

### The Secret Sandra

It hadn't snowed this particular December. It had only rained. Every single day. The classrooms at John Spence High School smelled of wet shoes and wet jumpers and wet hair. The North Shields sky was a grim grey and the playing fields were churned into thick mud. Nobody smiled very much.

But it was still Christmas and some of the children were determined to make the most of it. They jabbered away excitedly about what they were going to get and how much money they were going to have spent on them. Some of the children seemed to be engaged in some sort of competition: 'I'm going to get an X-Box,' one would crow.

'Well, I'm going to get an X-Box and a bike', another red faced child would pipe up as they tried to hide their giant bag of fat chocolates from the harassed looking teachers.

'Is that all?' I'm going to get an X-Box and a bike and I'm going to just get one thousand pounds so I can buy whatever I want from the shops,' yelled a girl in an expensive looking jacket, spraying crisps from her mouth.

One little lad didn't join in these conversations because he knew that his Christmas would be quiet. It was just him and his dad at home and they didn't have much. He wasn't bothered anyway; to be honest, as long as his dad's cough didn't get any worse, he was happy enough.

This was how it went anyway as the week progressed and the holidays drew closer. The little lad and his little friend, who he'd met in the sandpit when they were both three, spent their time avoiding the big lads and the big lasses with their big mouths and their big feet. His little friend had green hair and a bright red nose. He called her 'Roo' which was short for 'Rhubarb'. She liked rhubarb.

The disco at the end of term was loud. Roo and the little lad were dancing and having fun. They didn't know any of the words to the 'Macarena' but they made them up and jumped around and smiled a lot. The big lads and lasses sneered at them because they didn't know the words and they didn't dance in the same way as them and the little lad still had his uniform on because his jeans hadn't dried from the weekend before yet. Roo and the little lad didn't notice.

In the assembly on the last day, there was a raffle. Only those children who hadn't had a detention had a ticket. The Head of Year was wearing a party hat and smiling because the bell would go soon and everyone could go home for two weeks. She rummaged in the box and brought out a ticket. It was a pink ticket and the name on the back was 'Sandra' (which was Roo's real name). The prize was a voucher for books because that's the kind of prize that schools like to dish out.

On Christmas Eve, the little lad and his Dad were sat in their little kitchen listening to Wizzard on the radio. There was a knock on the door. It was Roo. She came in and sat with her friend and his Dad. They played chess and snap and charades and they told jokes. Then, from her jacket, she brought out a little gift wrapped up in lovely paper and she gave it to her little friend, whose name was Tim by the way: little Tim. It was a book and it was great because Tim loved to read and his Dad would enjoy it too.

Tim walked Roo home because she didn't live far away. It was cold but that was fine and then it started to snow - at last. Thick flakes swirled and danced in the warm flare of the streetlights. They reached Roo's house and they wished each other a very Happy Christmas. They hugged and Tim thanked her again for the book. 'I'm glad it's stopped raining, dear,' replied Roo with her red nose and her bright smile. Little Tim's heart swelled and he smiled too before giving her a quick kiss on the cheek and turning for home.

'Thanks Sandra,' he shouted from the gate. 'I think you're 'Santastic.'