

Ethan's Snowflake

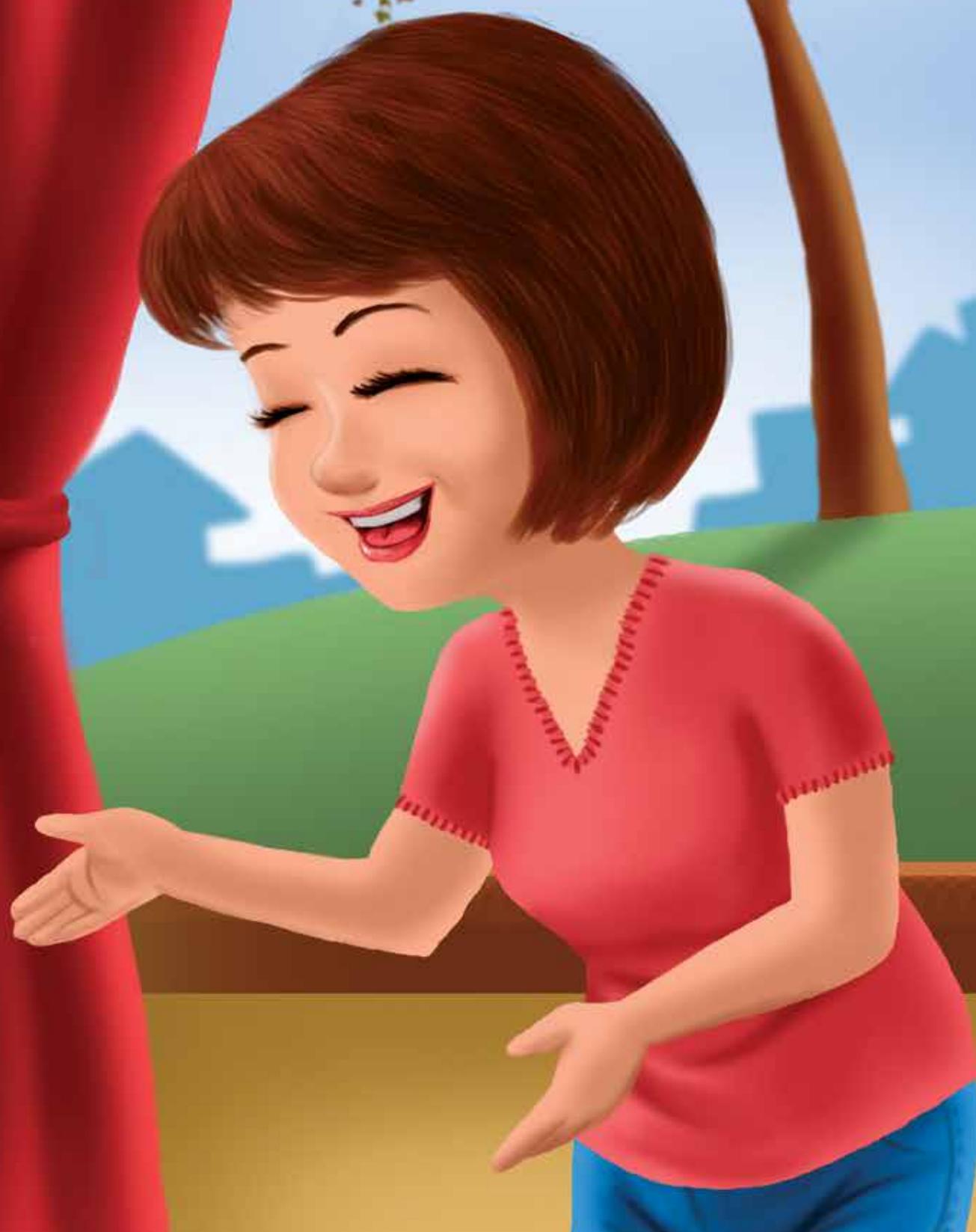
A HOLIDAY STORY SET IN CITYNAME



It was early December and unusually warm. Seven-year-old Ethan laughed when his mom made jokes about hosting a Christmas Day luau, but deep inside, he didn't think it was funny at all.

DECEMBER

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As Christmas drew closer, Ethan worried that a warm Christmas Day would ruin the entire holiday. He wouldn't be able to wear his favorite red and green Christmas sweater; his family's annual trip to the Christmas tree farm would feel like just an autumn hike in the woods; and he could forget about dreaming of a White Christmas.



Ethan's mother tried to cheer him up with crafts and hot chocolate. But even a paper plate snowman — complete with eyes made of black construction paper, real glued-on buttons and an orange felt nose — couldn't bring a smile to Ethan's face. Ethan's sister, Lisa, drew him a picture of their house covered in snow, with Santa, his sleigh and reindeer and bag of toys up on the roof. But Ethan found himself only longing more for even the hint of a snowflake in the air.



Two weeks before Christmas, the family piled up in the minivan and headed toward the outskirts of CITYNAME toward the christmas tree farm in search of the perfect tree. To Ethan, the pines, firs and fresh wreaths seemed out of place on the balmy, sunny day.



“Would you like to go shopping for a special ornament for the tree?” Ethan’s mother asked when the family had decided on a balsam fir taller than Ethan’s dad. “OK,” Ethan replied, kicking at pine needles on the ground. With the tree strapped to the top of the van, the family headed toward downtown CITYNAME as the sun set, past LANDMARK NAME and Ethan’s school, SCHOOL NAME.



At the gift shop, Ethan perused Santa ornaments carved from wood, a metal rocking horse and a felt drummer boy. An intricate brass Christmas tree lit up with a small battery-operated light bulb inside. The ornaments were all nice, but they weren't ... special. At the hardware store, Ethan saw a resin ornament showing Santa fumbling on snow skis, and another with a reindeer nibbling at a snowman's carrot nose. At the craft store, he saw kits for gluing together a foam penguin with a colorful scarf. But he didn't see a special ornament.



“Let’s go home,” Ethan said as the stores on STREET NAME began to close. “I need to go grocery shopping tomorrow. We’ll look again,” Ethan’s mother said. Ethan heard the familiar sound of Bing Crosby singing, “White Christmas” streaming out the door of the stationery shop.



Just then, an ornament in the shop's front window caught Ethan's eye — a glittery white snowflake reflecting the street lights from a thousand angles, causing it to glisten at the end of its string on the shop's Christmas tree window display. The entire tree was decorated in white, with doves made of feathers, iridescent white tinsel and a garland of white beads. "That's the one!" Ethan blurted out, and he was already running toward the shop.



At home, Ethan's dad lifted him up so he could hang the snowflake ornament at the top of the tree, just beneath the lighted star tree topper.



Over the next two weeks, each day grew a little colder, and soon Ethan was beginning to smile. It felt more like Christmas, and on Christmas Eve, he even wore his Christmas pajamas with a snow-covered train full of presents winding its way around a white-capped mountain. As Ethan drifted off to sleep that night, he hummed the tune to “White Christmas.”



In the morning, he headed downstairs to see what Santa had left under the tree. As he reached the bottom stair, Ethan noticed a faint glow coming from the front window. He walked over to the window and was delighted to see a fresh dusting of snow gleaming in the morning sun. "Merry Christmas," said Ethan's mother, who had walked up behind him. "Merry Christmas!" Ethan almost shouted, burying his head in his mother's warm hug.

