

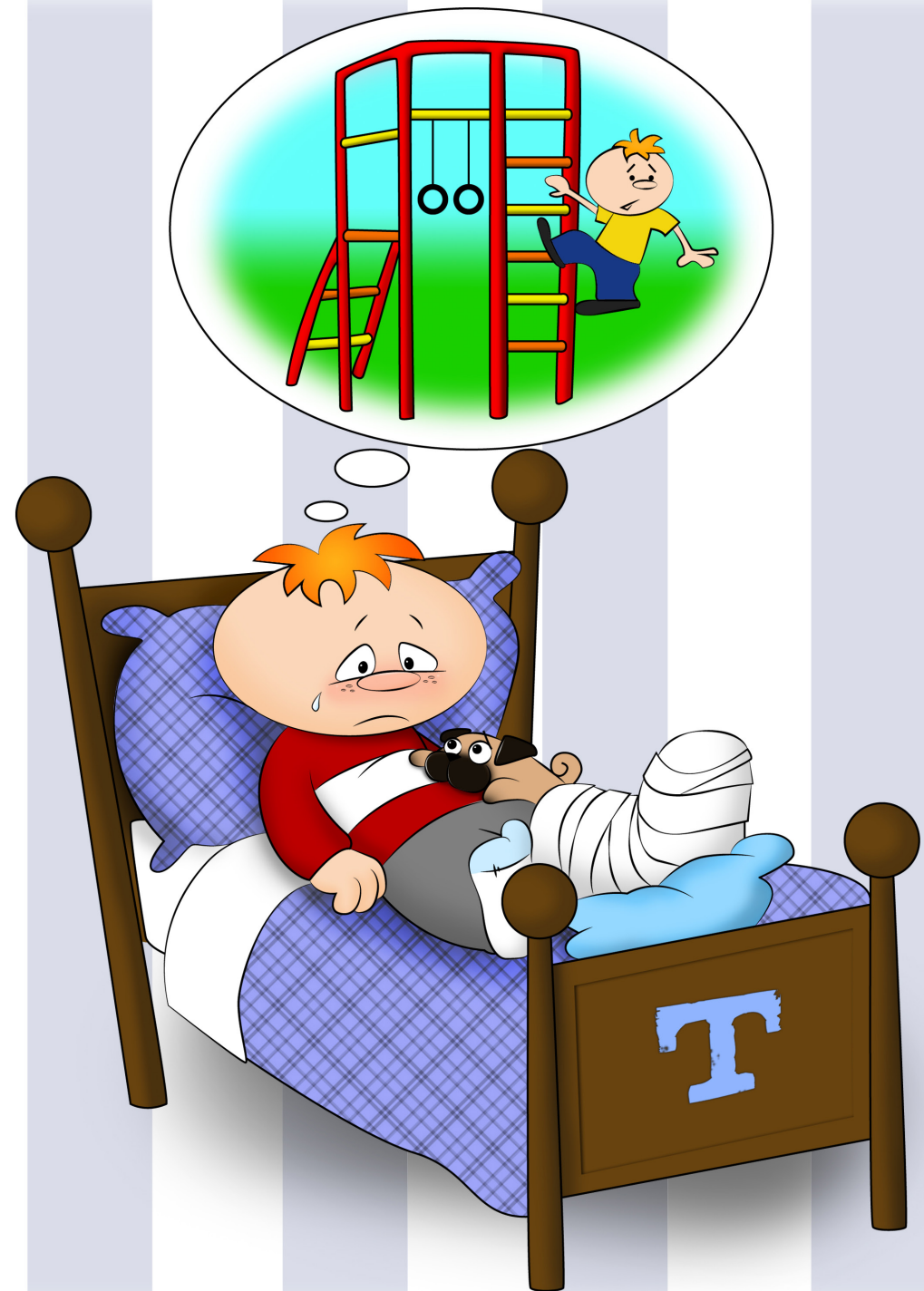
The Best Christmas Ever!

Thomas sighed as he looked out the window and watched the snowflakes gently tumble to the ground. He'd been looking forward to the Christmas season, but now he just felt sad. There was a knock on his bedroom door.

"Come in," Thomas said. The door opened and in bounced Thomas's sister Kate.

"How is your leg feeling this morning?" Kate asked as she carefully patted the cast that covered the better part of his leg.

"Fine, I guess." Thomas shook his head, remembering the terrifying fall he had taken on the playground equipment. It wasn't that the fall had been from so high, but he had lost his balance while climbing the playground tower, and the odd way he'd fallen on his leg had caused it to break. "I just wish this hadn't happened so close to Christmas," he said. "Now I'm going to be stuck in my room instead of enjoying all the usual Christmas activities."





“Actually,” Kate said, “that was why I came to see you. I know Christmas is your favorite time of year, so I was thinking that I could be your Christmas buddy, since you’ll need help getting around. We’ll do all the things you love *together*! Every day we’ll figure out one Christmassy thing and do it together. What do you think?”

Thomas smiled widely. “Thanks, Kate. I like that idea.”

“Good, I do too. Before we decide on the first event, I have a surprise for you.” Kate had barely left the room for a minute when she returned with a decorated wheelchair. There were red and silver tassels hanging near the handles; a wreath on the back of the chair, complete with blinking battery-operated lights; and Thomas’ favorite set of Christmas bells clustered near the armrest.

“Dad picked this up this morning,” Kate explained. “I asked Mom to let me decorate it for you. We’ll need this to get around for all the Christmas fun.” Kate was bouncing up and down with excitement.

“That’s pretty cool,” Thomas said. “It’ll be nice to leave this room.”

Thomas bundled up and Kate helped him into the wheelchair so that they could go into the yard to enjoy the snow. Thomas managed to help Kate pack the snow together to form their seasonal snowman.

Thomas was pleased with the final product—the snowman stood tall and looked particularly splendid with the green scarf, felt top hat, and carrot nose.





That evening a number of Thomas's friends visited him. It was the first time they'd seen him since his accident. They brought games, get-well gifts, and spent that evening doing their best to cheer him up. Thomas went to bed with a content feeling; this Christmas wasn't looking so bad after all.

I wonder what I can do to thank everyone for their kindness, Thomas thought. It'd meant so much to him to have his friends over. He'd almost forgotten about his unfortunate accident.

Thomas finally fell asleep with a happy thought on his mind: he was going to find a way to make this Christmas special for those he loved. Even if he wouldn't be able to get around as usual, he had a few ideas of how he could make it a wonderful time for those who meant the most to him.

The following day when Kate came to ask him what he wanted to do, Thomas talked with her about his idea.

“I know what we can do! We’ll need our arts and crafts supplies,” Kate said as she wheeled Thomas into the dining room. Before long the table was laden with everything they would need for their Christmas paper stockings.

Once the paper stockings had been crafted, Thomas labeled each one with the names of his family members and friends. The plan was that for every day leading up to Christmas, Thomas would place a piece of paper in each stocking. On the papers Thomas would either write something he appreciated about the person or a favor he would do for each person in the coming year.



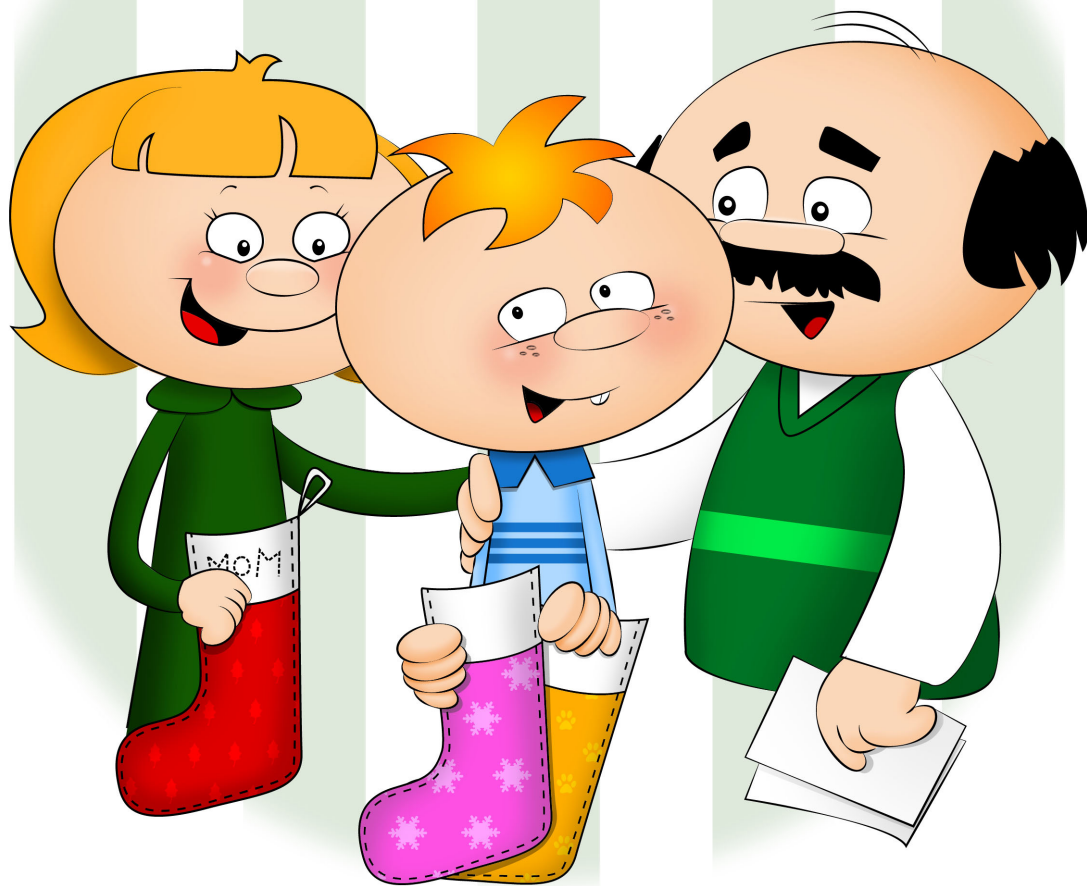
The more Thomas thought about ways he could help others, the happier he was. He'd all but forgotten how sad he'd felt when he'd first been injured. This was turning out to be the best Christmas he had ever had.

* * *

It was Christmas Eve and the little family sat near the fireplace singing carols and enjoying their mother's famous gingerbread cookies and spiced apple cider.

After several carols, Thomas proudly presented his paper stocking gifts to his family. "Thank you for making this Christmas special for me. Even though I wasn't able to do all the usual things I like at Christmas, there were so many special things that I did get to do. I really am happy!"





Mother peered into her stocking and pulled out a leaf of paper. She silently read the words Thomas had written on the paper. *Thank you for taking such good care of our family, Mom! I promise to help with the dishes whenever you need my help.* She smiled at Thomas and kissed his head. “Thank you, Thomas! You are so thoughtful.” And she dug into her stocking again.

Before she could read the next coupon, Thomas’s father looked up from the leaf of paper he’d just read. “I’ll be sure to take you up on that offer to wash the car, Thomas,” he said. “Maybe once you’re up and around on that leg of yours. I can’t wait to see what other treasures there are in here,” he said as he pulled out another piece of paper.

Kate bounded over to Thomas and gave him a big hug. “Thanks for offering to take care of the dog for me when I am away at a sleepover.” Then with a smile and outstretched arms, she handed Thomas a paper stocking with his name on it. “I made one for you. Making this Christmas special for you made mine a happier one, too!” she said.

Thomas didn’t think he could smile any bigger. He felt so happy. “This really is the best Christmas EVER!” he exclaimed.

The End

