



HALLEY HARPER
SCIENCE GIRL EXTRAORDINAIRE
THE CHRISTMAS PRESENT SPY

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ILLUSTRATED BY

HONOUR HARRY

SHHHHHH!

Halley Harper was lying awake on Christmas Eve night trying to be as quiet as a mouse, but she was buzzing with excitement! She was pretending to sleep but she could not wait any longer to open her Christmas presents, especially the ones from Santa! Now the night before Christmas was finally here! Halley hoped she was on the Nice List and that Santa would bring her what she wished for - her very own microscope. Of course, her little brother Ben had asked for the impossible - snow crystals from the North Pole!

Maybe this year Santa would even throw in a miracle on Christmas – snow! Halley knew that Christmas miracles are almost like science magic because, like science experiments, on Christmas things appear overnight, and you wake up to a magical transformation. Halley was certain that Santa himself was a scientist. She had been waiting for weeks, and now she just couldn't stand it any longer to see if Santa deemed her worthy of being on the Nice List and brought her presents this year!

Despite her many science messes, earning her the name Miss Disaster, and getting caught trying to peek at her presents early, every year she managed to always stay on the Nice List. She hoped this year would be the same, and solemnly promised herself that next year she would try harder not to create a science disaster and that this year, when she was peeking at her presents, she wouldn't get caught!

Halley rolled from her back to her side and adjusted the spy belt under her pajamas. She wished her spy equipment had a miniature x-ray machine so she could easily sneak a peek at her presents, but instead she had come up with a foolproof plan to find out her presents before anyone else was awake. Now, she was waiting and going over her brilliant plan again for Operation Present Peek.

That night, when putting out cookies for Santa, she secretly rigged a cookie with a jingle bell so when it dropped from the cookie, she would hear it upstairs, alerting her that Santa had come and left presents! She would use tools from her spy belt cut a small hole in the present's box, peek in with a flashlight, then quickly cover her tracks by sticking a big bow over the hole, leaving no trace behind to get caught. She could tiptoe back upstairs with the satisfaction of not having to wait any longer to find out what she got for Christmas. It really was a perfect plan. Nothing could go wrong.

Lying awake, her ticking clock was the only thing she heard for hours. She listened to her breath rise and fall – she yawned. Her eyes were getting heavy. What if she fell asleep waiting for Santa? She slowly blinked and yawned again...

JINGLE JINGLE JINGLE!

Halley's eyes flew open! The Santa alarm worked! This was it! If she hurried, she might get a glimpse of him too! She rolled out of bed, twisted her spy belt around her waist, and jumped into her slippers! She scurried to her door and stood still with her back to the doorframe, peering down the hall to see if Ben heard anything – thankfully, his room was dark and he was still asleep.

She quickly crouched down and crawled over to the stair railing and looked over. Sure enough – Santa had been there! The jingle bell had rolled off the plate onto the floor, the cookies were gone, and a red, gold, and green toy explosion was under the Christmas tree!

There wasn't much time, and Halley had to be quick. Mom and Dad's bedroom door was still closed. She quietly stepped down the stairs, locked in on the first present she saw - a bright red, glistening present with a giant bow! Halley shivered with anticipation. The red present practically asked her to open it because red, of course, was her favorite color! So, that was the present, Halley decided, was going to get peeked into first.

Her heart raced the closer she got. She lightly stepped off to the bottom step, slid along the wall, tiptoed through the other smaller gifts, and slowly unzipped her spy belt – when suddenly something brushed past her leg! Halley put her hand to her mouth to stifle a gasp while a ball of white fur scurried past her and bounded over the presents. Atom the Cat must have also been curious about what Santa left for him and was now sitting on the corner of the fireplace spying on Halley with his tail swinging slowly like a clock pendulum.

Halley exhaled. She had to focus because she was running out of time. She approached the bright red present nestled under the tree in the pine needles. This was a Santa gift, all right. She found the spy tools she needed for the operation, looked over her shoulder one last time, and knelt down. Her elbow hit an ornament, and it fell, landing on the hardwood floor with a sound that echoed down the hallway!

CLANK CLANK CLANK!

Halley dove behind the Christmas tree. What if her parents woke up? She would be in so much trouble! She waited a moment, peeked out from the tree, but Atom was the only one looking back at her.

“Shhhh!” Halley put her finger over her mouth, motioning to Atom, but the cat just looked annoyed because it was Halley making all the racket. She looked left and she looked right again, and grabbed the bright red present and proceeded to cut a small hole in the box with her spy scissors.

It took her longer to make a present peephole because her hands were sweaty and shaking. What was she thinking cutting into a Santa present!? Why did this feel so wrong!? But she kept going, her curiosity getting the best of her, and managed to make a small flap that she pried open and stuck in her flashlight for a peek. She couldn’t make out what it was.

She turned the present over and then realized the red present wasn’t even hers! It was a gift to Ben! What did Santa bring her little brother? What if he got something better than Halley? Or worse! What if Halley looked around and didn’t have any Santa presents this year?

Now, more determined than ever, she held the box tighter and cut a bigger hole in the box. She was on a mission cutting and sawing, when suddenly she realized the corner of the box she was cutting was getting wet!? The big, beautiful, red Santa present for Ben was starting to LEAK!

“Oh no!” Halley gasped; she would get in *so* much trouble if Mom found out she ruined Ben’s present from Santa! That would put her permanently on the Naughty List, and *that* would be the ultimate Christmas disaster.

She fumbled with the present, turning it upside down, trying to slow the leak, but the more she fumbled, the soggier the box got! The dripping came faster until it started to form a puddle and threatened to get the rest of the presents wet! What was in this present anyway!? She looked around frantically – she had to get it away from the other presents so it wouldn’t destroy all the gifts! This was beginning to look a lot like the work of Miss Disaster – messy, messy, messy!

She quickly shuffled around the rest of the presents, trying to make an aisle to escape with the leaky present, and in the process stepped on Atom’s tail!

“Me-OWW!” Atom screeched out like an alarm and scampered away as Halley reached the back door, and with one hand balancing the present, opened it and shoved the red, drippy box on the porch outside while a blast of cold air swept in. The door stayed just wide enough for the size of a cat, and before she knew it, Atom ran out!

“Ugh, Atom!” Halley hissed as the cat scampered out into the backyard and up into Halley’s treelab, “No! Atom, get back in here!”

Halley looked over her shoulder from the wet present outside to the warm room full of presents inside, knowing that she would really get in trouble if she left Atom outside to freeze. She blew into her hands, squinted into the night, and wrapped her arms around herself before stepping out on the porch and closing the door. She would retrieve Atom, then figure out what to do with the wet present on the porch, but first she should go back inside and get her coat. Halley reached for the doorknob and turned it, but the door wouldn’t budge! She tried the door again, but it was locked!

“No!” She rummaged inside her spy belt, trying to keep warm by jumping from one foot to the other. There were no keys or tools to help her get back inside without waking someone up.

This was turning out to be the worst Christmas ever. Ben was going to be so mad at her for ruining his Santa gift. Halley Harper, Science Girl Extraordinaire, had just single-handedly gotten herself on the Naughty List next year.

She quickly found shelter by climbing the ladder and tumbling into her treelab. Atom was curled up on a few blankets that had been left outside from a recent sleepover with Gracelyn. She wrapped up in the blankets as best as she could, but no matter what she did, her face was still cold. Halley was certain that snowflakes were falling outside and Ben’s sad, wet Christmas present was sitting on the porch freezing.



It served her right to be stuck outside after trying to peek at presents on Christmas night. Now, what Halley needed most of all, was a little Christmas magic. The cold air swished through treelab causing the tree to gently sway. She thought of warm Christmas things like wood logs on the fire, gooey marshmallow S’mores, and hot chocolate topped with whipped cream and peppermint sprinkles. She could still smell cinnamon cookies warm out of the oven and taste the

icing on top of their gingerbread houses. If she listened closely, she could almost hear Christmas carols playing and smell the pine needles of their real Christmas tree. As the memory of Christmases past washed over her, Halley drifted off to sleep with Atom curled up on her feet like fuzzy, warm cat slippers.

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“Halley.... Halley, are you out here?” Ben called out. Halley rubbed her eyes and sat up. For a minute she forgot why she was wrapped up in a blanket in her treelab. Atom stood up, yawned, and stretched. “Look! Santa left a present outside on the porch just for me!”

“Wait, Ben,” Halley called out before climbing down the ladder and crunching on the frosted ground under her slippers to join Ben and Dad, waiting on the porch for her. “Wait, I can explain. You see, last night I was...”

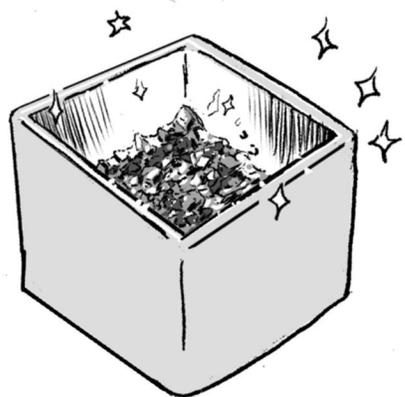
“Wow!” Ben opened the now dried, partially frozen present on the porch. “Look! It’s crystals! They’re crystals from the North Pole!”

“What?” Halley said. Surely, she had misunderstood Ben. “What did you say?”

“This is just what I wanted!” Ben looked inside the box again before turning it around to show his sister. “It says here that this present is how to make crystals from the North Pole!”

“That Santa.” Dad smiled, standing in a jacket and pajamas, scratching his head. “What will he think of next?”

“But Dad,” Halley tried to explain as Dad looked down at her spy kit and raised his eyebrows at her. The once soggy, wet present now looked like a geode with little sparkly crystals on the inside! How could this have happened? Was the leaky water really a crystal-forming solution? No matter how it happened, Ben was so happy that he got exactly what he wanted for Christmas.



“Wouldn’t you say, Halley, that this was Christmas magic?” Dad took off his jacket and wrapped it around Halley’s shoulders. “I think you should look inside; Santa may have brought you what you asked for too!”

Should she tell them the truth? Maybe one day she would, but maybe this was one disaster she should keep a secret. Besides, it was Christmas, and Halley knew that it’s always better to give than to receive. “Hey Ben, want to look at those crystals under my microscope!?”

It turns out that on that day, a little bit of magic - and science – saved Christmas.

FOR MORE HALLEY HARPER, SCIENCE GIRL ADVENTURES, HEAD [HERE!](#)

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MAKE YOUR OWN CRYSTAL SNOWFLAKES

HERE’ S WHAT YOU NEED: adult supervision, 2 cups of hot water, 1/3 cup of Borax, pipe cleaners, string, a jar, and a pencil.

HERE’ S WHAT YOU DO:

1. Twist pipe cleaners to make snowflake shapes small enough to fit inside the jar but not touch the sides or bottom of the jar.
2. Tie a string around the top of your snowflake and wrap the string to the pencil to hang your snowflake in your jar.
3. Mix Borax and water until dissolved, and pour this solution into the jar.
4. Leave the jar with the Borax solution overnight undisturbed. In the morning, you will see crystals that have formed on your snowflake!

WHAT’ S THE SCIENCE? When you mix Borax, a white crystalline solid, in warm water, it dissolves and forms a suspension (tiny solid particles hanging in the water). When the warm Borax solution cools, tiny Borax particles will settle on the pipe cleaner and form crystals. Crystals are everywhere in nature – salt, gemstones, geodes, and snow. Snow is formed when ice crystals deposit on dust or pollen high in the atmosphere!

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