



The Reindeer & The Fox

A Christmas Story

Written by Marc Laithwaite

Illustrated by the children of Richard Durnings Endowed Primary School

For Cora & Elsie



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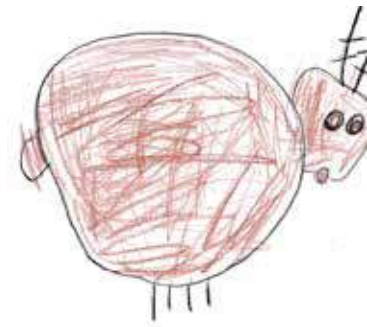
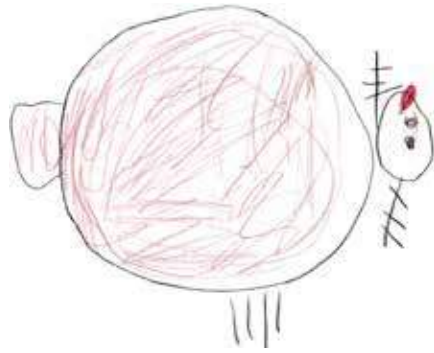
The Reindeer & The Fox is a festive story, which was written to coincide with the Lakeland Lapland Virtual Festive Ultra Run, organised by www.lakeland100.com

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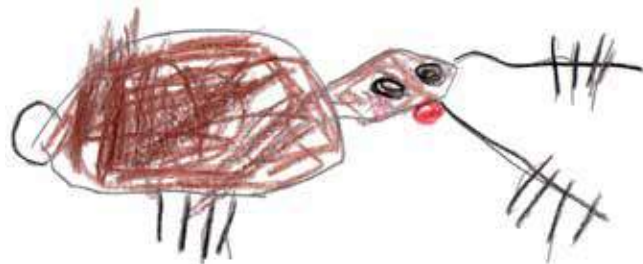
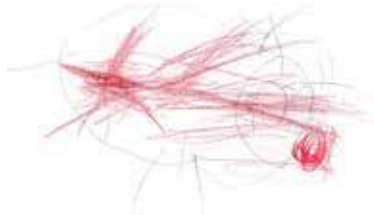
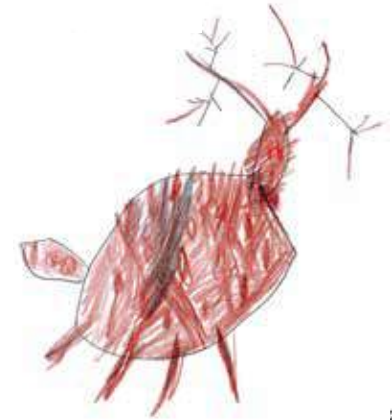
In the town of Rovaniemi, in Lapland, lives Comet. And Comet has the **most important job** in the world. Because she – along with her reindeer friends – helps Santa deliver presents to millions of children **ALL** around the world!

It was early in the month of December and Comet was getting ready to make her annual journey from her home, to Santa's home in the small village of Korvatunturi. You might think that Santa's reindeer live with him **all year round**, but that's not true! In fact, each of the nine reindeer lives in a different village or forest around Lapland, and it's only at the beginning of December, that they embark on their **special journey** to Santa's home.

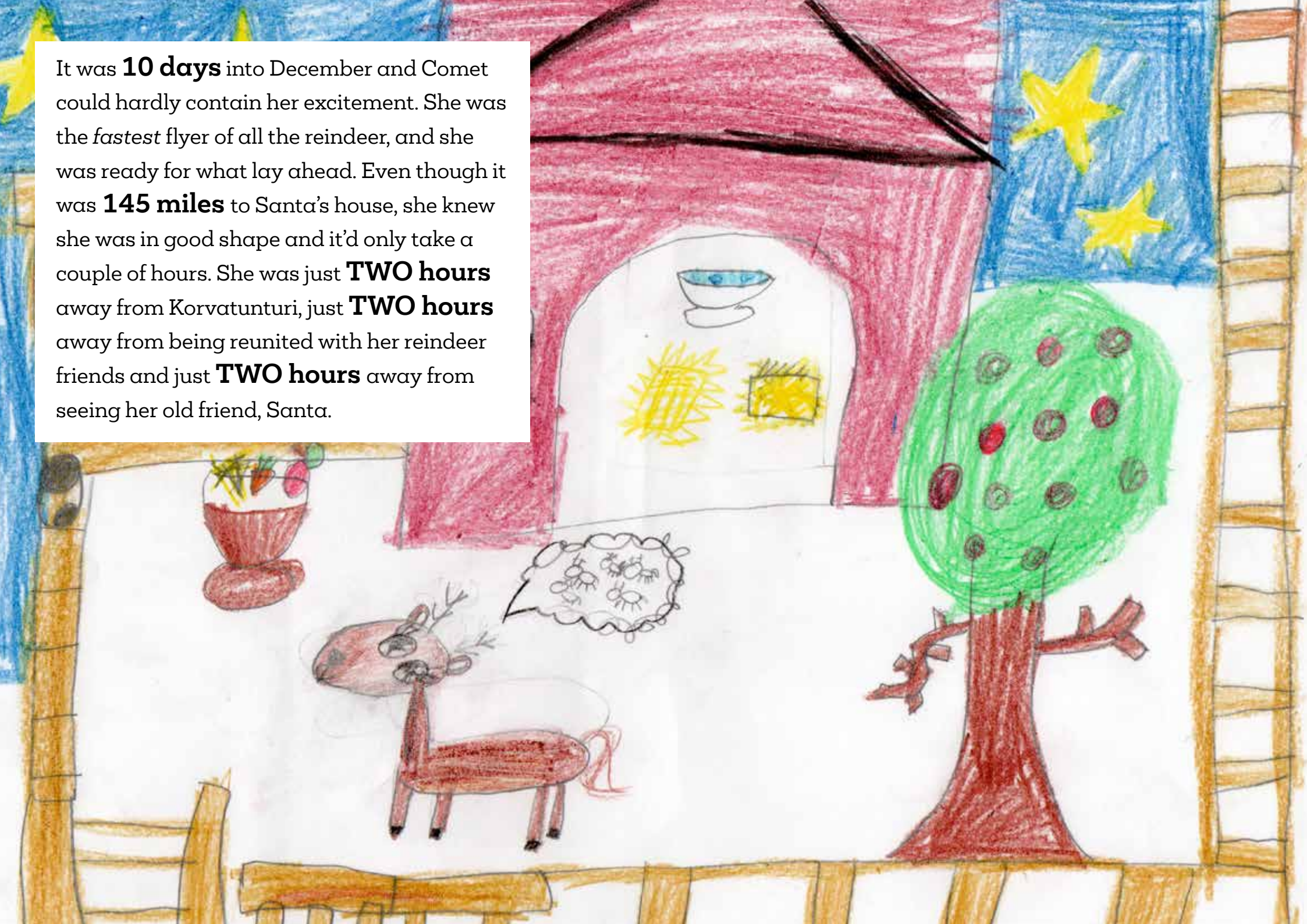


It's always the most **joyful** of days, when they regroup and make the final preparations for their mission – to pull Santa's sleigh and spread smiles. From Lapland to Lahore. Wigan to Wisconsin. Coniston to Cologne. Like I said, it's the **best job in the world**.

And this year, the journey was the most important it had ever been. Families and children in all corners of the globe had faced a tricky time and many people had suffered great sadness. So, **now more than ever**, they each knew that their mission had to be **bigger** and **better** than it had been before. People needed something to look forward to. The presents just **HAD** to be delivered on time!



It was **10 days** into December and Comet could hardly contain her excitement. She was the *fastest* flyer of all the reindeer, and she was ready for what lay ahead. Even though it was **145 miles** to Santa's house, she knew she was in good shape and it'd only take a couple of hours. She was just **TWO hours** away from Korvatunturi, just **TWO hours** away from being reunited with her reindeer friends and just **TWO hours** away from seeing her old friend, Santa.



She stepped outside her stable. The air was cold and still. It was **dark** and there wasn't a sound to be heard. The sun was starting to rise. She felt butterflies in her tummy. Excited. Nervous. She knew what they were about to do, this year more than ever, brought with it great risk and with great risk, comes great responsibility. After a deep breath, she steadied her thoughts. But there was no time to hang around.

She needed to get going.





Three... two... one...

After a few tentative steps, she was *off!*
Her hooves thundered through the icy
snow, faster and faster and then up...
away into the sky!

But... nothing happened.

She was confused. This had never
happened before. She was a reindeer
and reindeer *flew!*

She tried again. Faster and faster, then
up, up, ^{up}.

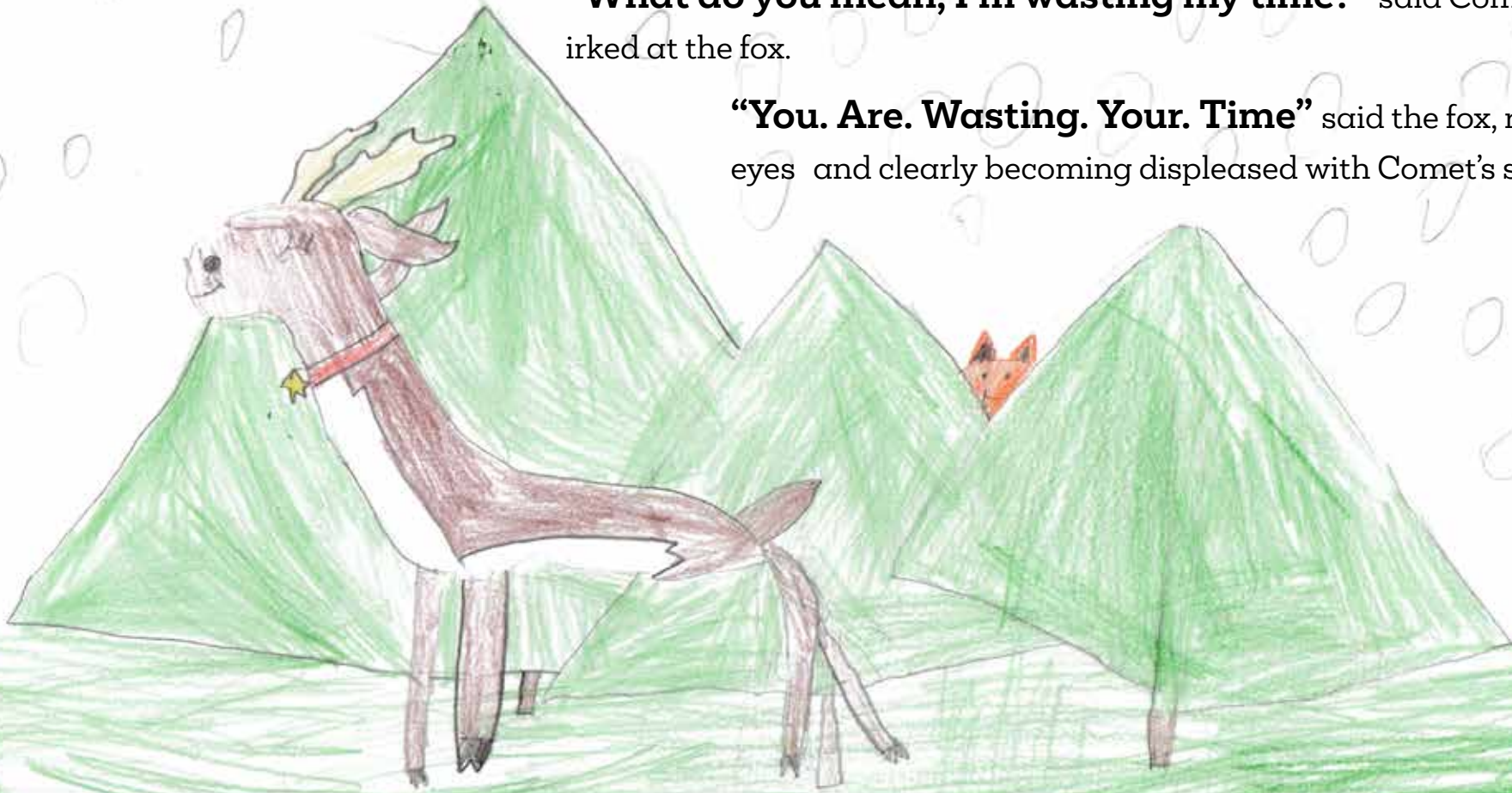
Again... nothing happened.

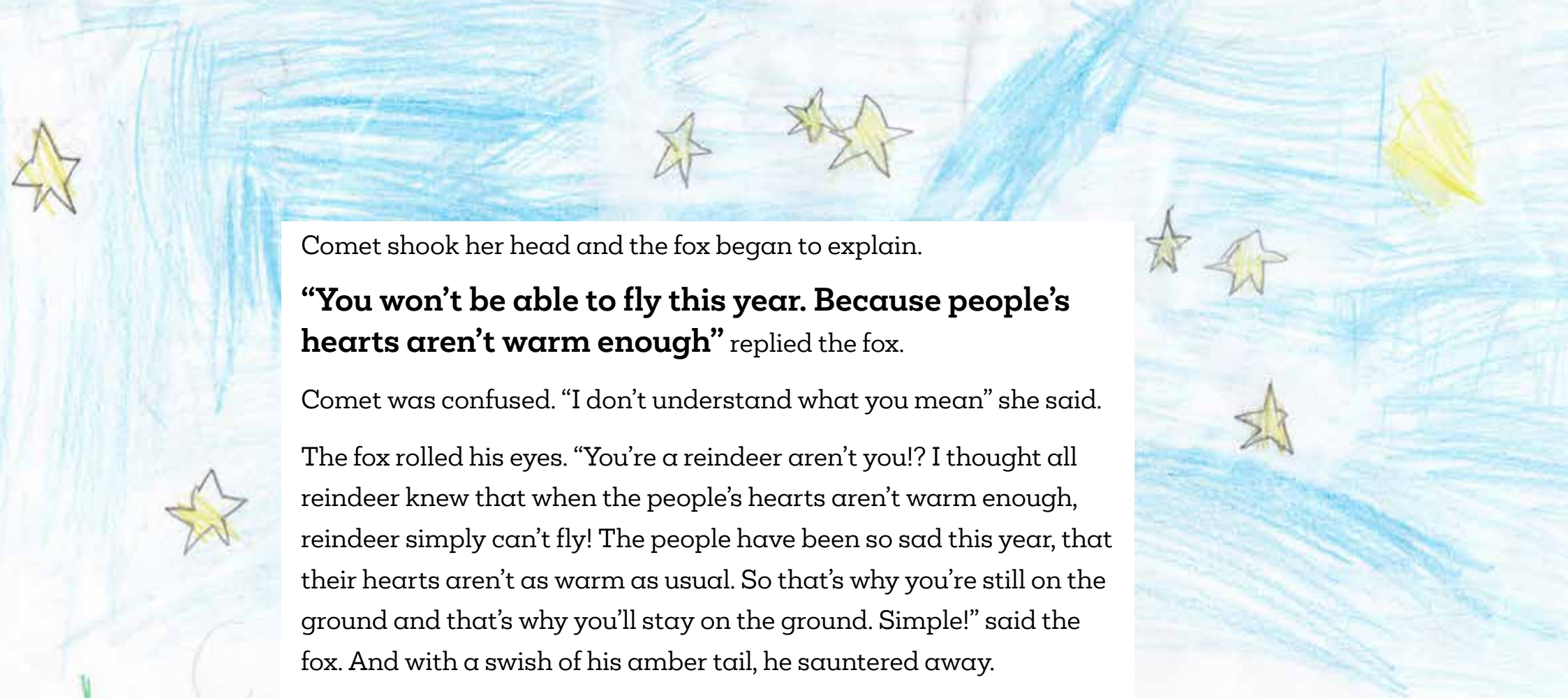


“You’re wasting your time” said a quiet but certain voice. Comet was shocked for the second time in as many minutes. First at not being able to fly and now, at the sight in front of her. She was barely able to make it out but as she squinted into the blanket of darkness, slouched on a tree stump just a few feet away, was a fox.

“What do you mean, I’m wasting my time?” said Comet, a little irked at the fox.

“You. Are. Wasting. Your. Time” said the fox, rolling his eyes and clearly becoming displeased with Comet’s slow uptake.



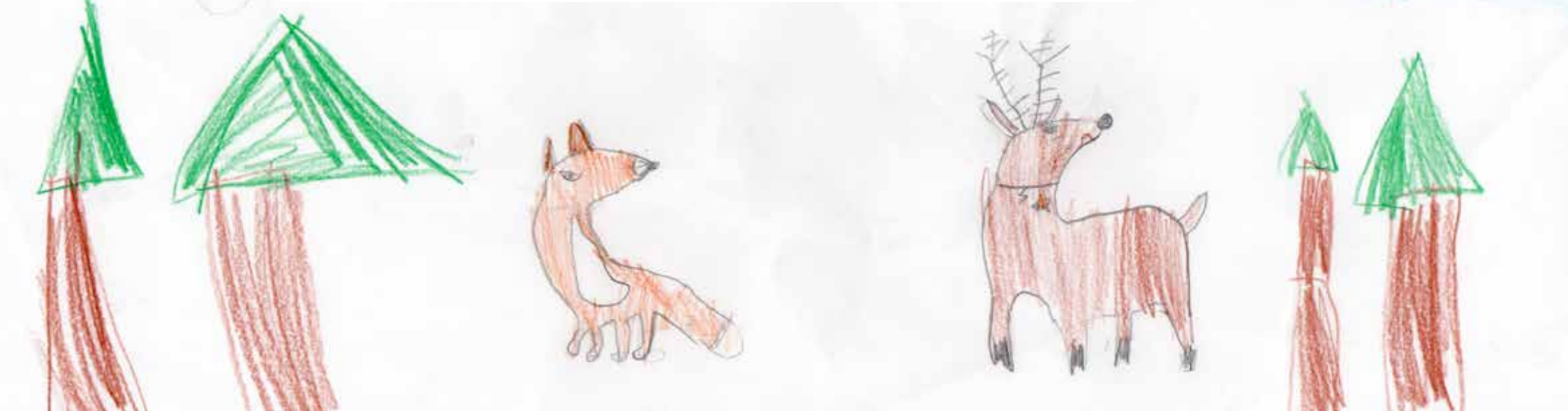


Comet shook her head and the fox began to explain.

“You won’t be able to fly this year. Because people’s hearts aren’t warm enough” replied the fox.

Comet was confused. “I don’t understand what you mean” she said.

The fox rolled his eyes. “You’re a reindeer aren’t you!? I thought all reindeer knew that when the people’s hearts aren’t warm enough, reindeer simply can’t fly! The people have been so sad this year, that their hearts aren’t as warm as usual. So that’s why you’re still on the ground and that’s why you’ll stay on the ground. Simple!” said the fox. And with a swish of his amber tail, he sauntered away.



With disbelief that could only match 2020, Comet started to panic.

“But this year more than ever, people need my help” she said, seemingly to nobody. “**I HAVE** to deliver presents to the children. **I MUST** find my friends. **I NEED** to get to Santa!”

Overhearing Comet’s flurry and fuss, the fox made his way back over.

“Well, if something is so important to you, then surely you should at least try. You’ll just have to walk” said the fox.

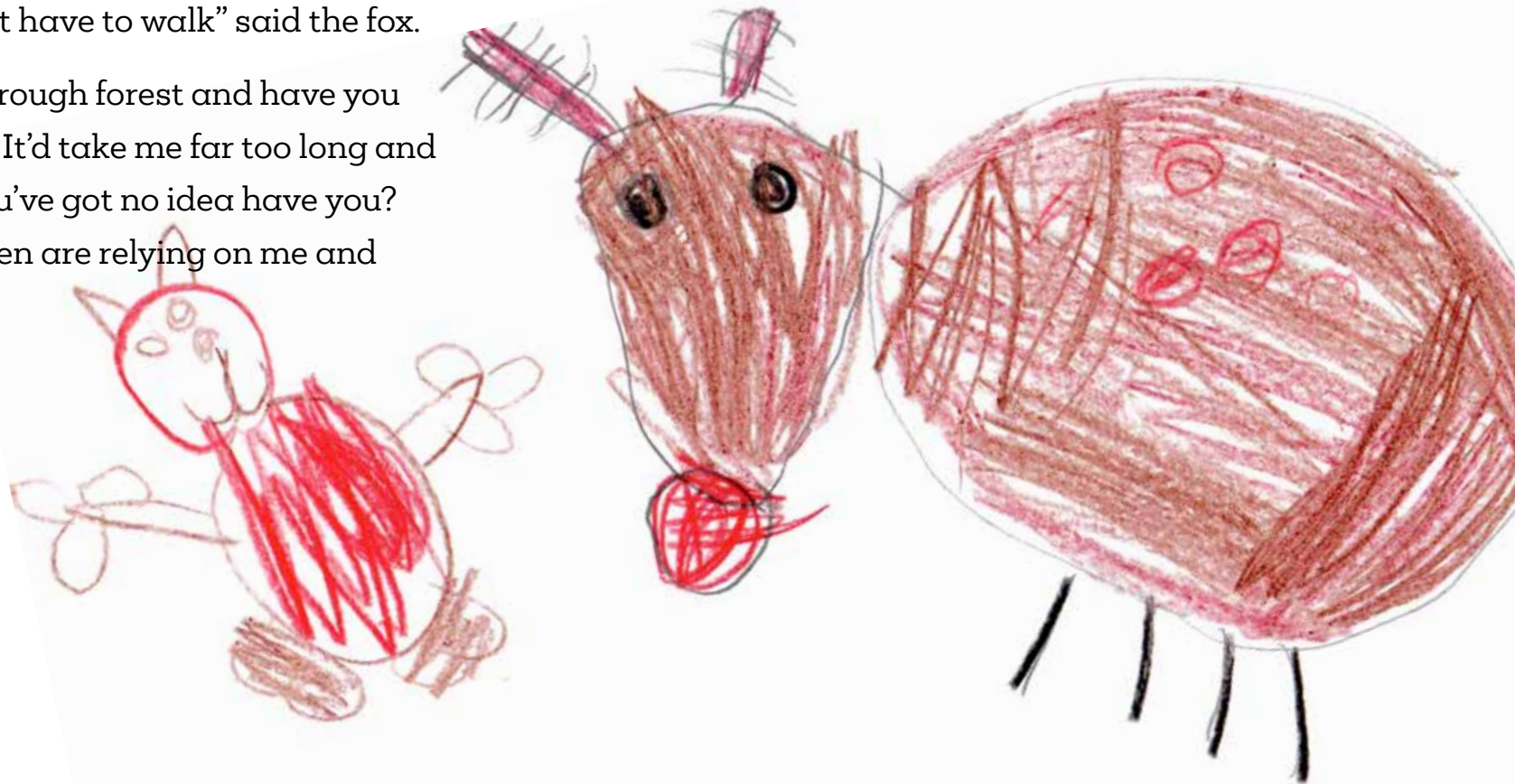
“**WALK?! It’s 145 miles through forest and have you seen how deep the snow is? It’d take me far too long and I’d never make it in time! You’ve got no idea have you? You’re just a silly fox! Children are relying on me and my friends!**”

Tears started to roll down Comet’s face.

“Well there’s no point sitting there blubbing” said the fox. “Shove your hooves into your shoes and we’ll get cracking. When do we need to be there?!”

“We?!” questioned Comet. “We?!”

“Obviously” nodded the fox. “**We!**”





“Oh. Right. Well... we normally arrive at Santa’s home to prepare the sleigh and the toys on 22nd December.”

“Great! That’s 12 days,” said the fox. “It’ll be tight, but I know we can do it... together! Grab your backpack, we can’t stand here all day!”

The fox nodded in the direction of the road and took his first step on the **mammoth 145 mile journey**. Comet was a little hesitant – she’d always been told not to trust strangers – but, well, the children needed her and she needed fox. She hurried after him.

It was *bitterly cold*, but they soon began to warm up as they trudged through the forest. Lapland was **truly magical** in December and everything in their path glistened as the sun started to replace the moon.



As the sun rose, they trudged on. As the sun shone, they trudged on. As the sun set, they trudged on. They stopped only to take a drink, melting snow straight into their mouths, or to replenish their energy levels – berries from the woods for Comet and rabbit droppings for the fox. ***“My favourite!”*** he exclaimed each time he gulped back a pellet that he’d found on the floor.

“You. Are. Gross” said Comet.



It was tiring work. They'd been trekking for **four days** and reached the top of *yet another hill*, when Comet stumbled to a stop.

"I... just... can't. My hooves are aching, my back is aching, my legs are aching. Can we please just take a break? It's such hard work. When I'm flying, it's so easy! We're not even halfway there yet and *I just want to stop!*"

The fox closed his eyes for a second, taking in the warmth of the sun on his face. As it melted the snow all around him, it was almost as though it too, was melting tears right out of Comet's eyes.

The fox put his paws on Comet's hooves and started to massage them.

"Sometimes Comet, we need to do the *difficult things*, move through the *hard times* in life, to appreciate the *good things*. Sometimes it gets really, *really*


hard. And being sad from time to time is okay, because it makes you realise how *good* it feels to be happy. I know you miss your friends and you're stuck with me but when you're reunited, it'll feel *100 times better.*"

"What do you mean?" said Comet.
"You're my friend!"

Fox's face flushed the same colour as his coat, so he quickly moved on.

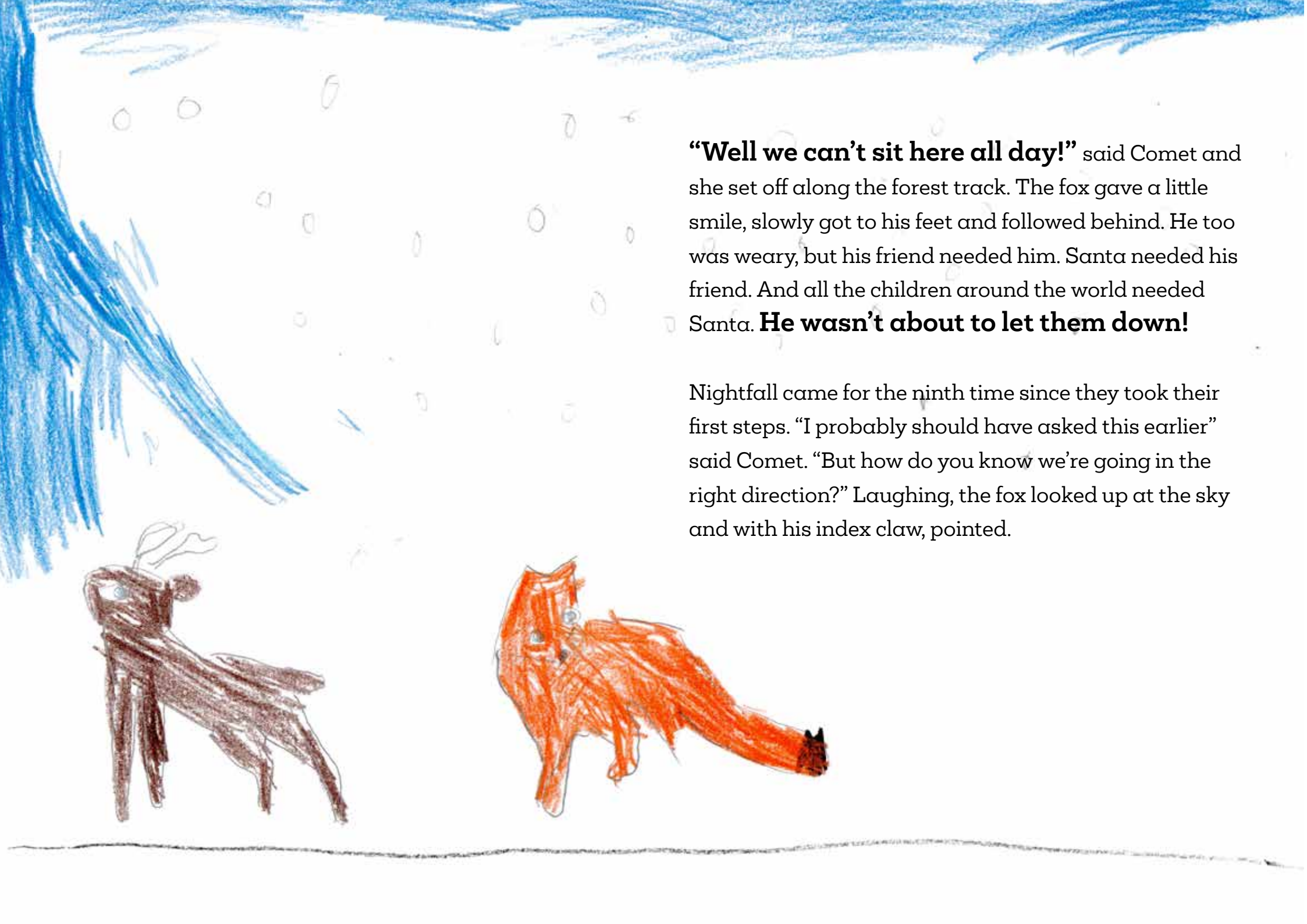
"Comet. You can do this, I know you can. **WE'RE** going to do it... together. Just think how good you'll feel when you finally get to Santa's house and help him to deliver all those presents. You need to always remember that the journeys which are the most difficult, will always give you the greatest rewards at the end."





The fox closed his eyes once more and rested his head against the tree. The sun had reached its highest point in the sky and it was nice to rest for a while and *feel its warmth*. He opened his eyes to see Comet already on her feet and lifting up her backpack by the old, worn leather straps.





“Well we can’t sit here all day!” said Comet and she set off along the forest track. The fox gave a little smile, slowly got to his feet and followed behind. He too was weary, but his friend needed him. Santa needed his friend. And all the children around the world needed Santa. **He wasn’t about to let them down!**

Nightfall came for the ninth time since they took their first steps. “I probably should have asked this earlier” said Comet. “But how do you know we’re going in the right direction?” Laughing, the fox looked up at the sky and with his index claw, pointed.



“It’s been leading us the whole way!” said the fox. Comet looked up to see a single bright star. Of course, there were other stars in the sky, but this one was brighter than the rest and clearly stood out from the others.

“Oh” said Comet. “Well... I hadn’t even noticed the star!”

“You’re not the first and you certainly won’t be the last” replied the fox. “We spend so much time worrying about the obstacles ahead of us on our journey, that we forget about the bright stars who are always there to help guide us.”

“Fox... you are very wise” said Comet.

“I know” said the fox.

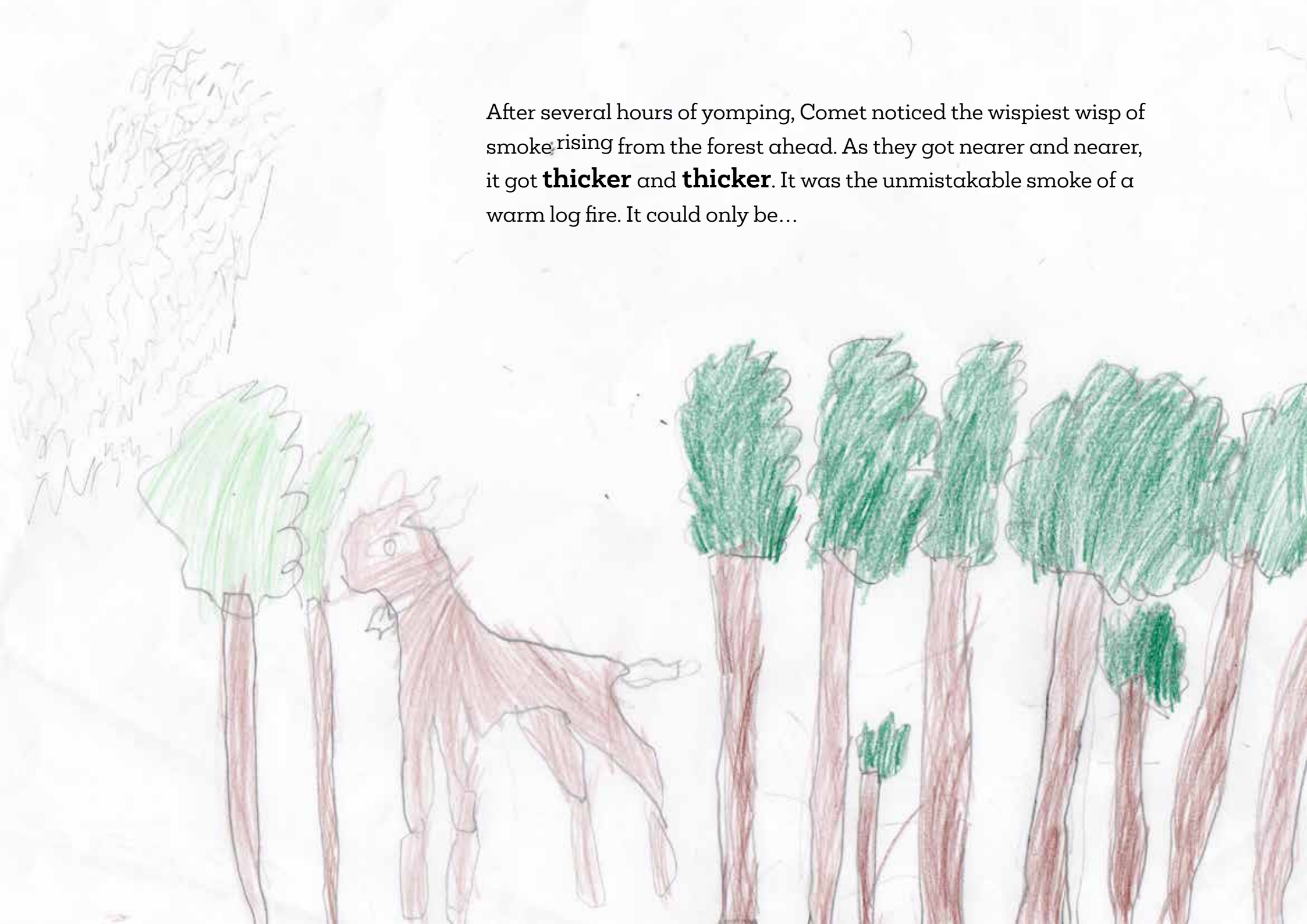




They woke to a thick frost and climbed out of the hollow where they had spent the night. It was **day 12** of their journey to reach the village of Korvatunturi and the snow was very deep now. The pair knew that the going would be slow and difficult.

But they'd not come this far to abandon their mission now.

After several hours of yomping, Comet noticed the wispiest wisp of smoke rising from the forest ahead. As they got nearer and nearer, it got **thicker** and **thicker**. It was the unmistakable smoke of a warm log fire. It could only be...





“SANTA’S HOUSE!” exclaimed Comet. With an injection of speed that is only found upon seeing the finish line of a monumental journey, they followed the small track.

The final few steps of their 145 mile trip. As they reached the end of the track which led to Santa’s house, there he was! Santa himself, polishing the brilliant red sleigh!





When Santa saw them approaching, he ran (as best as a rotund old chap can do) to greet his good friend. **"I'm so happy to see you. Please come inside, I have soup and warm drinks!"**



Santa's face was aglow, he was so happy to see Comet and as they ate and warmed themselves by the fire, Comet told Santa of the journey and how the fox had helped her along the way. The smile on Santa's face soon disappeared. **"You... you... have come alone?"** he stumbled.

"Yes. But aren't the others here?" questioned Comet.

"No, only you Comet" said Santa, looking deflated and towards the ground. **"I fear the other reindeer aren't able to fly either and haven't been able to make the journey."**

Comet's heart sank. She had come all this way only to find that the other reindeer were missing.





“The whole journey was for nothing!”

she cried, as she dropped to the floor with her head in her hooves.

The fox, who had been uncharacteristically shy since arriving at Santa’s house, was sat by the fireplace warming his paws.



“No, Comet.” he piped up. “Don’t you see? **No journey is ever for nothing!** It’s not always about what you find at the end - sometimes it’s about what you learn along the way.”

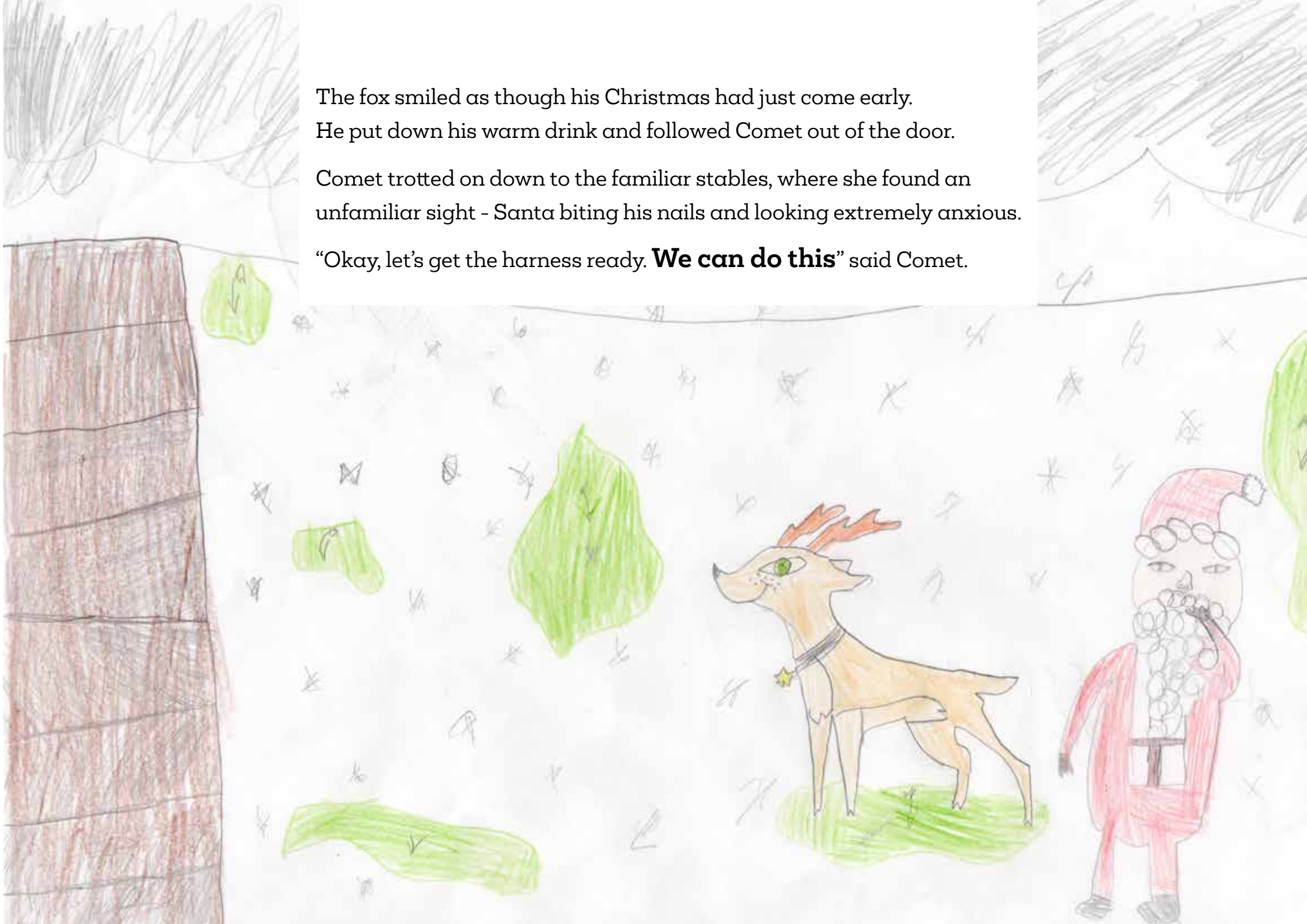


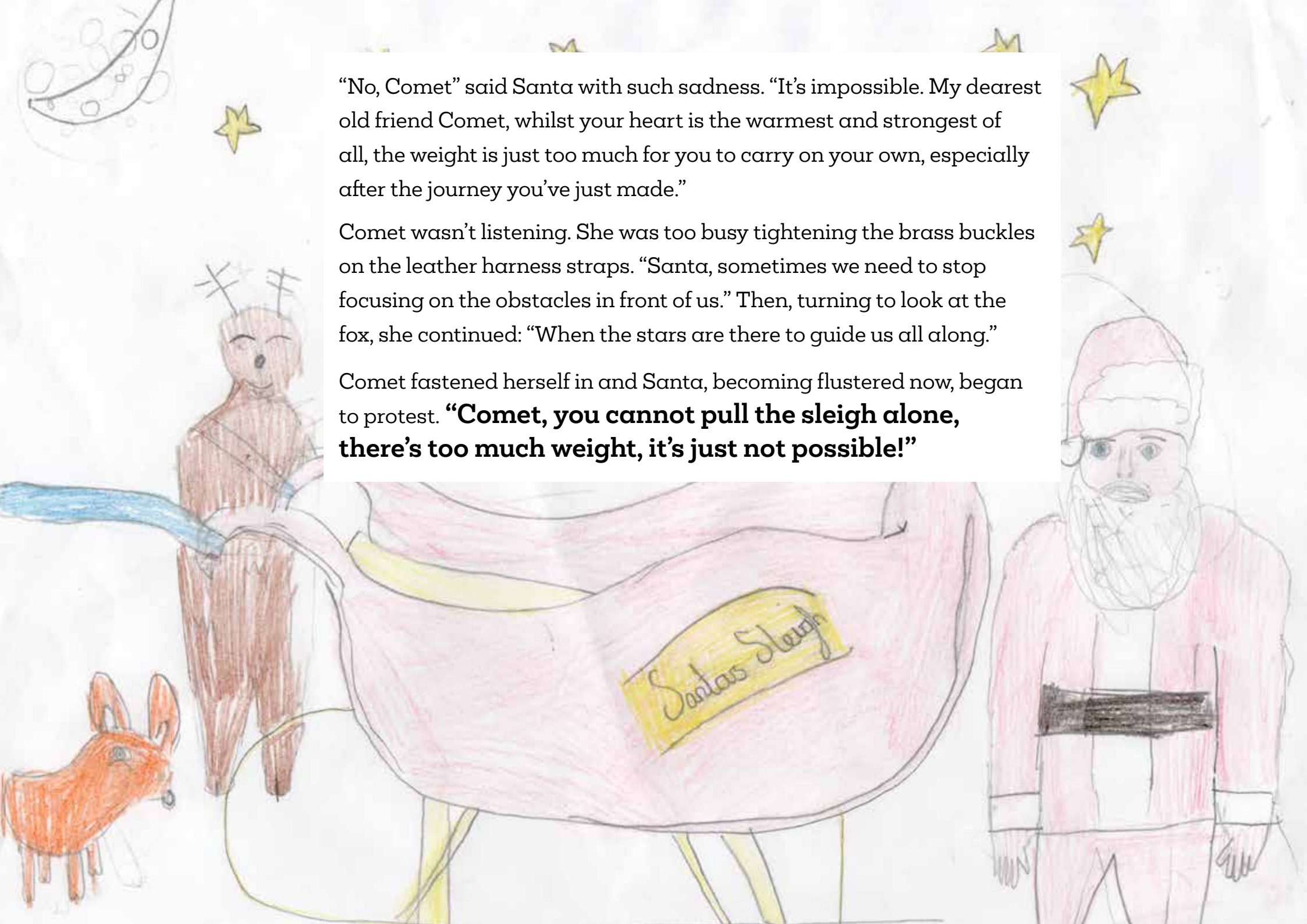
Comet stood up and walked to the door. She hesitated and turned to look at the fox who was still sat by the fireplace.

“Well, fox” she said, slowly. **“I suppose if something is so important to you, then surely you should at least try!”**



The fox smiled as though his Christmas had just come early.
He put down his warm drink and followed Comet out of the door.
Comet trotted on down to the familiar stables, where she found an unfamiliar sight - Santa biting his nails and looking extremely anxious.
“Okay, let’s get the harness ready. **We can do this**” said Comet.





“No, Comet” said Santa with such sadness. “It’s impossible. My dearest old friend Comet, whilst your heart is the warmest and strongest of all, the weight is just too much for you to carry on your own, especially after the journey you’ve just made.”

Comet wasn’t listening. She was too busy tightening the brass buckles on the leather harness straps. “Santa, sometimes we need to stop focusing on the obstacles in front of us.” Then, turning to look at the fox, she continued: “When the stars are there to guide us all along.”

Comet fastened herself in and Santa, becoming flustered now, began to protest. **“Comet, you cannot pull the sleigh alone, there’s too much weight, it’s just not possible!”**

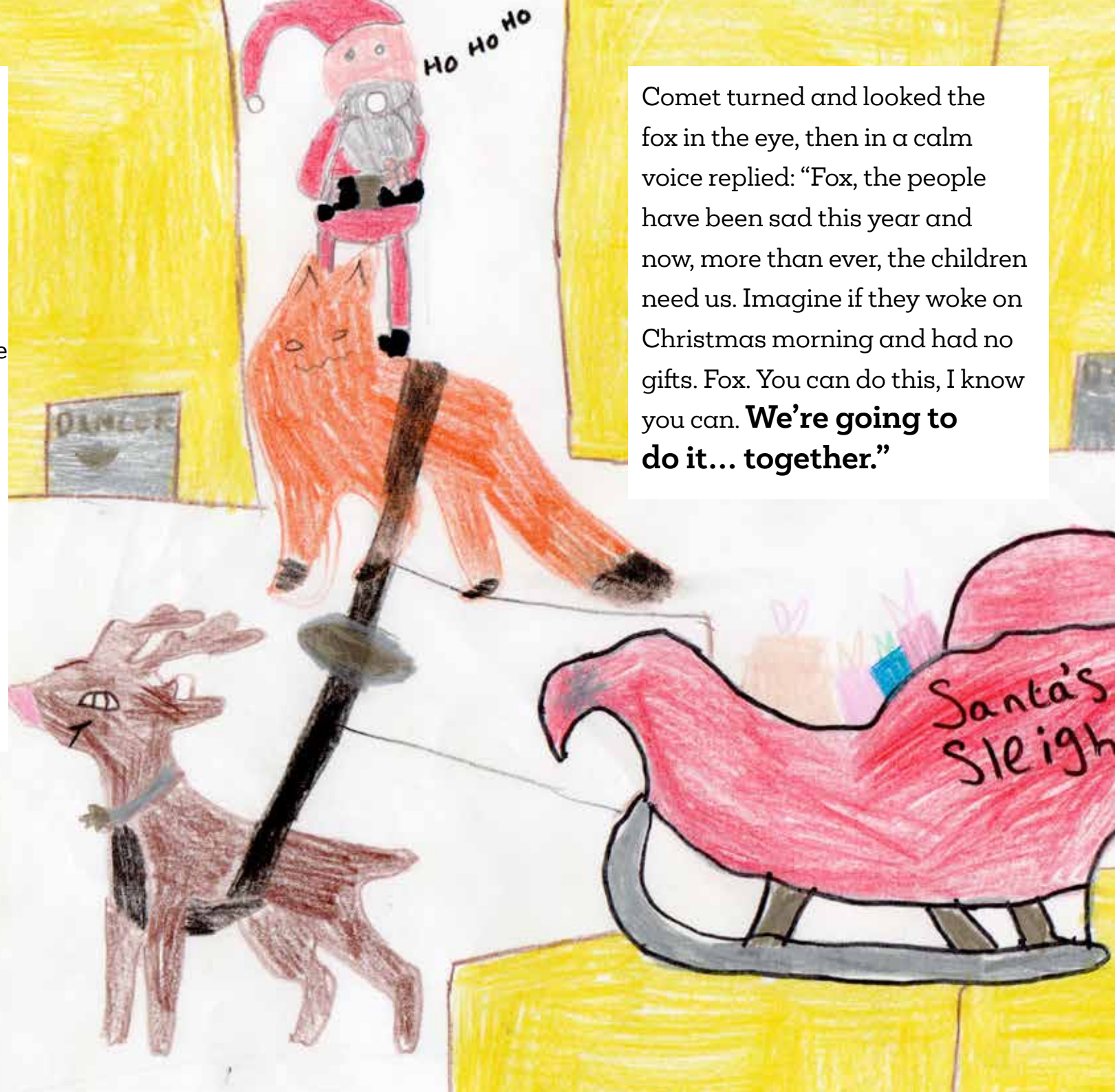
She glanced at the fox and laughed. “Don’t be silly Santa, I wasn’t planning on pulling it alone! I have a friend. And when you have a friend, you can do anything. Isn’t that right, fox?”

The fox stepped back. “Whooooaaahhh. I mean, I don’t do flying Comet! I’m not even good with heights. In fact, I’m **terrified!**”

“Yes, well, a wise old fox once told me that the journeys which are the most difficult, will always give you the greatest rewards at the end!” said Comet with a smile. As she pulled tight the leather straps around the fox’s chest, his eyes bulged a little. **He gulped.**



The pair of pals pulled the sleigh out of the stable and Santa jumped on board. The trio paused for just a moment, silently reflecting on what lay ahead. It was beginning to get dark, but the night sky was beautiful and above them, as always, was the bright star. Each breath created a cloud of steam, which rose into the air. The fox was anxious. "Look, this really isn't what I do. I'm not a reindeer. *I'm. Well... I'm... I'm... just a fox.*"



Comet turned and looked the fox in the eye, then in a calm voice replied: "Fox, the people have been sad this year and now, more than ever, the children need us. Imagine if they woke on Christmas morning and had no gifts. Fox. You can do this, I know you can. **We're going to do it... together.**"

Seeing the look in Comet's eyes, he turned and fixed his gaze straight ahead.

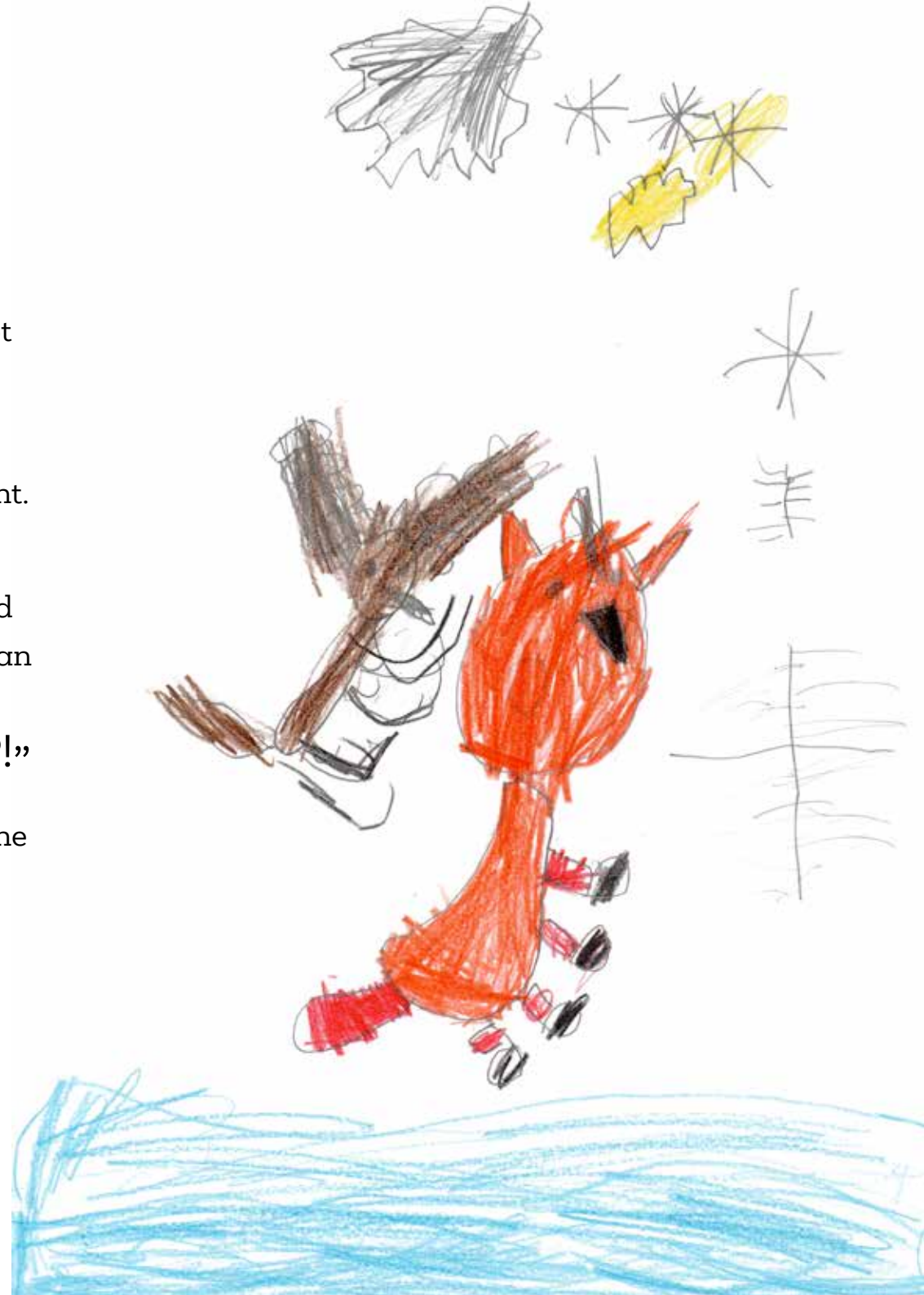
"The children will **NOT** wake up tomorrow morning without gifts" he said. "That cannot happen and will not happen. ***Not on our watch!***"

With that the fox screamed an almighty "**HOORAHHH!!**" and they pulled with all their might. The sleigh started to gather speed.

"**GO, GO, GO!**" screamed Comet as they accelerated faster and faster. The fox's legs were moving quicker than they'd ever gone before.

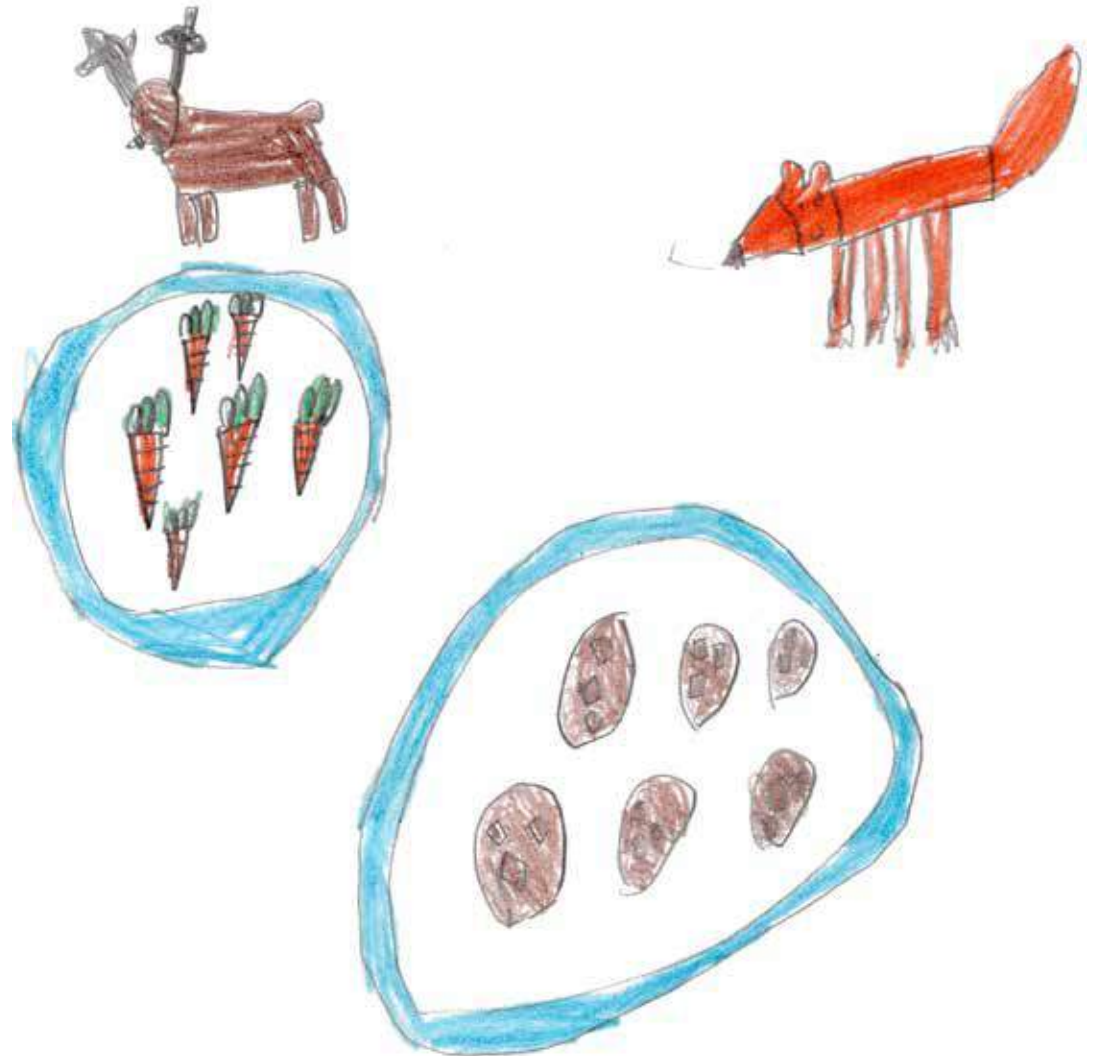
He tilted his head back and screamed "**UP, UP, UP!**"

The sleigh left the ground and soared **upwards** into the night sky. "**We're up!! We're up!! Oh my days, I don't believe it!**" shouted Santa.



Now I don't have to tell you how this story ends. The toys were delivered and this year, more than any year, Christmas was special for everyone.

But it's important that I correct you with regards to Santa and his team. This Christmas Eve, when you leave out a mince pie for Santa and a carrot for Rudolph, make sure you also leave a carrot for Comet. In fact, leave some more carrots for Dasher, Dancer, Prancer, Vixen, Cupid, Donner and Blitzen. But if you'd be so kind, please also leave a biscuit for dear old Mr Fox, **because the only thing he hates more than heights, is carrots.**



The end.



In the town of Rovaniemi, in Lapland, lives Comet. And Comet has the **most important job** in the world. Because she – along with her reindeer friends – helps Santa deliver presents to millions of children **ALL** around the world!

But this year, something has changed. As if 2020 hasn't been bad enough, it seems Comet has lost her ability to do what reindeer do - **FLY!**

With an unlikely friend and a tough journey ahead of them - can the reindeer and the fox save Christmas?

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