it? You *want* it to be cancelled." Felicity stopped in front of her mother. "Mum, *why* do you *hate* Christmas so much?"

Her mother began to shake. Tears started cascading down her cheeks. "*Mum?*" said Felicity, concerned. "*What's the matter?*" Felicity found a box of tissues and handed one to her mum. She wiped away the tears and looked up. "Yes, you're right, Felicity, I *do hate*

Christmas. But I've got a good reason. Do you remember my mum and dad, your grandparents?"

"The ones we never hear from because they emigrated to a remote village in Peru with no postal service, phone or Internet?" said Felicity. "What do *they* have to do with anything?"

"Well, they didn't go to Peru, Felicity."

"*Didn't go to Peru?*" said Felicity, astounded. "Where did they go then?"

"They didn't go anywhere, Felicity. They're dead."

"What!"

"I'm sorry, Felicity. But I didn't like to tell you."

"Didn't like to tell me! Oh my goodness. I don't believe it! *Everyone* gets told when their grandparents die. They don't get told they've *emigrated to Peru*. *Why* didn't you tell me the truth?"

"Oh, I wanted to, Felicity, believe me, but..."

"But *what?*"

"But I couldn't because of the... *distressing circumstances.*"

Felicity looked at her mum, sharply. "*What* distressing circumstances?"

"It was a freak space junk accident," explained her mum. "They were lying in bed one morning when a piece of re-entering Space Shuttle crashed through the roof of their house, vaporised the water tank in their loft and punched a fist-sized hole in the dead centre of their bed."

Felicity listened, appalled. "They would have survived," sobbed her mum. "Unfortunately, they'd had a row the previous night over what soap opera to watch on TV. And, when they woke up they were both full of remorse and said sorry and hugged each other – *in the dead centre of the bed!*"

"*Oh, mum,*" said Felicity, sitting beside her mum and throwing her arms around her. "How awful."

"I know. It was so terrible I just couldn't tell you. Which is why I made up the story about Peru."

"But I don't understand," said Felicity. "*Why* the Christmas thing? Why do you *hate* Christmas so?"

"Didn't I say?" said her mum.

"No," said Felicity.

“It all happened... I mean, the freak space junk accident happened...” Her mum started crying again. “... on *Christmas morning*.”

“Oh,” said Felicity, everything suddenly coming together and making sense.

“So celebrating and having fun on Christmas Day – the day that piece of space junk went through your grandparents’ bed – well, it’s just been too painful, Felicity.” Her mum broke down again. Felicity gave her another hug.

The door to the Green Room swung open and a young man with an earpiece and a mobile phone came in. “Your mum overcome with the emotion of you winning the Turnoff Prize?” he said to Felicity.

“Something like that,” she said.

The man tapped the screen of his mobile phone. “The car to take you home is ready now.”

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Sitting in the back of the car, Felicity's mum finally stopped sobbing. "It's such a relief the truth is now out in the open," she said. "All these years it's been such a terrible weight on my shoulders." The car sped away from traffic lights and passed a giant P&Q superstore. "Stop!" her mum shouted.

The car screeched to a halt. "*What?!*" said the driver, swivelling around to them in the back.

"Wait!" said Felicity's mum. And, with that, she leapt out of the car and disappeared into the giant P&Q superstore. Five minutes later, she re-emerged, dragging...

*A huge Christmas tree!*

"Don't just sit there," she yelled at Felicity. "Get out and help me."

\* \* \* \* \*

Felicity's dad came out of the house as Felicity and her mum were pulling the Christmas tree out of the boot of the car. "*What's that?!*" he said.

"What do you *think* it is?" said her mum.

"But, I thought..." said her dad, puzzled.

"It's a long story," said Felicity's mum. "But the important thing is that this year we're going to give Felicity the best Christmas she has ever had."

"Don't you mean the *only* Christmas she has ever had?"

"Well, er, yes," said her mum, embarrassed. "Now, don't just stand there. Give me a hand."

As Felicity's mum and dad carried the Christmas tree up the path and into the house, Felicity found herself standing, watching, speechless. Even winning the prestigious Turnoff prize had nothing on this.

Marigold Gloves was leaning over the fence, having just finished a day's filming for a special 3D HD movie about the phenomenon of her Christmas angel, mobile and miniature tree. "What's going on?" she said.

"I'm going to have my first-ever Christmas!" said Felicity. "And I can *hardly wait!*"

## CHAPTER 4: Crisis at Christmas

The night before Christmas Felicity's dad left a steaming cup of tea by the chimney for Father Christmas. "Won't it get cold?" said Felicity.

"Umm," said Felicity's dad, thoughtfully. And replaced it with a glass of milk from the fridge.

"What are those potatoes?" said Felicity.

"For the reindeer," said Felicity's dad. "I couldn't find any carrots. But reindeer eat potaoes, don't they?"

"Umm," said Felicity, not sure whether they did or not.

"It was that or onions," her dad explained. "*Or* carrot and coriander soup."

"Oh," said Felicity, seeing her dad's dilemma.

Getting to sleep the night before Christmas is never easy. But imagine if it was the night before your *very first Christmas*. As Felicity lay in her bed, all she could think about was the following morning. Only *9 hours 16 minutes and 32 seconds to go* (not that she was counting).

She tried all kinds of tricks to get to sleep. She counted backwards from 1000 *in steps of 5*. But she lost count at 995. Maths was not one of her strong subjects. She even tried listing the capital cities and national dishes of the world's 192 countries. But she got stuck wondering whether the national dish of France was French fries or French bread. Geography was not one of her strong points either.

It did not help that on 17 separate occasions she was absolutely convinced she heard reindeer chomping potatoes and on a further 26 occasions someone slurping milk. But, finally, at 7.55am, after a stressful night of tossing and turning, Felicity fell off to sleep. Only to be woken *five minutes later* by the nerve-jangling jangle of her alarm clock, which she had set for 8.00am.

"Ahhhhh!" she exclaimed, falling out of bed onto the hard bedroom floor.

"Felicity!" shouted her mum through the wall. "Are you OK?"

"Fine," replied Felicity, though she was dazed and confused. It was only as she picked herself up and

brushed herself down that she realised the incredible, unbelievable truth.

*It was Christmas morning!*

Instantly, all of her tiredness melted away. She shot out of the door, sliding on the landing in her bare feet, and jumped, half fell, down the staircase, three steps at a time. Breathless, yet hardly daring to breathe, she swung back the living room door. And saw... and saw...

*Nothing!*

The Christmas tree stood in the corner of the room, covered in tinsel and shiny balls and winking fairy lights, just as the way it had been night before. But that was what was so terribly, horrifyingly, wrong. It was *just the way it had been the night before*. The floor beneath the tree was totally bare. There wasn't even the tiniest, incy-winciest present for Felicity.

Standing in the doorway, shocked, Felicity quickly scanned the room. The potatoes were untouched, the milk unslurped. Her mum and dad, driven from their bed by the racket she had made clattering down the stairs,

were now standing beside her. "What's the matter?" said her mother.

"Father Christmas..." said Felicity, fighting back the tears. "He *hasn't come!*"

"Don't be silly, Felicity," said her dad, pushing past her into the room to take a look for himself. "Oh," he said, when he saw the empty space under the tree. "The girl's right, you know."

"What could have happened?" said Felicity's mum, distraught.

Felicity's dad switched on the TV, his principal source of news and entertainment. For a few moments the screen was filled with rosy-cheeked choir boys, singing carols at King's College in Cambridge. Then the picture went blank and a continuity announcer said: "We interrupt this programme to bring you an emergency news broadcast. Over to our newsroom and ace news reader, Sophie Haporth..."

"Thank you," said Sophie Haporth, taking a last, quick sip from a glass of water and looking up from the sheaf of notes on her super-neat newsdesk.

"Nice hair," said Felicity's dad.

"Shussh! Not now!" said her mum.

In a grave voice, Sophie Haporth announced: "This morning the whole world is in a state of shock. No child on any continent has received a present today. Father Christmas simply hasn't come. Is he ill? Is he on strike? At this moment in time *we just don't know.*"

"I don't believe it," said Felicity. "I've never had a Christmas before. And, the first one I get, Father Christmas doesn't come!"

"Maybe he's just got the date wrong," said her mum.

"*Mum!*" said Felicity. "He only has *one date* to remember!"

"His clock needs a new battery?"

"*Dad!* You're not helping!"

"In other news," said Sophie Haporth, "NASA's Lunar Explorer satellite has entered orbit around the Moon..."

*Who's interested in that?* thought Felicity.

Disconsolate, she went up to her bedroom, where she sat

on the edge of her bed, very sad. The lights in the house next door came on and Felicity started counting. When she reached *five* the silence was broken by a shocked scream from Marigold Gloves. "Ahhhh! Where are my presents?!"

*Well, at least, it's not just me,* thought Felicity.

It seemed she been sitting on the edge of her bed for hours when her gaze alighted on the fist-sized chunk of dusty grey rock, which, along with the Turnoff trophy, she was using as a bookend. Suddenly, she jumped to her feet, eyes bright with hope. *Flummff! Of course! Why didn't I think of him before?*

Flummff was a Three-Headed Aldebaran Dust Devil. He had burst into Felicity's life one morning when she was lying in bed. A patch of her flowery bedroom wallpaper had gone all whizzy like a mirage on a summer's day, then turned into a *wormhole*, a short-cut through space-time. Out of it, in a choking cloud of eye-smarting dust, had shot Flummff, a whirlwind of grit and grime.

Flummff was from a planet orbiting the red giant star, Aldebaran-4. He had come to Earth because he was *bored* and because he wanted to have some *fun*. That fun had got Felicity, who was quiet and polite and never got into any trouble, into all kinds of hot water at school. On the plus side, though, she *had* got to travel down a wormhole to the International Space Station; to the tropical island of Hawaii; and to Flummff's horribly dusty, horribly gritty homeworld, Aldebaran-4. *And* Flummff had saved her from being beaten up by sending Jennifer Tetley, the school bully, down a wormhole and depositing her on the school roof.

The second time Flummff had come to Earth, he had brought his best friend and partner in crime, Fnfl, the Newly Wedded Capellan Toast Weevil. They had saved the Earth from an asteroid impact but accidentally sucked Felicity's school down a black hole (it was currently being re-built). The fist-sized chunk of grey rock was the souvenir Felicity had brought back from the asteroid. Nobody knew what it was – least of all her mother, who had tried to throw it in the bin on several

occasions – just as nobody knew that Felicity had had a hand in saving all life on Earth and civilisation as we know it.

Flummff came from a super-advanced alien civilisation that could do things like create wormholes and make them go anywhere he wanted. *Surely, then, he would know how to find Father Christmas?*

On the last occasion, Felicity had summoned Flummff by writing a message on a big sheet of paper and holding it up to her bedroom wall. By sheer chance, *at exactly the same time*, Flummff, bored in his own bedroom on Aldebaran-4, had opened up a wormhole into Felicity's bedroom to see what his Earth-friend was up to (Flummff was banned from *actually coming down* a wormhole because Earth was designated a 'nursery world' and out of bounds to all alien races). When he had seen Felicity's note, he had come to Earth's rescue.

*Well, it worked last time*, thought Felicity. *It's definitely worth another try.*

She found a piece of paper and, with a bright pink marker pen, wrote "HELP!!!" Then she held it up in front

of the piece of wallpaper that had turned into a wormhole that distant morning. And waited.

*And waited.*

*And waited some more.*

But, this time, nothing happened.

Finally, after what seemed hours and hours, Felicity could hold the paper up no longer and let it flutter to the floor. It had worked last time. *But it wasn't going to work this time.* Flummff wasn't there. He wasn't watching. She massaged the life back into her aching arms, then, sank back down on her bed. "Oh no," she said, quietly, her head in her hands.

## **CHAPTER 5: Tidiest Dust Devil of the Year**

A million billion kilometres away, on a very dusty planet with a giant sun hanging in its sky like an enormous blood red orange, Flummff was hearing of the latest triumph of his goody-two-shoes sister, Flummffette. "I don't believe it!" he squeaked. "She's won Tidiest Dust Devil of the Year for the *third year in a row!*"...