

Once upon a time in twenty-fifteen
in a small terraced house on Bordesley Green
lived a girl called Aisha and her mum, Mariam
On the night before Christmas in cold Birmingham.
They were going to do Christmas day 'proper' this year
with stockings and turkey and gulps of good cheer.
But with the turkey unstuffed and the stockings unstocked,
Mariam flinched with each tick of the clock.
Age six-and-three-eighths, Aisha was buzzing;
she'd had three cups of Schloer and gushed ten to the dozen*.
Her mum scooped her up and said she must get to bed,
but Aisha would rather be reindeer instead.
'Look mama, look! I've got two spikey horns
I'll land on the roof and poo on your lawn.'
'They're called antlers, ok, now stop it now, please
Get in the bath, yes, quick, or you'll freeze.'
She hoped that she'd have a quick rinse and be done
but Aisha decided to have some more fun
'Look mama, look at my fluffy white beard
I wear the same clothes every day of the year
I've grown so fat with my wobbly belly
'cause except for today I just sit and watch telly.'
'Thank you my darling, yes thank you my daughter –
enough of that now, and don't drink the water.'
She scrubbed and rubbed her daughter* dry
and clothed her clean, ready to lie
and fall asleep to dream of day
having missed the sound of Santa's sleigh.
But Aisha wouldn't, couldn't close her eyes;
no matter how her mother tried
and coaxed and begged and pleaded her to,
while tempted to drug her with PVA glue.
At last she said she'd tell her a tale
The Christmas Story, how could it fail?
'I've heard that one a gajillion times;
they tell us at school, I know all the lines.'
Mariam looked at her smug little face
and tried to find the inner grace
and patience to say that this one was secret.
'You won't find this on a Christian Aid leaflet.'
Aisha paused then leapt under the covers.
She was quiet at last, which is music to mothers.
'Are you ready to listen? Well then I'll begin,'
and with no plot or plan, nose-first she dove in.
Long, long, long, long, long, long ago,

Before Walt Disney invented snow
and all was wireless and nothing beeped,
in wide open land through which we've crept,
there was a young woman riding an ass.
She was covered in dirt and called Christina Mass.
She lived alone on a quaint little farm
with a donkey, some cows, and oodles of charm.
The only crop that her fields would grow
were lettuces, which spread row to row.
She ate them in pies, cakes, quiches, and soups
and even once tried flavoured ice cream scoops.
The rest she'd sell to far away cities
and occasionally met with salad committees,
but for the most part and from day to day
she was lonely and wished she had someone to say
'Hello' and 'Good morning' and 'Did you sleep well?'
'I missed you', 'I love you', and 'Phewee, you smell!
When'd you last wash you labouring fart?'
And by showing they cared, she'd be in their heart.
So she posted an ad to the neighbouring town
Farm girl, quite stocky, with hair that is brown
seeks friend or companion who on the outset is
fun, kind and caring, and has to love lettuce.
By the end of the month, she'd given up hope
thirty responses and all of them dopes.
That was until one day, a Tuesday perhaps,
she opened the door and nearly collapsed.
A woman was stood there, dressed all in white
and when their eyes met it was love at first sight.
Her name was Mary and she was sick of her life
in the city where she'd become some dullard's wife
so she'd runaway fast before they could get her
and had left behind all but her Irish red setter.
So Mary and Chrissy, they set up together,
planting and tending, whatever the weather
Taking care of the donkey and cows
and, although they had their fair share of rows,
they were happy and found that each day was exquisite
and were glad that none ever bothered to visit.
But still they felt that something was missing
and suddenly Mary said while they were kissing
'I think that I want a baby, I do.'
Chrissy looked up and replied, 'I do too.'
But then they were stumped on how to proceed
'I guess it's a matter of finding a seed.'

They searched their bodies to unearth the right fruit
each of them taking the opposite route
until Mary shouted 'I've found one, it's here!'
And plucked something tiny from inside her right ear
she gave it to Chrissy, who looked at it closely
then laughed and exclaimed 'it's a bit of cheese toastie!'
Mary's eyes filled up with tears
as Chris confirmed her deepest fears.
Perhaps they'd never have a child
to bring them joy and drive them wild.
But prayers unspoken are still heard;
as Mary cried, the heavens stirred
and in the skies that very night
a star appeared that shone so bright
it would have made Tom Edison
invent the lightbulb there and then.
Mary woke and walked outside;
you could say she was starry-eyed.
It seemed like something in a dream
the star fell down, she didn't scream.
It ripped apart the black ink sky
and Mary was convinced she'd die.
It hurtled nearer, nearer still.
She closed her eyes and felt a chill,
but when she opened them again
the star had disappeared and when
she tucked herself back up in bed
she thought it'd been all in her head.
The following day she woke at dawn
and stretched and cracked and quashed a yawn
before she went to milk the cows
and shook her head so as not to drowse.
She tugged the dugs of Gabriel
Their first-prize bovine cheese Royale.
When suddenly she felt a kick
and very nearly dropped a brick.
For when she started to look down
she saw her belly, nice and round.
'What's this monstrous, fleshy lump?'
Of course it was a baby bump.
But not for long as water broke
and trickled down like raw egg yolk.
She cried for Chris and then lay flat
avoiding Gabriel's latest pat.
After fifty shrieks and thirty screams,

while literally bursting at the seams,
their baby lay in mothers' arms
in amongst the stink of farm.
All seemed right and good...although
there was a strange unearthly glow
that dimly lit the shallow pen,
what we would call a halogen,
or halo if we're going there.
Either way, none could compare
with this their little star born babe
snugly lying in the hay.
From this day forth it was their joy
to cherish and love their golden boy
whose light grew brighter every day
and brought the sun when skies were grey.
And in the very darkest night
he was his own plugged in nightlight.
But all this illumination
was a flashing provocation.
As on a farm not far from them
there was a group of turkey hens
whose working conditions got so bad
they spilled more blood than Stalingrad
in a rebellion of claws and beaks
and cries of 'GOLOLOLOLOL!' that frightened the weak
and strong alike until all were dead
or into the fields they'd turned and fled.
They lived like turkey queens and kings
sewing diamonds to their wings.
But restless after tasting blood
and having turned the land to mud
they cast their sights to territories
where they might find future glories
and here it was they saw the glimmer
of Mary's son who had no dimmer.
What a prize, oh what a catch!
And so began the plans to snatch
this beacon bright, this shining treasure
who would bring them so much pleasure,
but first to deal with mother dears
without driving the boy to tears.
He must not know the work they do
for what would happen if he knew?
Perhaps the bulb inside would bust
and all their work reduced to dust.

They made a poison using drops
to spray on to their lettuce crops
using the best ingredients
of hate and spite and deviance
a dash of greed and jealousy
to finish off their chemistry.
Then off they trot to lay the trap
and tried to muffle any flaps
and while the family were inside
to the lettuce they applied
a healthy splash of what they'd brought
then flurried off without being caught.
The lettuces began to fizzle,
hiss and sputter and spit and sizzle.
They bubbled up, then shrivelled down
to tight green lumps laid in the ground.
When next outside the parents came
they wondered what was in the rain
that made their lovely green leaves shrink
and what was that unholy stink?
Still they thought they shouldn't waste
no matter how the buds would taste.
It didn't look like plant mildew
so they cooked them in a stew
but the boy was spared the dish
as he wanted chips and fish
and he was a little spoiled
so when the meal was fully boiled
it was just Chris and Mary who
took a gulp and turned quite blue
then red then yellow, white then green
their skin developed a glossy sheen
and both of them fell on the floor
to see and hear and eat no more.
The boy sat stunned until he heard
the gleeful gobble of a bird
and as they cheered for what they'd done
their trophy went and got a gun
and toddled back to face the mob
not letting out a single sob
He calmly aimed it at the chicks
and gently flipped the safety switch.
Before they knew what had been done
he blew their brains out one by one.
Then having done his filial job

he wept until his body throbbed
and as his tears fell on the land
they soaked into the poisoned glands
of the green and bitter vegetable
which somehow made them edible.
He froze the fowl and ate the greens
and lived off both until his teens
when he was discovered by
the world who always likes to pry
and became famed for spreading light
into the darkest winter night.
His story spread around the earth
and the nature of his birth
but of course details were twisted
through the pattern of their whispers
and so it is that still today
we celebrate this Chris Mass day
and eat our turkey with our sprouts
which listeners will have figured out
and tell a story of make pretender
that better suits the world's agenda.
'And so my girl, what did you think?'
Said Mariam with a cheeky wink,
but Aisha'd fallen fast asleep
she hadn't quite been able to keep
awake to hear the final section
but Mariam thought that on reflection
it was good she hadn't paid attention
she'd have more time for her invention
to tell it again tomorrow evening
and make up traditional Christmas meaning
for them and theirs, to make it their own
and maybe once her daughter was grown
She'd tell it to her kids and them to theirs
Down the generations shared.
But for now, she gave her a kiss
and tucked her in to sleepy bliss.
Then the weight of the jobs left hit
the turkey, the wrapping, the stocking, oh sh--