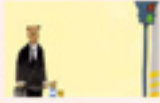


# The Best Christmas Ever

*Merlyn* Books



The year had been tough for Little Bear's father.

His business had failed and he couldn't find work. There was just enough money left to feed the family.



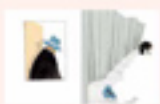
It was almost Christmas, and everyone would be expecting gifts- What were they going to do?



Mother Bear counted their money and said to Father Bear: "We need to save this for the winter. We can't afford presents for the kids this year."



A few days before Christmas, Mother Bear made Christmas decorations with some old clothes that Little Bear had outgrown. Little Bear's older sister and brother decorated the windows, hoping that Santa Claus would see.



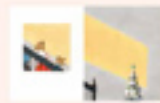
That afternoon, Father Bear put on his hat and went out to look for some tree branches. He was going to make a Christmas tree for the family.



Father Bear hung ornaments on the tree. He sprinkled the top with white flour, which sifted down to the branches below like fresh snow.



On Christmas Eve, Mother cooked up a delicious dinner with fish that Father Bear had caught.



After dinner, everyone went upstairs to bed. No one said much, just a quiet "Good night."



Little Bear tossed and turned in his bed, unable to sleep. He called out to Father Bear, asking to hear some Christmas stories. When the stories were over, Little Bear said softly to his father: "Santa Claus brings us presents every year - he won't forget us this time."



On Christmas morning, a gentle ray of sunlight streamed through the thin glass windows of the Bears' house.



The ray illuminated five presents of different sizes, lying together under the Christmas tree. Little Bear was the first one up. "Presents! Come and see, everyone!" he shouted, waking the whole family.



Each found a present bearing his or her name. Joyfully, Brother Bear exclaimed:  
"It had to be Santa Claus!"



Brother Bear opened his present. "It's my kite!" he said in amazement. "It got stuck in a tree and had this big hole... But now it's as good as new!" Sister Bear's present was an umbrella - one she had left at the park, near the swings. "Santa must have known how much I wanted it back!" Sister Bear said excitedly.



Mother Bear's present was a missing button from her favorite dress. She cupped the button in her hand as though it were a jewel. Father Bear's present was the hat the wind had blown off his head the day he collected branches for the Christmas tree. "How did Santa find my hat?" Father Bear said with wonder.



Little Bear's present was his favorite baseball glove, "It's cleaned and shined up just like brand new!" he said.



Sister Bear discovered something strange: under the tree were tiny footprints. "Santa Claus must have made these when he came with the presents... But why are they so small?" she asked. Father Bear glanced at Little Bear and said, "Maybe this Santa Claus is a dwarf," Mother Bear laughed and said, "If that's the case, he's not 'Father' Christmas... he's more like 'Toddler' Christmas!"



The whole of Christmas Day was spent discussing the mysterious gifts and, of course, the mysterious visit from "Toddler Christmas".



All those old familiar things, newly presented, had rekindled many fond memories. And it was thus, that the Bears had themselves... the best Christmas ever.

