



## In Which Tom Appears

Sophie woke early on the morning of her fifth birthday. It was still very dark. Usually the first thing she did when she had switched on the light was to look at the pictures hanging on her bedroom walls. There were four of them, all drawn by Sophie's mother, who was clever at that sort of thing.

One was of a cow called Blossom, one was of two hens named April and May, the third of a Shetland pony called

Shorty and the fourth of a spotty pig by the name of Measles.

These were the animals that would one day in the future belong to Sophie, for she was, she said, going to be a lady farmer when she grew up; and neither Sophie's mother and father nor her seven-year-old twin brothers, Matthew and Mark, doubted for one moment that she would.

Sophie, though small, was very determined.

But on this particular morning Sophie did not spare a glance for her portrait gallery. Instead she scrambled to the end of her bed and peered over. And there it was!

"Yikes!" cried Sophie.



“He’s been!” and she undid the safety-pin that fastened the long bulging woollen stocking to the bedclothes.

By now Sophie was used to the fact that her birthday was on Christmas Day. The twins, who had been born in spring, felt rather sorry for her.

“Poor old Sophie,” said Matthew, “being born then.”

“Hard luck on her,” said Mark. “Glad we weren’t.”

But Sophie didn’t mind.

“It’s twice as nice,” she said, when anyone asked how she felt about it.

“Everybody gives me two presents.”

“It was clever of you, Mum,” she had said to her mother once.

“What was?”

“Having me on Christmas Day. How did you manage it?”

“With difficulty. But you were the nicest possible Christmas present. Daddy and I both wanted a little girl very much.”

“Why?”

“Well, we already had two boys, didn’t we?”

“What would you have called me if I’d been a boy?”

“Noël, probably.”

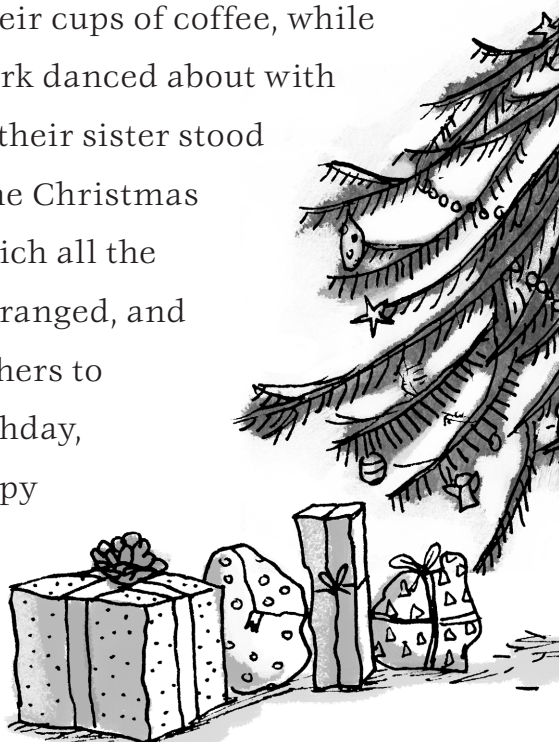
“Yuk!” said Sophie. “I’m glad I wasn’t, then.”

This Christmas Day, the sixth of Sophie’s life, started off in the customary way. As soon as the grandmother clock in the hall had struck seven, the twins ran,

and Sophie plodded, into their parents' bedroom, and they all climbed on to the big bed to show what Father Christmas had brought them.

Then, after breakfast, came the ceremony of the present-giving.

This was always done in the same way. Everybody sat down, in the sitting-room of course – at least the two grown-ups sat down with their cups of coffee, while Matthew and Mark danced about with excitement, and their sister stood stolidly beside the Christmas tree, beneath which all the presents were arranged, and waited for the others to sing “Happy birthday, dear Sophie, happy birthday to you!”



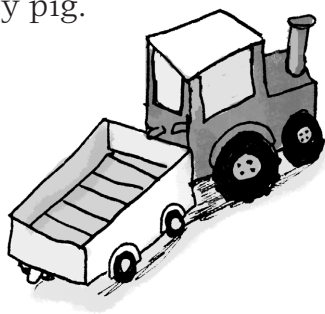
Then the opening of the presents began, one at a time, youngest first, eldest last – a Christmas present for Sophie, then one for Mark, then Matthew (ten minutes older), then Mummy, then Dad, and finally a birthday present for Sophie, before she began again on her next Christmas one.

This year, to Sophie's surprise and delight, word of her intention to be a lady farmer had somehow got round the entire family, and both her Christmas and her birthday presents reflected this.

From grandparents and aunts and uncles came picture books of farms and story books of farms and colouring books of farms. Best of all, from her mother and father, there was (for Christmas) a model farmyard with a cowshed and a

barn and some post-and-rail fences and a duck pond made of a piece of glass in one corner and (for her birthday) lots of little model animals, cows and sheep and horses, some standing up, some lying down, and a fierce-looking bull, chickens, a turkey-cock, some ducks for the pond, and even a spotty pig.

And as for her present from the twins – that was super, nothing less than a red tractor pulling a yellow trailer!



“The tractor’s for your birthday,” said Matthew.

“And the trailer’s for Christmas,” said Mark.

“What a lovely present!” said Sophie’s mother.



“Yes,” said the twins with one voice. “It was jolly expensive too.”

Sophie felt a bit guilty about this, since her Christmas present to them was the usual one – a Mars bar each, their favourite. Still, that was all she could manage when she had finished buying presents for her parents. Afterwards she had unscrewed the plug in the tummy of her piggy-bank, on whose side was stuck a notice:



and found that there was only seventy pence of her savings left.

At last there was only one present remaining at the foot of the tree, an ordinary white envelope with *Sophie* written on it. Underneath there was some joined-up writing that Sophie couldn't read. She had left it till last because it looked boring. Probably just an old Christmas card, she thought, as she picked it up and handed it to her father.

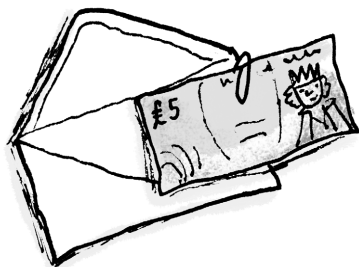
"What's it say, Daddy?" she asked.

"It says: *Sophie, Many happy returns of Christmas Day, Love from Aunt Al.*"

Aunt Al was Sophie's Great-great-aunt Alice, who was nearly eighty-one years old and lived in the Highlands of Scotland. She had come to lunch one day in the summer, and she and Sophie had got on like a house on fire.

"Aren't you going to open it?" asked Sophie's mother.

"It's just a card, I expect," said Sophie, but inside the envelope was another smaller envelope marked *Farm Money* and inside that was a five pound note.



"Yikes!" shouted Sophie. "I could buy a hen with that, a real one, I mean!"

"April," said Mark.

"Or May," said Matthew.

"You wait till you get your real farm," said Sophie's father. "This house would be full of animals if you had your way."

After lunch, Sophie set out her model farm on the sitting-room floor. She

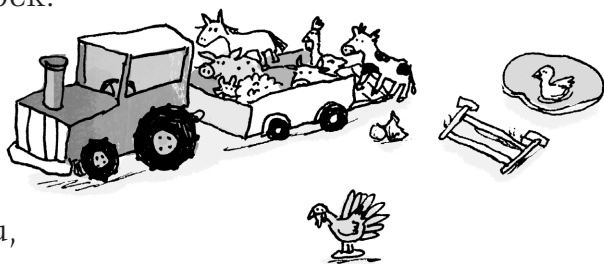
loaded all the animals in turn on to the trailer, and then drove the tractor into the yard to unload and arrange them.

“You’re lucky,” she said, holding up the turkey-cock.

“We’ve just been eating one of your

lot. Mind you,

when I have real turkeys on my farm, I shan’t eat any of them.”



“You going to be a vegetarian?” asked her mother.

“No,” said Sophie, “but you can’t eat your friends. I shall eat a stranger – from the supermarket.”

“This farm of yours is just going to be a collection of pets,” said her father, yawning in his armchair.

"That's right," said Sophie. "I like pets.  
I wish I had a pet, now."

"You're much too young."

"I'm five."

"That's much too young," said the  
twins.

"I'll buy myself a pet, with Aunt Al's  
money."

"Don't be silly," said her father sleepily.

"I'm not silly."

"You are," said Matthew.

"I'm not."

"You are," said Mark.

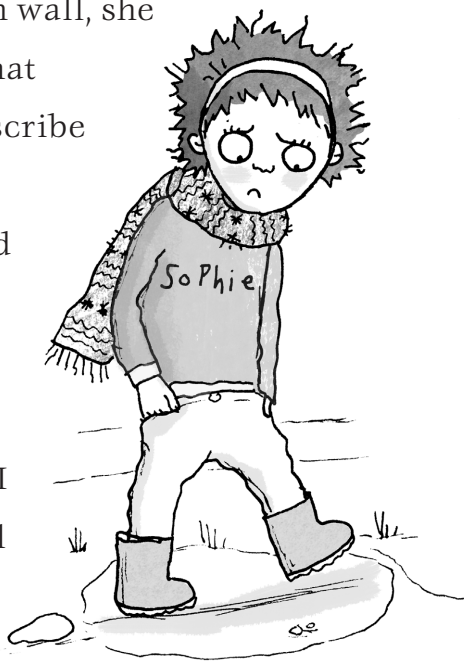
"I AM NOT."

"Be quiet, Sophie," said her mother,  
"and play with your toy farm. Daddy  
wants a nap."

Sophie put the turkey-cock down  
(on the duck pond, as it happened) and

stamped out of the room. Hands rammed deep into the pockets of her jeans, she plodded out into the wintry garden, a short stocky figure whose dark hair looked, as always, as though she had just come through a hedge backwards. Her head was bent, there was a scowl on her round face, and as she walked along the path beside the garden wall, she mouthed the phrase that she always used to describe those who upset her.

“Mowldy, stupid, and assive!” she muttered. “That’s what they all are, mowldy, stupid, and assive. Why can’t I have a real live animal of my own – now?”



“Nee-ow?”  
said a voice  
above her head,  
and, looking up,  
Sophie saw a  
cat sitting on  
the wall. It was  
a jet-black cat with huge round orange  
eyes that stared down at her, and again it  
said, more confidently, “Nee-ow!”



Then it jumped down, trotted up to  
her with its tail held stiffly upright,  
and began to rub itself  
against her legs, purring  
like a steam-engine.

Sophie's frown gave  
way to a huge grin  
as she stroked the  
gleaming sable fur.



“Happy Christmas, my dear!” she said.  
“And how beautiful you are! I wonder  
who you belong to?”

“Yee-ew!” said the cat.

At least that’s how it sounded to  
Sophie.

