

# Random PoiSon

A page for random thoughts, reviews and what not by my humble self



## PoiSon's Advent Calendar 2014

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A Collection of Stories for Photographs

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## Foreword

Again and again during the last year I had the idea to try myself on stories for pictures. Then back in September the idea evolved and I decided to it for an Advent Calendar.

With the help of the wonderful people on the cover, I managed to get the needed amount of pictures to fill 24 doors.

All of the stories are now collected here and can be re-read over and over again at will.

Enjoy the reading and I hope the stories are pleasing.

Again I also want to sincerely thank people involved.  
Without you this whole thing wouldn't have been possible!

Until the next story.

Your

PoiSonPaiNter/  
Anne

## Door 1 – The Autumn Leaf



© Marina Bonzelet/DarkFairy

*On my way home I strolled through the park without haste. It had been one of those usual days at the uni. Everyone wanted to know something from you, but no one gave you the time to properly think about the question. But now I had time, now I could let my mind wander. The warming sun shone down on me and even though it was already December, was it still green around me. It was as if the weather wanted to tease us. Cold in the summer and warmth in the winter.*

*While I walked I suddenly noticed something lurid. A lonesome leaf, still colourfully tinged from the autumn, lay on the grass and confirmed my assumption. The weather mocked us.*

*I sighed and picked up the leaf.  
I like the autumn and the colours, it brings about.  
But there is one thing, that I like even more than that.  
Snow. Masses of snow.  
Snow, that covers everything colourful with bright white.*

*Now that it is finally December it shouldn't be long until it finally fell. But until then I had to make do with the fading autumn colours.*

*With another sigh I let the leaf fall onto the ground again and told him in my thoughts 'Soon you will be covered by snow'.  
Yes, soon it would snow, I was certain of it.*

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## Door 2 – The Prankster



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*On the whole way from the monastery until here he struggled with one thought 'It was just a stupid joke'.*

*He hadn't wanted the abbot to be this enraged about it.*

*They were a large monastery and not every time everyone got an interesting task. When he was seconded to clean the habits he got that bored that he decided to play a prank on his brothers.*

*He had remembered how the women in his home village had bleached the linen and likewise had he now done so with the habits that were entrusted to him.*

*A sulphurous brew mixed into the water and whoosh were the simple black habits grey. He thought they were now more fitting for the dreary life of a monk.*

*Grey, dull, boring.*

*The abbot instead thought that he was a disgrace for their confraternity and send him away to repent in a secluded church and support the local pastor in his work.*

*Isolated from cities and his brothers.*

*When he emerged from the forest he already saw the trail that lead him through the corn field directly to the masonry. The church was considerably smaller than his monastery and it seemed to offer even less variations in tasks.*

*Here he would have to spend the winter and probably even more time, when the abbot was still mad at him.*

*It didn't look like it yet, but the field, through which he wandered, would soon be harvested and covered by snow. He could very well imagine that the winter here was even more grim and colder than in the monastery. There he had surrounding building that provided cover from wind and cold.*

*But here was nothing.*

*Here was only the church, a puny wall and the field.*

*Just what had he gotten himself into?*

*Why did he have to get bored?*

*He already felt regret and sincerely hoped the abbot would soon forgive him.*

*He hadn't even arrived and he would like to return already. But now it was too late, he had to walk the last few steps and face his new task.*

*He had to admit that the abbot had seemingly chosen the perfect place for this.*

### Door 3 – The little people



© Katrin Brockmann-Propp

*It was finally that time of the year again. All the greenery had fallen in the autumn and every leaf and every blade of grass was covered in a thick layer of ice. Every time this happened they would set out to collect it. They loved using it for their dishes, still all they could do was keep it frozen magically for some months instead of creating it themselves whenever they liked. They tried, but it was just not as good as the real thing.*

*Those few months when they didn't have any ice left were the worse according to the youngest in their group. He had been on this collection trips for a few decades now, but he always loved the excitement they brought with them on their first trips. The eyes of the young ones would gleam in awe when they climbed up what were icy mountains for them.*

*The little people that was what they were called by the tall ones who rarely believed in them any more, yet occasionally managed to accidentally step on one of their brethren. Therefore this expedition was not just necessary to finally have ice cream and all those other fantastic dishes again, but also quite dangerous if the tall ones were to be around.*

*It was this reason that the groups were made of the fastest and stealthiest of their kind. But they also had to be strong enough to carry the filled baskets and climb the ice. Of course they had the help of their magic lightening the weight,*

*but when it came to such delicate matters as ice they preferred manual labour.*

*High on top of the icy leaves he took in a deep breath of the clear air around him.*

*He simply loved his job.*



## Door 4 – Winters' Coldness



© Friggs Photography

*It was a mild winter again.*

*What gave this away?*

*The flowers already thought it was spring.*

*A couple of days ago it had snowed and a thick, fluffy layer had stayed, but that didn't bother the flowers in the front garden bed at all.*

*Through the snow they had fought their way into the light.*

*Maybe they already shook off the snow as soon as it had landed.*

*She didn't really know.*

*What she did know was that the lovely snow would soon be just a pile of mud and not even remotely look anything beautiful.*

*There simply weren't any constant winters any more.*

*Winters during which you could go for a walk or ice skating on a sea and even river or at the hem of the sea.*

*There even had been years where you could drive your car onto a frozen river.*

*But this kind of winter rarely happened these days.*

*Now the flowers thought it would already be time to blossom and awake in the beginning of December.*

*She thought this was awful.*

*Blowing out the last smoke, she crushed her cigarette on the step of the staircase and stood up to adjust her coat.*

*It was milder than she remembered from her childhood, but that didn't mean it wasn't still too cold.*

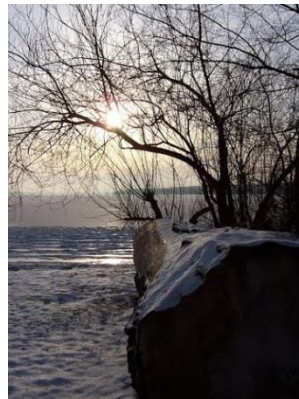
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## Door 5 – A new dawn



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*It had been a long day.  
He had walked many miles during which his backpack had become heavier and heavier by the minute.  
To add to his fortune it also had started to snow in the evening and continued to do so far after nightfall.  
It wasn't like he hated the snow, but he preferred not being in it unless he absolutely had to.*

*Weary from the days journey he was quite certain that he got lost along the way.  
Everything looked the same in the dark and there weren't any signs to guide him.  
With a heavy sigh he decided that this place, where ever it was, was as good as any to rest for the night.*

*He dropped down his heavy baggage and started looking for blankets.  
He wouldn't find any material for a fire anyway and even if he did it would be wet and useless.  
Wrapped into the warmth he soon fell asleep.  
Luckily it wasn't cold enough for his slumber to be eternal.*

*In the morning he was awoken by birds chirping their songs.  
He stretched his arms before slowly opening his eyes.  
As expected was everything around him covered with a thin layer of snow.  
What he didn't expect was the sun rising at his side just above the horizon of a stunning water side.*

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*Right now he didn't care if it was a lake or the sea, he just stood up, the blankets still around his shoulders and watched nature's display of beauty in awe.*

*Maybe this journey would end badly for him in the days to come, but at least he had this sight to behold and treasure until then.*

## Door 6 – Krampus



© Edward Mooney/Ed Mooney Photography

*"You know what this old thing reminds me of?" He asked his friend, gesturing at the sculpted creature hanging above them.*

*"A goat head?" The other guessed without trying.*

*"Oh, shut up! Krampus. This thing reminds me of Krampus." He explained a little bugged that his friend wouldn't play along.*

*"Who the hell is Krampus?" The other wanted to know.*

*"You don't know?"*

*"Never heard of it."*

*"He's the guy that gets to all the naughty children when St. Nikolaus is visiting the good ones." He told his friend.*

*"You mean 'Knecht Ruprecht'?" The other boy tried to clarify.*

*"No, I mean Krampus. Horns, fur, quite a nasty fella that doesn't mind using a birch on the kids."*

*"You have strange traditions. Where I come from the naughty kid gets a piece of coal or a birch in its shoe instead of the sweats the others get. But no one uses the birches." His friend explained and added:*

*"Does your Nikolaus still bring sweats?"*

*"Yeah, he does." The boy affirmed.*

*"Well, at least there's that. Even if you have a way crueller version of the assistant."*

*"Yeah, I guess they wanted the kids around here to be especially nice." He suggested.*

*"I can see how that turned out!" The other laughed, remembering all the mischief his friend had caused.*

*"Oh, shut up! You don't want him to get on our trail, do you?" He threatened, pointing at the head.*

*"Hell no! Let's get out of here that thing creeps me out."  
"Yeah, me too."*

## Door 7 – With the Angels



© Katrin Brockmann-Propp

*The cemetery lay in a dim light as the sun had begun to set and the moon was slowly crawling his way up.*

*A few visitors were still at the graves of their loved ones, but soon they would have to leave as the graveyard closed earlier during this time of the year.*

*He believed it was due to the poor lightning they had on the grounds and from the street lights outside. It was barely able to illuminate the outer rows of graves and the farther you got inside the less you were able to see anything.*

*It didn't bother him though.*

*Continuing his walk through the graves he stopped by a neatly sculpted statue of a cherub; a small angel. He loved this statue and his walk always let him here. If he could, he would spent hours starrng at it to find every little detail it had to offer. But it was difficult to discover them in the darkening day.*

*To his misfortune the young man had never managed to see it in brought daylight.*

*He only managed to arrive when the sun started setting and he left when he couldn't see any more. Every day he tried coming earlier, but something always got in the way.*

*Just once he wished to even be able to read the inscription.*

*He had never managed to do that and today he wouldn't be able to do it either. It wasn't like he cared for the person lying beneath him, he simply wanted to know who was granted such a beautiful statue.*

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*He would love to include it in his collection of angelic motives at home. It would just fit in perfectly.*

*While he contemplated where he would put such a thing the light started to fade.*

*And so did he.*

*The orb of white light that floated just in front of the cherub became less and less visible by the minute.*

*And as the sun was gone, so was it.*

*If he had managed to look down he could have read on the barely illuminated gravestone:*

*James O'Malley*

*1837-1858*

*Our beloved son now with the angels he adored.*

## Door 8 – The Timekeeper



© Marina Bonzelet/DarkFairy

*With a wheeze she sat down on the bench at the market place. She had spent the whole morning doing Christmas shopping and now needed a break from carrying around bags.*

*Before her the people were buzzing about between the booths on the Christmas market during their lunch break. Above all of this hung the shadow of the old church.*

*When she let her gaze wander up to the towers she was blinded for a moment. The sun had chosen this precise moment to appear behind them.*

*As she had blinked the light away and looked at the market place again a thought struck her.*

*‘Maybe the sun was once a guide for something that had happened, like a duel starting when it appeared behind the tower.’*

*She discarded this idea right away. Duels were something for other regions like the Wild West, not for church places in cities.*

*What would be more fitting in her eyes, however, would be executions.*

*During midday the most people would be at the market to attend the spectacle.*

*And as soon as the sun would have appeared completely behind the tower. Whoosh. Another alleged guilty life extinguished.*

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*She shivered. It sounded a lot like something, that might have happened and she was relieved to live in a country where executions were no longer public displays and the whole thing only happened in states far away from here.*

*She fiercely shook her head. There were places where it was better to enjoy the here and now instead of dwelling on the past.*

*At least on one of the sunny days in December where the warming rays shone nicely onto ones face. The eyes closed she decided that she did not want to deal with the history of the market place for now. Maybe she would look into it some time later.*

*But not now.*

*Now she wanted to stock up some sunshine and that she did.*

## Door 9 – In the Forest



© Edward Mooney/Ed Mooney Photography

*The pastor had send him off to get firewood from the forest. As he had anticipated did the church get cold and unpleasant, now that the dark time of the year drew nearer. Armed with an axe that lay in the small barrow he pulled behind him, he made his way through the field.*

*Since his arrival two months ago he had done a lot of the physical work. Patching up leaks, helping with the harvest, taking care of and even butchering what little livestock they had, were only some of his duties. They also had those tasks his monastery, but there more people were responsible for them. Here he had to do everything by himself, as the pastor was an old and fragile man.*

*Nevertheless did he enjoy the work. It busied him and distracted him from missing his brothers and the monastery. This was something he hadn't expected to happen.*

*Meanwhile he had passed through the harvested field and had reached the forest. He searched for the right tree he would fell amongst all the others. The pastor had explained to him what he had to look for to get proper firewood when they first went to the forest together.*

*When he looked between the trees he suddenly noticed a shadow. It wasn't dark, but it wasn't easy to see clearly in the distance either.*

*Curious as he was, he left his barrow behind and hid behind a tree to watch the shadow.*

*The shadow moved forward very slowly and it seemed as if he stopped time and again to gain a bearing and to not lose its path.*

*Carefully the young monk crept a bit closer.*

*He could now see that the shadow had a human shape and wore some kind of coat that wasn't much different from a habit.*

*He moved forward again, axe and barrow forgotten far behind him.*

*In the few rays of light that broke through the branches the coat shimmered greyly, it couldn't be a habit then as he had never seen a monk in a grey habit.*

*Until he remembered that the bleaching of their black habits was the reason he was here in the first place.*

*Certainly it was one of his brothers that wanted to visit him.*

*Courageously he stepped forth from behind the tree and called out to the person.*

*It was startled and looked around in hectic.*

*But as he knew from his own experience was it not easy to see much while wearing the hood.*

*As expected did the other remove the cloth and caught sight of him.*

*"Brother Lukas!" He called out happily and came towards him.*

*"I was just on my way to the church! I have a pleasing message for you!" He continued in euphoria, grabbing his brother by the shoulders.*

*"Tell me!" Lukas urged and returned the greeting by embracing the others' elbows and grinning widely.*

*"The abbot says, you can come home! He only heard good things from the pastor and believes that you have repented enough!" His friend told him jubilantly.*

*"That is...fantastic, but.." The young monk started and avoided the gaze of his brother.*

*"But?" The other enquired and lowered his arms.*

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*"But I believe I shouldn't leave yet. The pastor needs my help and I fear he will not make the winter without me..." He revealed.*

*Often he had thought about what he would do if he were allowed to leave earlier, but he liked the old pastor and wanted to stay by his own choosing.*

*"I am sorry that your journey was for naught."*

*"No, it wasn't. I was able to see you and now I can tell the abbot that you volunteered to stay. He will be proud of you." The other assured him.*

*"I hope you are right..." He murmured and lowered his head slightly.*

*A small smile flicked across Lukas' face. Not in his wildest dreams had he imagined that the abbot would ever be proud of him, at least not after the stupid prank.*

*"But enough of this. Please stay for the night and tell me from home before you leave!" He requested.*

*"Gladly." The other agreed.*

*"But at first I need to chop some wood. You are free to go on ahead." Lukas explained and turned away.*

*"Never mind that, let me help you. Together it will be done faster!" His brother responded and followed him.*

*The young monk smiled as he walked ahead. It was nice to have someone to share the work with again.*

## Door 10 – A Christmas Wonder



© Babsi Becken/Babsi Bilder

*He liked his work as merchant.*

*He couldn't imagine himself in any different occupation, but there were still moments like this when he would yearn to have a different profession.*

*Thickly wrapped in blankets and furs he sat on his sleigh and just wished to arrive already.*

*But there was still a long way ahead of him.*

*During the summer the distance wasn't hard to overcome, but in the winter there were a few obstacles.*

*A thick layer of snow covered the ground and the horses moved only rather slowly.*

*At the last inn he had painstakingly fastened skis to the wheels, so that they wouldn't sink completely into the snow.*

*Additionally did barely anyone dare to cross this region during this time of the year.*

*The forests were inhabited by hungry wolves and even a few bears. No one knew if or when they would attack someone.*

*But he wanted to go home and even in the deepest snow was this the shortest way to get there.*

*He had many presents for his family with him and they would have a great feast when he arrived.*

*When.*

*This small but significant word stood in his way yet again.*

*He knew his horses were well trained and would manage the journey.*

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*As long as there wouldn't be a snow storm or an attack, there would be nothing stopping him.*

*The cold got to him and he believed to even hear howling in the distance. His ears certainly played tricks on him, yet he pressed the horses to run faster.*

*The forest lay directly in front of him and to not lose the trail he had to drive close to it.*

*Though the closer he got, the louder got the howling.*

*Frightened he accelerated the horses again.*

*The wolves seemed to have caught their sent and soon they would have him surrounded, but he would not let that happen.*

*He had covered a couple of meters beside the forest as something suddenly jumped onto the road.*

*A meagre, hungrily growling wolf stood directly in front of his cart.*

*With a jolt he stopped the vehicle.*

*He didn't want to anger the animal and through this die an even more horrible death.*

*It growled again and the horses shied away, but could not flee as they were restrained in their harness.*

*The man managed to calm them a little before they would topple the cart.*

*The wolf still watched them.*

*"Please don't eat me! My family is waiting for me!" He pleaded with the animal, but it did not move.*

*"Here take some of my food!"*

*The man rummaged in his bag and shakily stood up on the coach box. In a high arch he threw a piece of ham in front of the wolves feet.*

*The animal smelled it briefly before he took it into its fangs and lowered his head as if he bowed.*

*Just like that the wolf returned into the forest.*

*The merchant looked in astonishment at the spot where the animal had just stood.*

*He had survived.*

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*And the wolf had thanked him for the meal.  
With a smile he sat down again and pushed the horses forward.  
He certainly had witnessed a Christmas wonder just now.*



## Door 11 – Ruin-magic



© Katrin Brockmann-Propp

*Their winterly walk lead them to the castle ruin again.  
They have often been here, but it was impressive every time again.  
It wasn't much left of the manorial masonry, yet you could still  
imagine its grandeur.  
As all the other times before they walked through the open halls to  
see how the newly fallen snow covered the ruin.*

*But this time it was different.  
They had barely entered entrance hall when they heard noises in  
the distance.  
A crackling and a clattering they could not allocate.  
The two of them looked at each other and considered turning  
back, but their curiosity was too strong.  
The farther they walked into the ruin the clearer the sounds  
became .*

*The crackling seemed to come from a fire that someone had lit  
nearby. Regardless of the missing walls and ceilings they felt the  
warmth surrounding them.  
But if there was a fire there would be people. Unease crept into  
their hearts, but again the curiosity won.*

*"There!" The woman exclaimed and pointed at a fireplace that  
held a strong fire.  
Puzzled her companion looked at the fireplace he had never seen  
before.  
The wall behind the hearth of warmth seemed newer and less*

*ruinous than the rest of the castle.*

*It seemed as if someone had rebuild it in the original style.*

*The longer he looked the more details he could see: Engravings in the stone, iron pincers for the fire, there even was grating and some decorations on the mantelpiece.*

*His observations were interrupted when someone pulled at his sleeve.*

*Questioning he looked at his wife, who in turned stared with widely opened eyes and pointed above them.*

*He followed her gaze and was just as surprised.*

*Where just earlier a huge hole had gaped was now a complete ceiling, decorated with beautiful motives. Frescos, paintings and huge chandeliers span above them.*

*The room was brightly illuminated and the more they looked around, the more of it returned to how it once was.*

*In the corner of the room a pompously decorated fir tree appeared, several packages lying beneath it.*

*Beside it a plentifully set table ranged until close to their feet.*

*It was as if they could nearly smell the dishes.*

*Light laughter sounded when two children ran into the large room and examined the presents below the tree.*

*The couple bore witness to a long since discontinued play, when the ruin showed them how magnificent it once looked during the Christmas time.*

*Neither of them dared to move in fear the illusion would vanish, but it didn't matter.*

*As soon as the hall had changed, as soon did it turn back.*

*The colours faded and only the strong rays of sunlight remained that illuminated the snow covered ruin.*

*The play was finished, but not forgotten.*

## Door 12 – Frozen



© Edward Mooney/Ed Mooney Photography

*The boys played at the river bank like they did every day. They were trying to again find out who would manage to hit the pillar of the bridge with a stone from here.*

*“You know what my papa told me the other day?” One of them wanted to know.*

*“No. What?” The other asked and paused.*

*He had just prepared to throw a stone.*

*“Papa told me that the river was frozen really thick when he was our age.”*

*“The whole river?”*

*“Yes, papa said they could even drive a car onto it!”*

*“Wow! I would like to do that too! Driving the car onto the river, that has to be cool!” The remarks all but bubbled out of the boy.*

*“I think so too. Let’s squeeze our thumbs\* that it will happen again this year!” Suggested the boy who had told the story and clenched his fingers so that his thumb was enclosed.*

*His friend imitated the gesture right away.*

*“Do you think that’s enough?” He asked after a moment.*

*“Sure” The other agreed and both of them loosened their hands.*

*“It would be cool if we could at least go ice skating on the river.”*

*He said then and picked up another stone.*

*“Oh yes that would be cool too!” The other encouraged his friend and threw the stone he had put into his pocket.*

## Door 13 – A Christmas Journey



© Katrin Brockmann-Propp

*It had been a long journey when they finally reached the iron gates of the castle.*

*Time and time again throughout the weeks it took their carriage to get here, they had asked themselves, why they made their way here year after year.*

*The roads were dry or muddy at most when they started, but became frozen and slippery the closer they came to their destination.*

*It was a bothersome ride, yet they took it every year.*

*And what for?*

*For one of the most incredible Christmas celebrations in the whole country.*

*The whole castle was illuminated with candles of all variations. Green branches from different trees were draped over mantelpieces, window sills and door frames or woven into the banisters.*

*Colourful cloths hung from the ceiling and were embroidered with all kinds of symbols befitting the occasion.*

*In every room a fire was lit to bring warmth to the castle and create a homey atmosphere.*

*It was simply beautiful to look at.*

*Every evening there would be a small banquet to celebrate the arrival of new guests until the Christmas Eve.*

*The castle then would be filled with nearly a hundred people.*

*The families came from all around the country, some were related*

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to each other or the host, others were just dear friends, but everyone would bring their children and parents and a small entourage.

They would also bear many gifts for the celebration.

On Christmas Eve they would all come together in the main hall. A huge tree would sit in a corner of the room and many presents would be covered by the lowest branches.

Most of them would be for the children, but a few special ones would be for the adults.

Besides ornaments, sweets and fruits, small packages were also hung as decoration.

They all would sit at a long table and eat the most exquisite meals from around the world.

And they would sing the old carols and tell stories to each other.

One would think that after a week of celebrations and many Christmases together there were no more stories to be told, but there would always be one.

Each family tried to gather new tales throughout the year, just for this event.

When the evening grew long the servants were invited to join them and share their stories as well.

On this day alone all rank would be forgotten and they would sit together as equals.

It was a wonderful and magical gathering and worth every suffering on their way here.

Finally the gate was opened and the carriage continued on its path onwards to another year of shared stories and cosiness.

## Door 14 – The Wishlist



© Friggs Photography

*Christmas is drawing closer by the day.  
The streets are buzzing with people looking for the perfect presents.  
But right now, I couldn't care less about it, as I'm sitting in the  
comfort of my home.*

*As I love the smell of fir have I already put up my Christmas tree.  
It isn't much, but it is mine and I like it.  
I'm going to be quite busy in the weeks to come - Christmas parties,  
extra work load, etcetera - so I decided to write my Christmas  
cards this evening.  
Just like the tree is this one of my favourite traditions and I take  
great joy in creating colourful and loving cards.*

*Half way through my address book, I start to wonder when I first  
wrote a Christmas card.  
As much as I rake my mind, it won't come to me, but then it hits  
me:  
My first card was my wish list for Santa, when I was a kid.  
I decorated it with crude star paintings and glitter, just to make  
sure the man in red would like it.*

*And he did.  
Some weeks after we sent off my letter I really got a reply.  
By now I know it was from volunteers answering children's letter  
in an unofficial post office, but back then, it was magical.*

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*But in my age I am far too old to believe in Santa, let alone write him a letter.*

*It is a ridiculous, yet enticing, idea.*

*A smile on my face I pick up a pen and one of the many ornamented papers that lay on my desk.*

*Slowly I write a "D" and then stop.*

*No, this is silly.*

*I'm a grown up woman, why would I be writing a wish list to Santa?*

*Well, maybe to find the magic again, that I felt when I received my answer all those years ago.*

*But just maybe also to show myself that I am not too old to find joy in children's tales.*

*Christmas is a magical time after all.*

*So this adult would now become a child again.*

*Satisfied with my own arguing I continue.*

*"Dear Santa,*

*I know I haven't written to you in a long time, but I hope you still remember me.*

*The thing is, I'm not entirely sure what to ask of you this year.*

*I could name trinkets and gadgets that I would like to have, but I don't need you to get me those.*

*What I would like you to get me is a miracle of sorts and I do not believe you would be able to grant me that wish.*

*So I'm just wishing you a Merry Christmas.*

*And maybe, just maybe, the miracle will happen on its own.*

*All the best*

*Susan"*



## Door 15 – Winter-birthday



© Eva Nadolski

*After a long time he celebrated his birthday again on the day he had. When your yearly anniversary is in winter you have to make certain compromises. Your family only gives you presents once and not every person you would like to celebrate with, would be able to come.*

*This year, quite a few of his friends were with him and one of his friends even baked a cake for him.*

*And now he stood in front of a different problem:*

*How do you explain it to someone, who exerted oneself with baking a seasonally fitting cake that you couldn't stand chocolate and hated it that your birthday is in winter?*

*It was a precarious situation.*

*If he expressed his resentment she would be offended.*

*Did he pretend to like the cake she might bake it for him again.*

*It drove him up the wall.*

*With a forced smile he thanked her for the cake and bend to the request to slice the cake. Maybe he would get out of tasting this monstrosity if he gave everyone else a large piece first.*

*But then he would get the cake again for sure, just so he would be able to taste it to say if he liked it.*

*Why couldn't he blame a lactose intolerance or something, so he wouldn't have to taste it? Even though that was mean.*

*He didn't have a choice but to take the last piece himself and at least try it.*

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*This way he could still stay that chocolate cake wasn't really his thing.*

*Maybe it really wasn't as bad as it looked.*

*Tentatively he tasted it.*

*Yes, you could eat it, but once a year was often enough.*

## Door 16 – The Viking



© Edward Mooney/Ed Mooney Photography

*He didn't understand what had gotten into their leader.  
This close to the Yule feast he had decided to start another conquest.  
It wasn't fair.  
Not to them, nor to the people they were about to attack.  
Cold wind blew from every direction imaginable, their supplies and tents were covered in layers of frost and sometimes even snow each morning.  
And there was no sign of a success in this upcoming fight.*

*He sat down, his lance in hand.  
This whole conflict was useless, he was certain of it.  
Someone had aggravated the leader and made him prove his point by ordering this idiotic adventure.  
The warrior took down his helmet and rested it on his knee.  
He could now feel the wind even more, but at least he didn't have the cold of the metal on his head any more.*

*Looking up his eyes landed on the shiny tip of his weapon.  
It was sharp and deadly.  
But what use was it when he didn't want to fight?  
He wanted to be at home with his wife and his daughter, preparing their home for the winter celebration and definitely not on a battlefield the gods knew where.*

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*Engrossed in his musings, he didn't hear his fellow warrior calling out for him.*

*"Kristoff! Kristoff! It's time!" He repeatedly informed him.*

*Finally Kristoff registered the words and acknowledged them with a reply.*

*He stood up and placed his helmet back on his head again.*

*It was time.*

*Time for their group to march on into this foreign land, while all he wanted was to turn back home.*

*Yet, he was too proud to become a traitor, but maybe with the help of others he could make their leader see reason and stop this insane quest.*

*It was the time of Yule after all, anything could happen.*

## Door 17 – The Forgotten



© Annett Prodöhl

*He had his arms full with wood for the small fire that they had lit in the barracks, which wasn't enough to heat the whole room by far.*

*This way the snow and cold could creep into the building and turn it into an even less comfortable place.*

*Only the icicles that grew from the roof were useful.*

*They could break them off and use them as fresh water for cooking.*

*This didn't change the fact that all of them just wanted to leave.*

*In the summer they had been stationed here to guard the border section. Months before their replacements should have arrived, but they were still stuck in this run-down shack without a word from their superiors.*

*It wasn't a good mood amongst them.*

*He opened the heavy iron door of the barracks with his elbow and leaned his shoulder against it to push it open completely.*

*His comrades sat closely huddled around the fire, even the current guard had returned to them.*

*"There you are!" The youngling of their group, just old enough for service, greeted him.*

*With a grumble he returned the greeting and stacked the wood in its place beside the fire. He warmed his hands over the flames and then sat down in an empty space.*

*"We thought of something." His comrade beside him declared.*

*Rarely anything good came from it, when they thought about*

things and as the oldest he often had had to talk them out of their silly ideas.

With a nod he urged the other to continue.

"Christmas isn't far from now and we don't want to be here any more." He revealed their plan.

"You want to desert?" The old one asked in surprise.

"How can you desert from a post that no one pays attention to? Nobody hadn't given two figs about us since the summer. Our replacements should have come in July, so our duty is done. It is high time we got back to our families." The other explained further.

The old man let this words sink. They were right. Who knew, if their post was even still needed, if they hadn't been forgotten and could have been home for a long time?

He looked around in the barely furnished dwelling. A few beds stood around the fire, a puny Christmas tree stood in one corner, a small kitchen, composed of a stove and an old table with chairs, in the other.

They all missed their families, but there was one thing left to do.

"Then let us celebrate Christmas together today, before we part ways tomorrow." He declared his decision.

The faces of his comrades lightened up.

They had not expected this answer.

"One more night doesn't matter now anyway." He added into the silence.

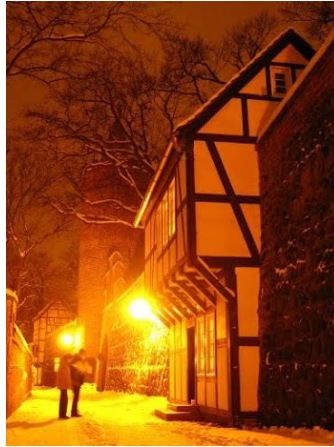
"What are we waiting for then? We have a feast to prepare!" The youngling jumped up and clapped his hands together.

When what they did was really desertion, they would be executed, but even if it went well they wouldn't see each other again. Each of them came from a different corner of the country. So this meant that they had to enjoy their last moment together before they could embrace their own families again.

It would be an ending to their task that they had hard-earned and soon they would finally be home again.

A true Christmas surprise for their families.

## Door 18 – The Christmas Market



© Katrin Brockmann-Propp

*They had stayed at the Christmas market again, or rather the Weberglockenmarkt as it was officially called here, yet only rarely referred to as such.*

*As always had it been loud and full of people.*

*Conversations of the ones around them, music booming out of different speakers and the general noise a crowd of people made.*

*But regardless how often they went to or walked across the market, they didn't get bored.*

*Every time they stopped at a different booth for the hot spiced wine and each time they tasted some more of the different flavours.*

*Some booths had several of them. You could get the normal Glühwein everywhere, but some had it mixed with raspberry, currant or sea buckthorn, but there was also eggnog and grog. When they didn't want to try anything they usually met up with friends at the booths they liked most.*

*However they did it, they went often and liked it every time.*

*Now they were out of reach of the Christmassy hustle and bustle.*

*It was a nice way to end a good evening for them by walking a bit along the city wall.*

*The wall, that surrounded the city centre wasn't decorated as much as the centre, but it was always nice to see how it and the integrated Wiek houses were illuminated and covered by the snow.*

*The old buildings brought a whiff of the past into the bustle of the present.*

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*In their own way did they portray the calmness that the Christmas time brought with it, just as the celebrations and markets symbolised the joy and cheerfulness.*

## Door 19 –The Winter Solstice



© Annett Prodöhl

*Christmas is a time of telling stories. Many were told about the old oaks of Ivenack and this is another tale that is hidden in the mists of the time between sunset and nightfall.*

*Whenever the twilight creatures celebrated - be it the Walpurgis Night, Samhain or now the Winter Solstice - they gathered here. It started with a tall being walking from one of the seven oaks to the other putting his hand on the wide trunk. When he was done, he stood right in the middle of them and raised his palms to the sky, calling out: "Arise!" in the ancient tongue of the elves.*

*Slowly the trunks unwound and the seven nuns, cursed to live as oaks for a thousand years, came forth. The elves had learned about their predicament, when they looked for a new place for celebration and had decided that they should join them for the feast. And so they had done for the last eight hundred years.*

*With their awakening they helped the elf to summon his kin and kind. And they would come from everywhere. Some rode the winds, some rose from the ground, others came through the twilight itself.*

*Though it wasn't just elven folk. Forest and house gnomes and visitors from farther away like the mermaids from the Baltic Sea or the forest spirits that had settled into this region from the large*

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*forests of Russia.*

*Everyone who knew of the elven celebration came.*

*The more creatures arrived, the more the banquet stretched, full of all kinds of elvish delicacies.*

*The animals of the park would join them as well, drawn in by the music that was only amplified by the giant trees.*

*It was a spectacle to be behold, but no mortal soul is allowed to participate, let alone see it.*

*If they just manage to get a glimpse of it, regardless of how well they hid behind the trees, the whole ceremony would vanish into thin air.*

*The music would linger a moment before it would be silent as well.*

*Everything would fall into a deep slumber, waiting for the next celebration.*

*Or in the nuns case: The end of their punishment.*

## Door 20 – The Way Home



© Katrin Brockmann-Propp

*They had spent time on a wonderful celebration at their friends estate and it was time to return to their own.*

*When she went to the window of their room, high above the ground, she did not expect to find a thick layer of snow covering every available inch.*

*It looked stunning.*

*It was as if the castle had fallen asleep over night and covered itself with a white blanket.*

*“Look at this!” She urged her husband and waved towards the window.*

*When he gazed outside a deep frown formed on his face.*

*“Great, now it will take even longer to get home and it will be cold inside the carriage.” He grumbled.*

*“Don’t be like that! Can’t you at least enjoy the beauty for a moment?”*

*“Not if I have to ride through it in a draughty carriage.” He simply stated, declaring the conversation to be over.*

*Over the course of the breakfast many guests had already left.*

*Mostly those that needed to go even further than they had to.*

*But now it was their turn to break the blanket of snow and make new tracks.*

*Luckily the exit trail was already deep enough so their cart wouldn’t have a problem using it.*

*Covered in their thickest clothes they sat inside the carriage.  
Several blankets lay on the empty bench across from them in case  
it would become even colder.*

*“Ride on” Her husband ordered the coachman and with a jerk the  
carriage started to move.  
Unlike their arrival the hooves of their horses could no longer be  
heard.*

*A small smile on her lips the woman watched the passing beauty.  
She didn’t mind driving in the snow one bit.  
If it was up to her, they could take months and she wouldn’t get  
sick of seeing the landscape covered in a thick blanket of snow.*

## Door 21 – The Christmas Light



© Friggs Photography

*Christmas was the time of lights. Every street and window was decorated with fairy lights, stars, Schwibbogen and other brightly illuminated trinkets. But not only the artificial light could be soon more and more the close the 24th came.*

*Candles in all shapes and colours were not just offered on the Christmas markets, but also found a new home with different families.*

*On evenings in the companie of each other they would light the candles and least not forget the Advent candles, were the first one had to last until the fourth one could be lit*

*Due to December being in the winter, the dark time of the year, the light gained an even more meaningful role.*

*The light in the darkness that used to guide people to their homes and even now are a good indicator in a foreign town.*

*She loved look at the illuminations in her area and other places. She couldn't imagine anything more beautiful that the lightning seas during Christmas time.*

*Though amongst all those lights one of them was most beloved to her.*

*It was an old and sooty glass that was engraved with the flakes of a snowstorm and lightened by a tea candle. It didn't shine that bright, but that was trivial.*

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*The glass was a present from her mother to have some festive atmosphere in the Christmas time she had to spend alone in her new, barely furnished flat.*

*The flat was a different one by now, but she had taken the light with her and would still lighten it even if you could no longer see the flakes and treasure the present.*

*Because the lightening of the light, her Christmas light, was her way of remembering the person she had lost.*

## Door 22 – The Christmas Star



© Babsi Becken

*A popular symbol of the Christmas time was the star, the star of Bethlehem if you wanted to say it more exactly. The Biblical Magi once followed it, to greet their saviour Jesus Christ.*

*This story was one of the first you learned, when you grew up in a Christian household, in which you still went to church at Christmas.*

*It was a nice story of belief, angels and a god that sent his own son to save humankind. Though nowadays barely anyone knew the actual Christmas story. Christmas was commercialized and promoted with a round, old man with a red coat and a long beard, who delivered presents.*

*Even if you used them, barely anyone understood the old customs they originated in.*

*The star, the nativity scene and whatever else arose from Christian traditions. Of course there were others, who were way older, but she wasn't that versed in them either.*

*For her it was still important to preserve her own family traditions. Far away from home she had set off to attend a nativity play.*

*Usually she would go with her parents, but this time they couldn't go together, so she went alone.*

*She sat down in one of the rows in the middle and made herself as comfortable as she could on the hard church bench. She waited in anticipation for the to her well known words with which the play*

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*started each year.  
And than it began...*

*“In those days...”*

## Door 23 – Fireworks



© Annett Prodöhl

*She came late from work again and rushed through the streets. It was dark and she just wanted to get home. Her hands deep in her pockets, her head ducked and stubbornly looking ahead, she tried to shield herself from the cold.*

*Suddenly she heard a bang behind her.  
She was startled and turned around in haste.  
It had sounded like a shot and she didn't want to be caught in a shooting at all.*

*Then something fizzled close to her and she recognized the noise. She turned quickly around herself and looked up into the sky to see the result of an ascending skyrocket.*

*Soon she found the remains of golden sparks and immediately another projectile buzzed aloft. A real glory of rocket flowers soon illuminated the night sky. With a wide grin she watched the spectacle.*

*Even though there were certain rules for fireworks and this one was probably illegal, did she enjoy it. Though soon it was over and she had to go her ways.*

*This time though she had a smile on her lips and walked upright, the cold forgotten and accompanied by the pictures of the firework.*

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## Door 24 – The Fifth Light



© Babsi Becken

*Slowly he opened his eyes.  
It took him a moment until he realized that the pale something  
that he was currently starrng at, was the table cloth.  
So he was laying on the sofa.*

*He struggled upwards a bit and looked around the room. The  
Christmas lightning was still lit and illuminated the dark room.  
Someone had even re-lit the Advent wreath. Though when his gaze  
landed on it he stopped.  
Not just four, but five candles burned on the netting of fir.  
That couldn't be true.  
When he had last seen it, there had only been four candles.  
And that was before his nap.*

*After the ample Christmas meal they all had retreated a bit and  
he had made himself comfortable on the sofa and had fallen  
asleep.  
And now it was already dark and five candles burned on the  
Advent wreath.  
Something had happened while he had slept.*

*Puzzled he was still starrng at the wreath when the door opened.  
“Well, are you finally awake?” His older brother greeted him and  
flipped on the lights.  
He had a wide grin on his lips. His sister that came in after him,  
didn't look much different.  
Eventually their parents came in as well.  
His father looked at him reproachfully, as if he had done*

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something bad. In moments like these, he felt like a young boy again.

“Did I miss something?” He asked in a mixture of fear and cluelessness.

His brother laughed and rose up behind the wreath, his sister stepped up right beside him and nodded shortly three times.

“Advent, Advent a light is lit,  
First one, then two, then three, then four.  
Then Santa Claus is upon your door.  
And if the fifth light's burning away  
You have missed the Christmas Day.”

They quoted the old children's poem nearly synchronous.

He looked even more confused from his siblings to his parents. He couldn't have slept the whole day. They certainly would have awoken him.

As he was about to say something his brother laughed out loudly and the rest of the family joined in.

“Please tell me, you didn't believe this just now!” His brother urged him and wiped a tear from the corner of his eyes.

It took him a moment, then he finally comprehended.

A wide grin spread over his lips and he leaned back.

“Nearly.” He admitted and earned laughter again.

His family had played him well this time.

Afterword

# Thank you for reading!

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