

Christmas with Heart



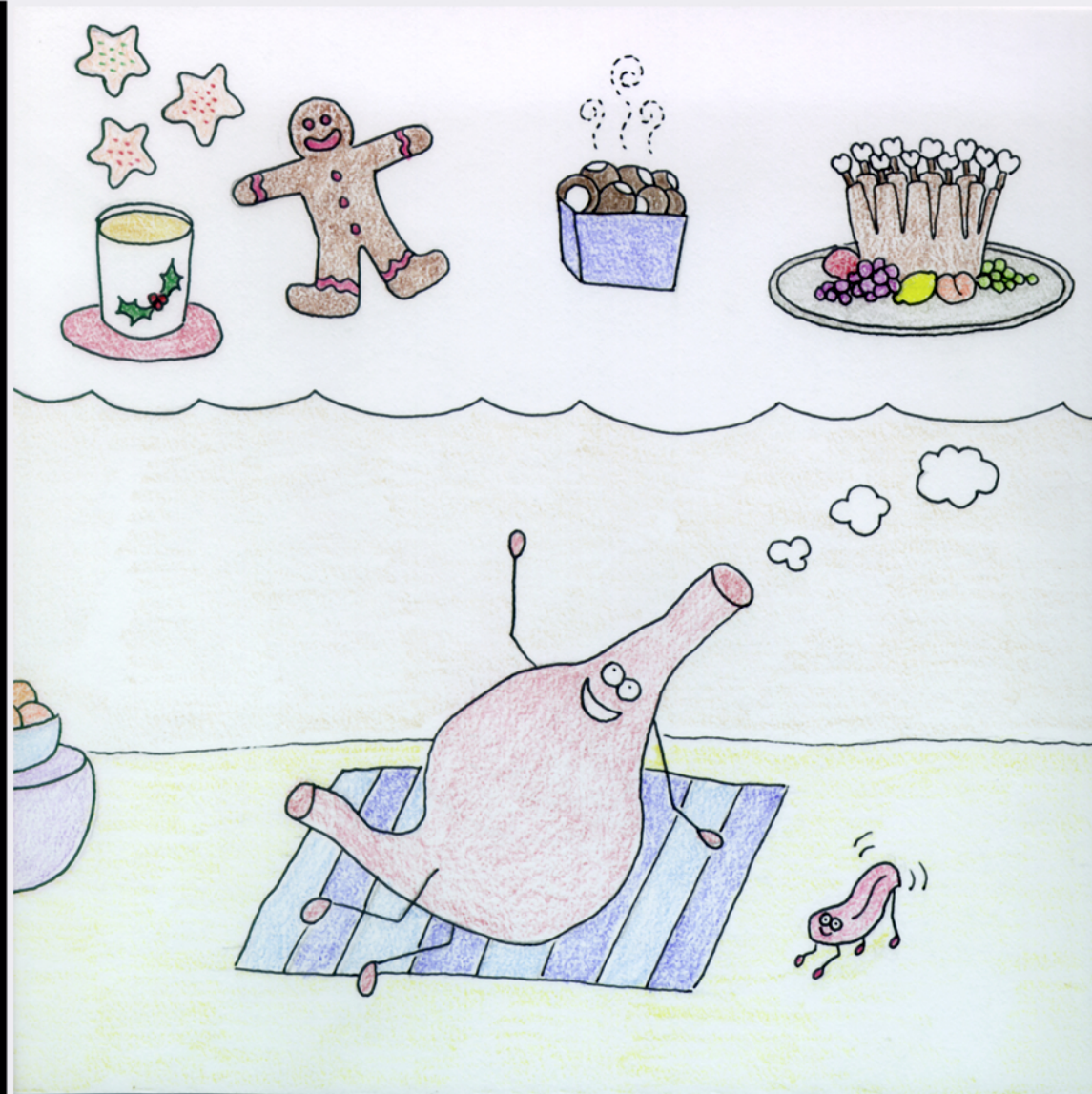
by
Hilari
Kleine
Jones

It was Christmas Eve, and Eye, Stomach, Nose, and Ear were awaiting their holiday delights.

"Think of all there is to see," said Eye, rolling back in the comfort of his easy chair. "Twinkling lights! Swirling snowflakes! The world awash in reds and greens!"



"That may be a feast for *you*," said Stomach, "but I much prefer the cuisine. Eggnog and cookies! Roasting chestnuts! Crown roast with paper feet!" His voice trailed off with a happy rumble. Stomach's sidekick, Tongue, waggled in anticipation.



"Let's not forget the scents," sniffed Nose, shiny and pink from the winter cold. "I can smell the pine and the Yule fire already." He inhaled with satisfaction.



"And what would the holidays be without the carols?" said Ear. "*Hark Hear the Bells...I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day.* I could listen all year and never grow tired of them."

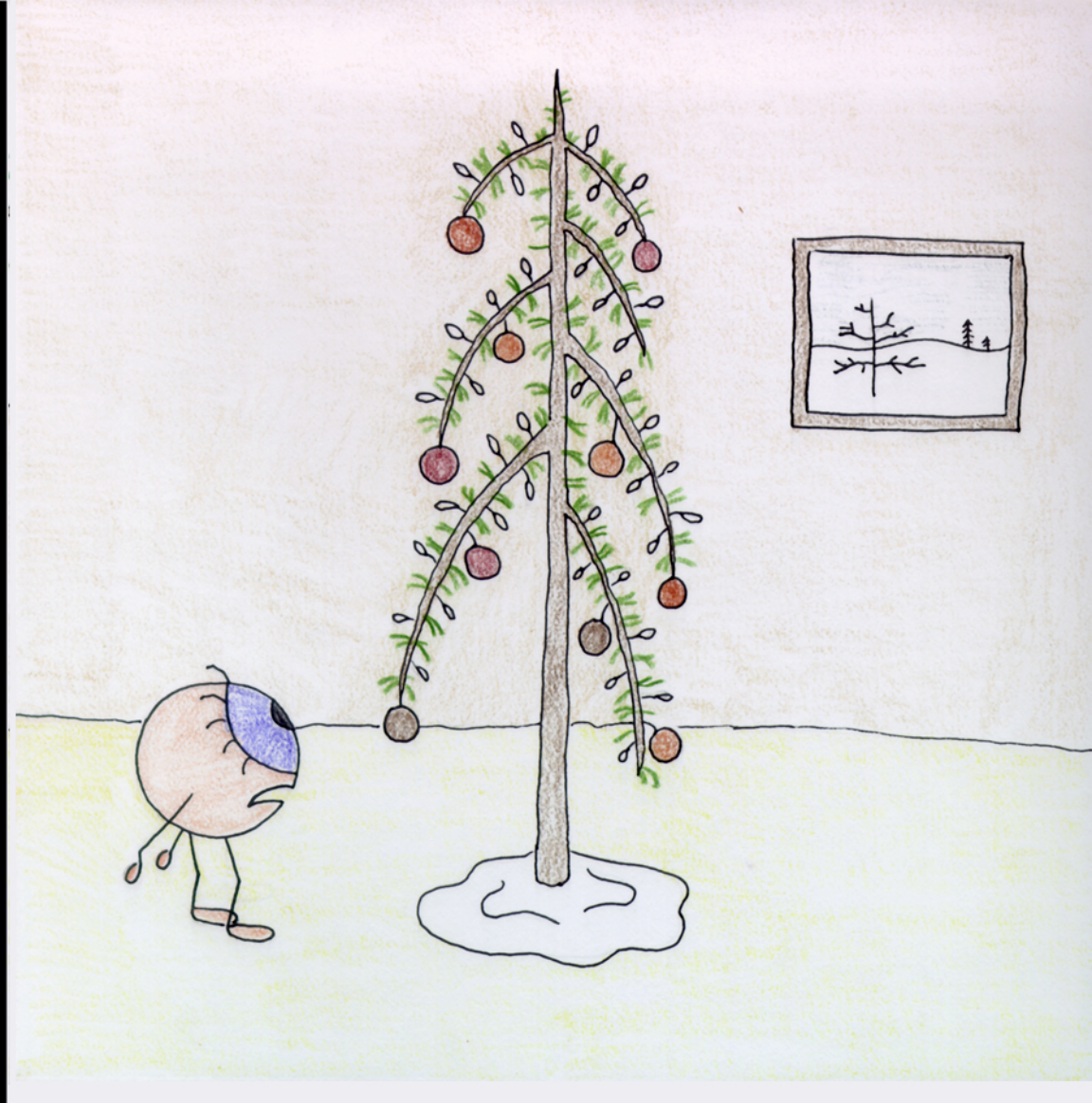
He hummed a few bars of his old-fashioned favorites.



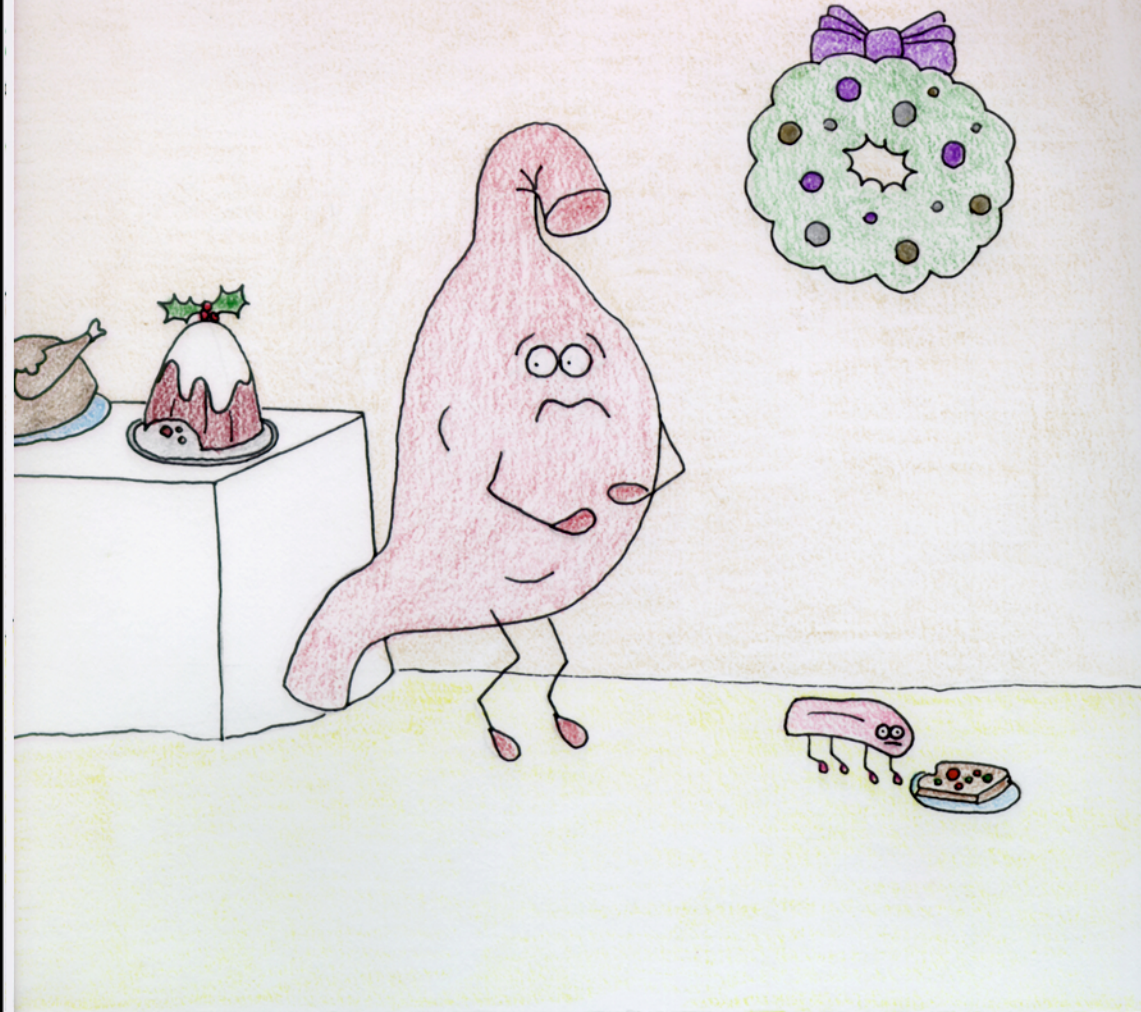
They went to bed, each dreaming of the sensory pleasures the next day would bring.

But on Christmas morning, something was wrong.

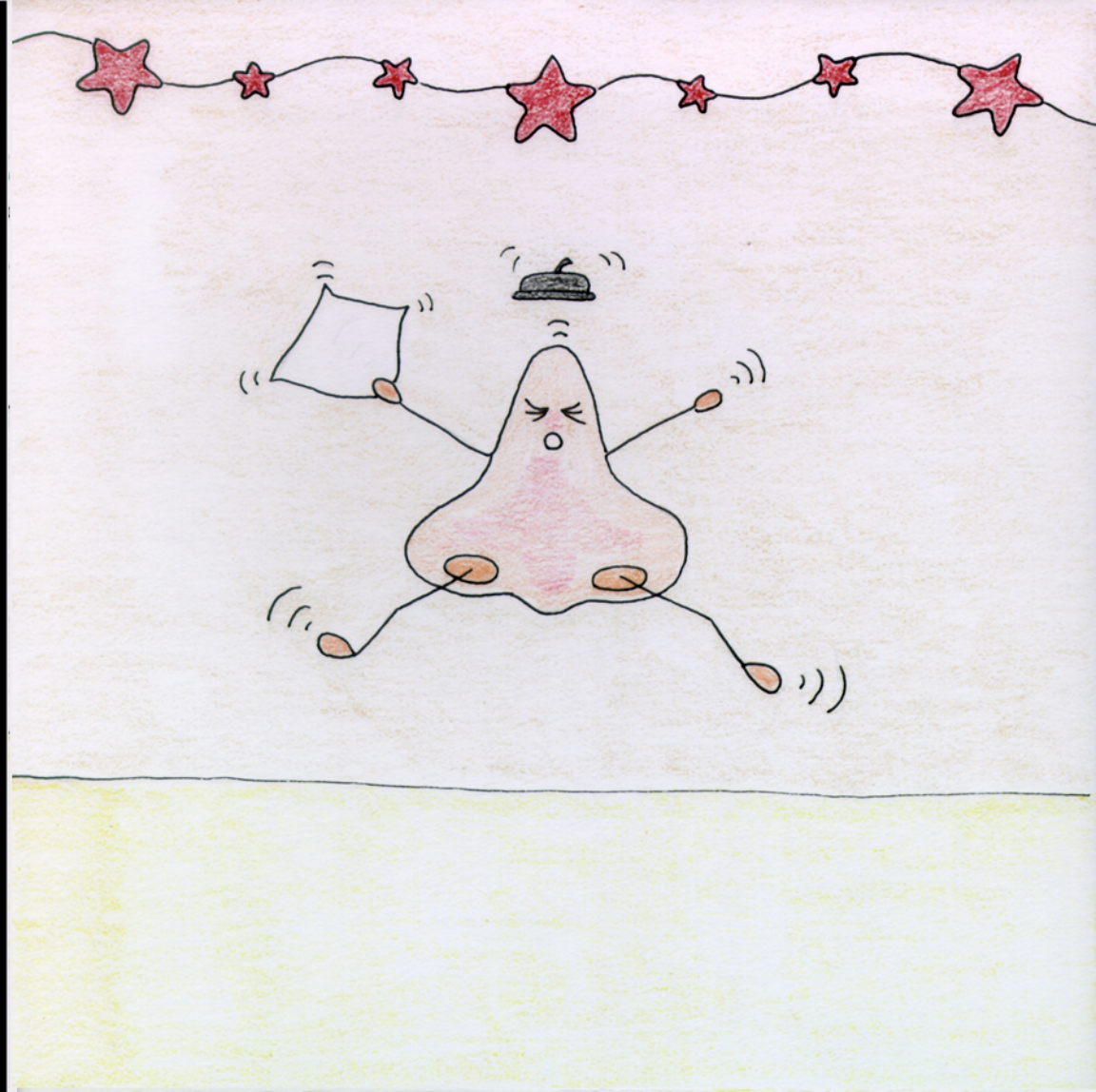
Eye gazed hopefully at the tree, but the branches looked dreary and the lights seemed to sputter. The ornaments sagged like tarnished fruit.



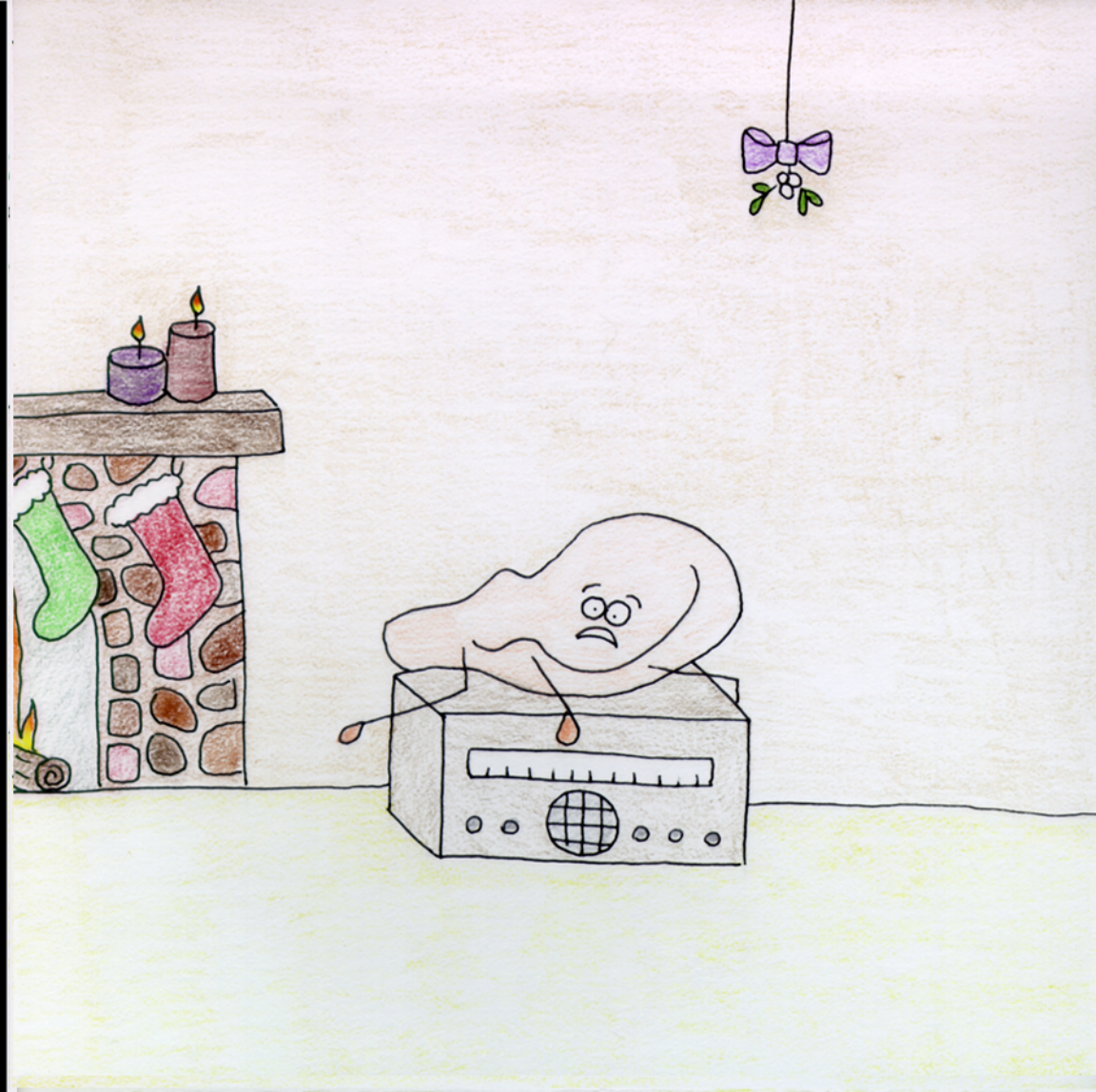
Stomach sampled the buffet, but the goose was stringy, the stuffing dry, and the plum pudding bland as paste. Tongue lost interest after just one bite of fruitcake.



Nose strained for the slightest whiff of oranges, but he caught only dust that made him sneeze.

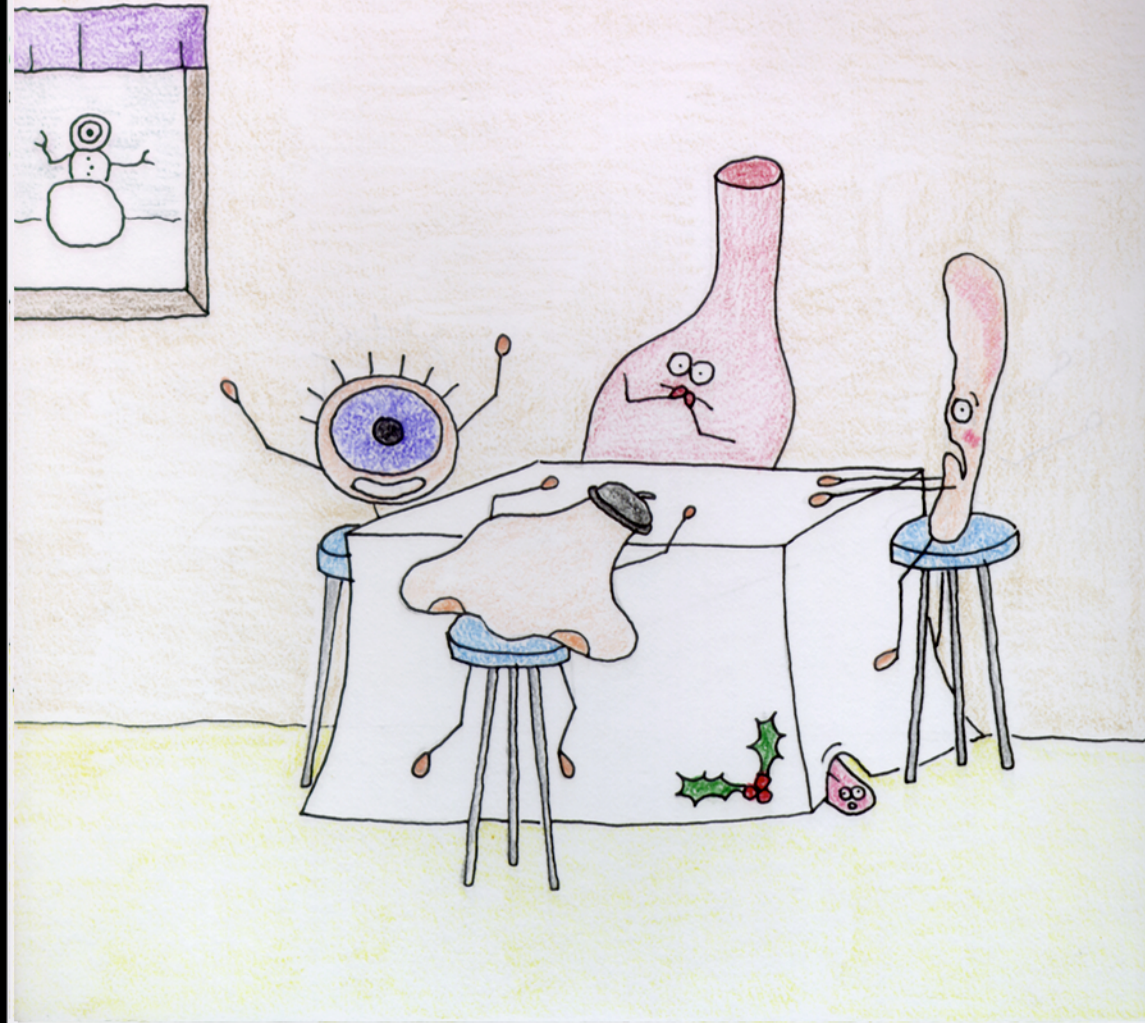


Ear tuned the radio from station to station, but all he could hear was the lonely hiss of static.



The four friends gathered to discuss their disappointment. Why was Christmas so different this year? What had happened to the things they so enjoyed?

It struck Nose first as he glanced around the table: "Someone is missing!" he cried, twitching uncomfortably. Eye blinked in horror: "How could we be so blind?" "It's Heart!" lamented Ear, growing hot with shame. "In all our excitement, we forgot to invite her!"



They set off at once in search of their absent friend and soon ran into Liver, who was shoveling the walks.

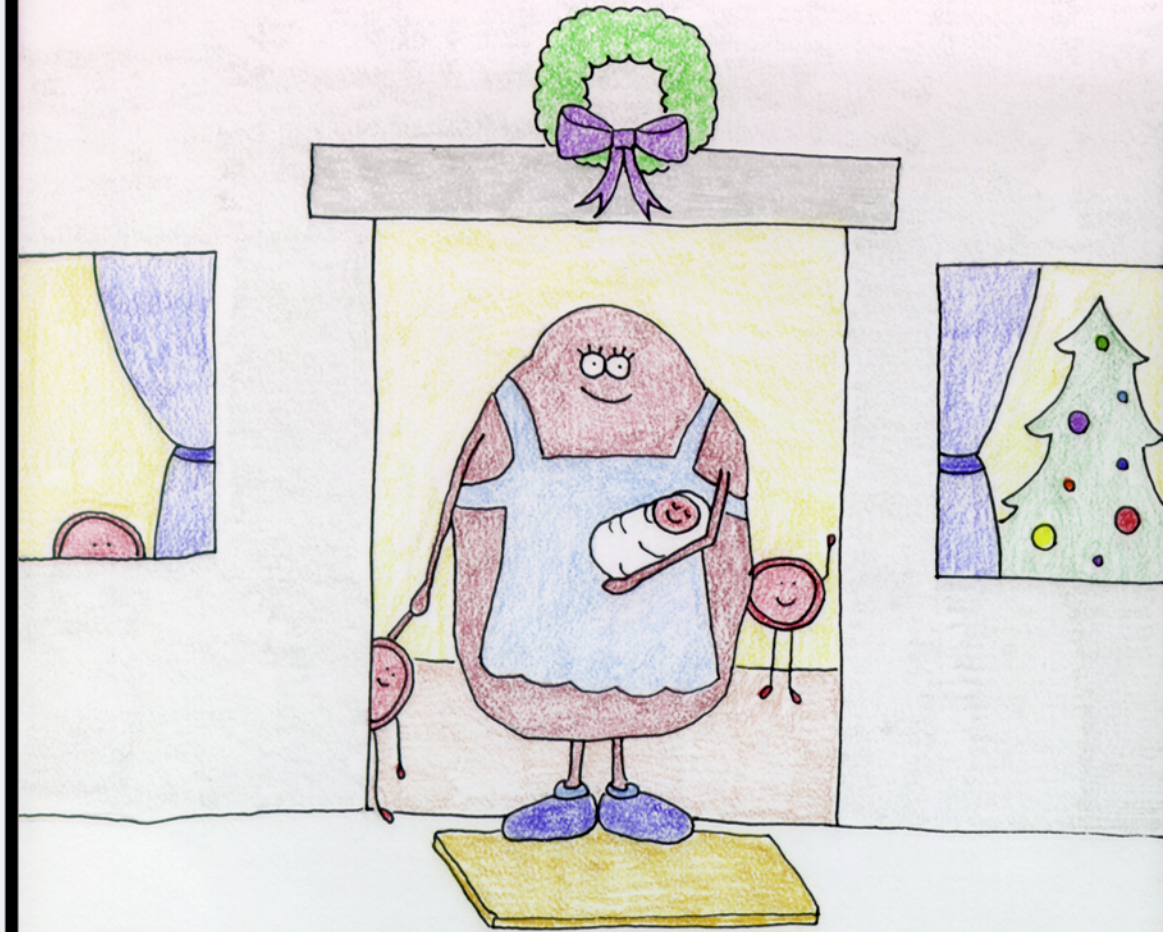
"Have you seen Heart?" they asked.

"I think I saw her at the nursery," said Liver. "Dropping off gifts for the baby blood cells."

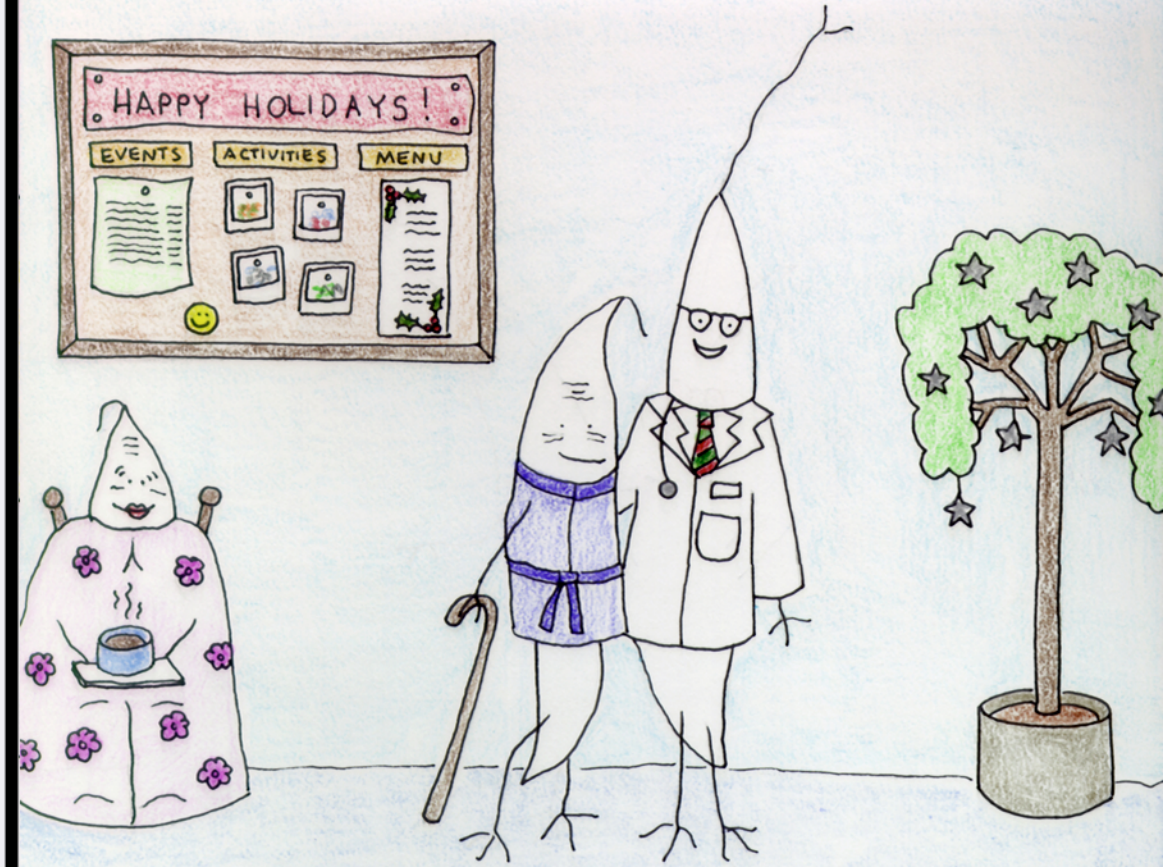


But Heart wasn't at the nursery.

"She was here some time ago," Mother Marrow said,
"but I believe she went to read at the Old Neurons'
Home."



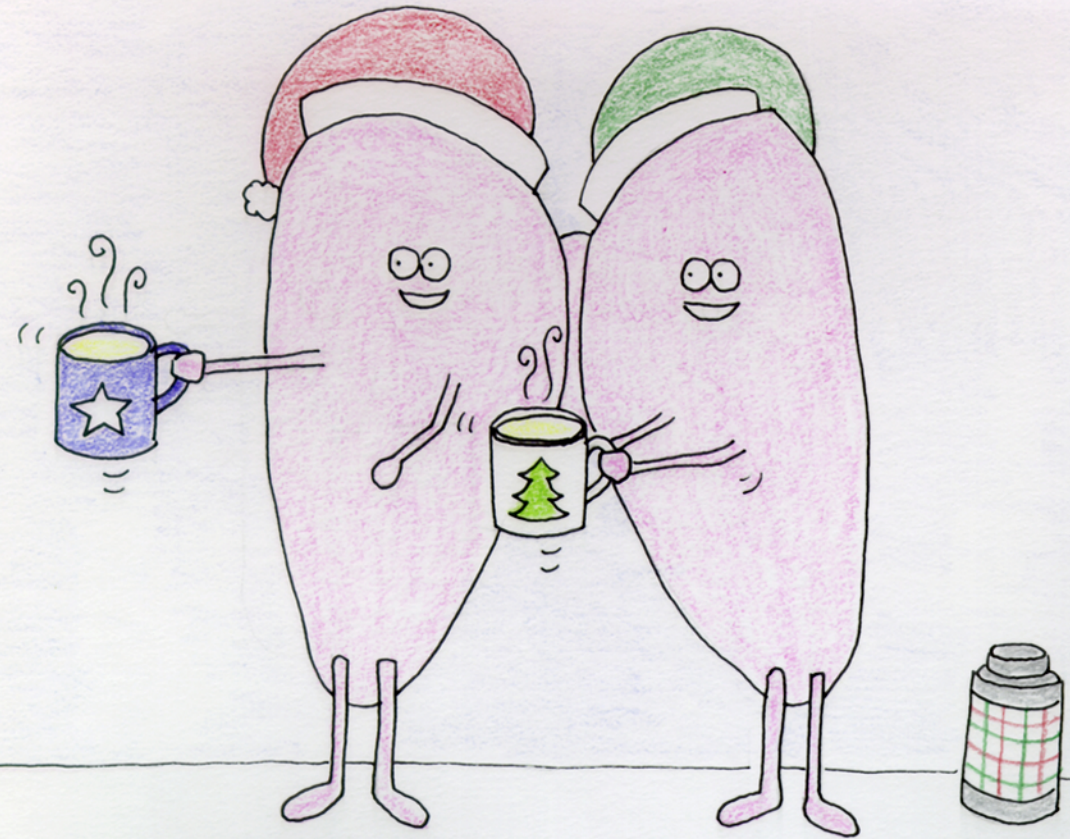
But Heart wasn't with the elderly brain cells, either.
"Our residents were so moved by her stories," said Dr. Ganglion, "but I'm afraid she's already gone. You might try the Lungs. They've had a touch of bronchitis, and she made them some soup."



But Heart wasn't with the Lungs.

"She just left!" they said, gesturing with steaming mugs.

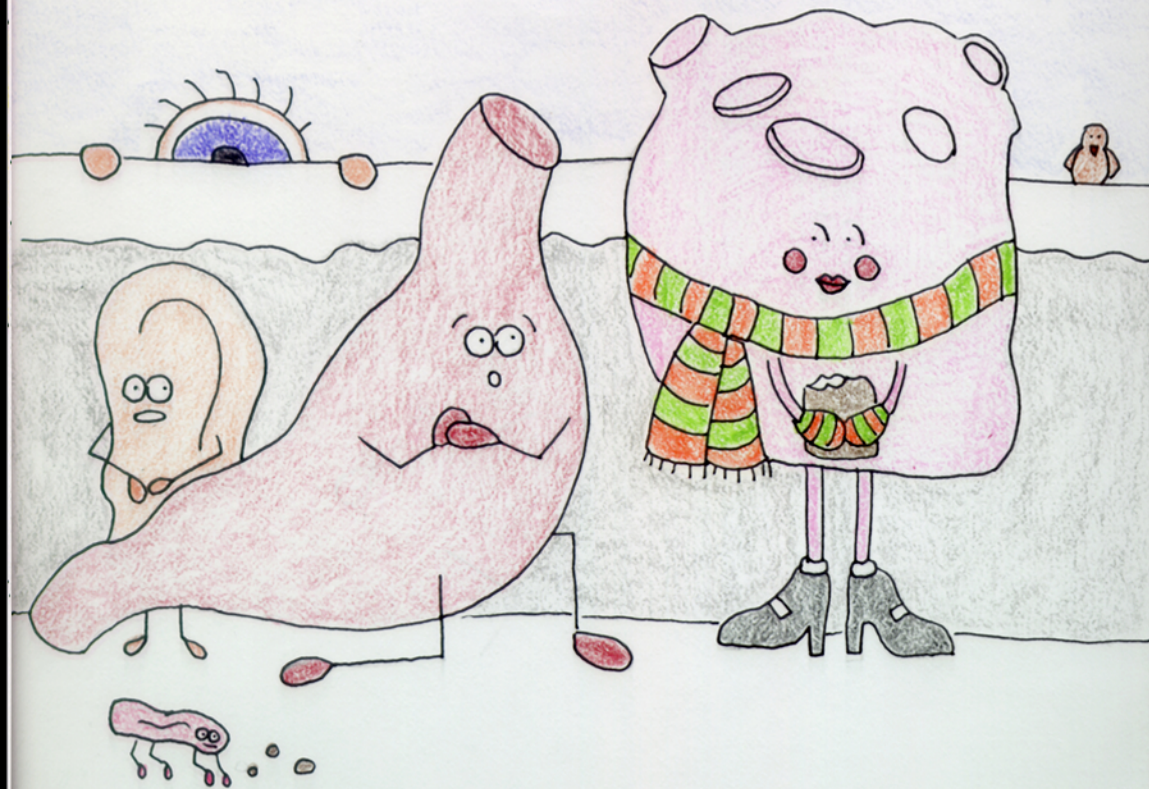
"But if you hurry, you might be able to catch her. She wanted to take a walk."



They hurried to find Heart, who was feeding the birds at the park. She was dressed in a cheery scarf and matching mittens, and she gave a little wave as they approached.



"Dearest Heart," panted Stomach, now out of breath.
"We meant to ask, but with all the distractions....oh,
such a faux pas! It's true: Christmas doesn't taste,
doesn't look, doesn't sound, doesn't smell the same
without you. Can you ever forgive us?"

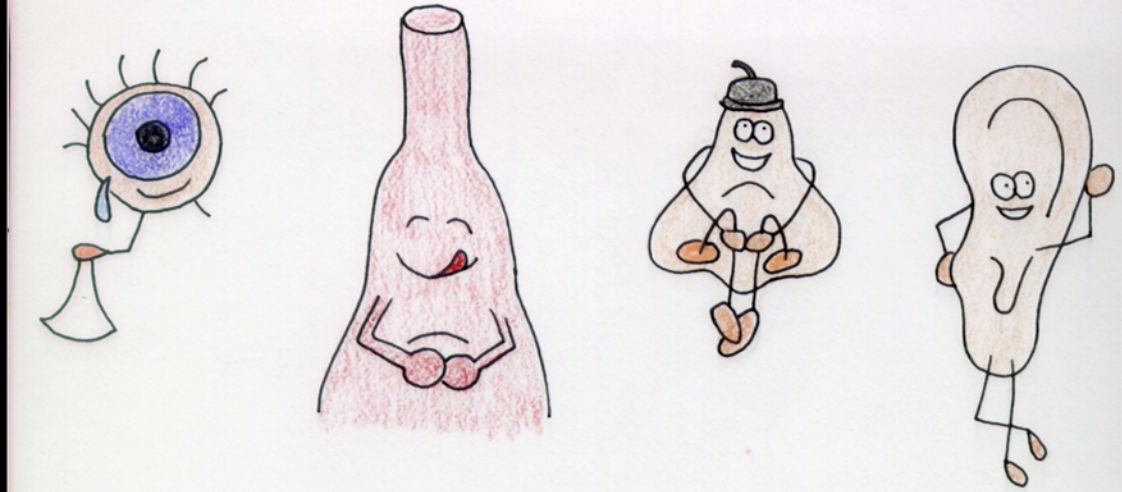


Heart looked fondly at each of her friends.

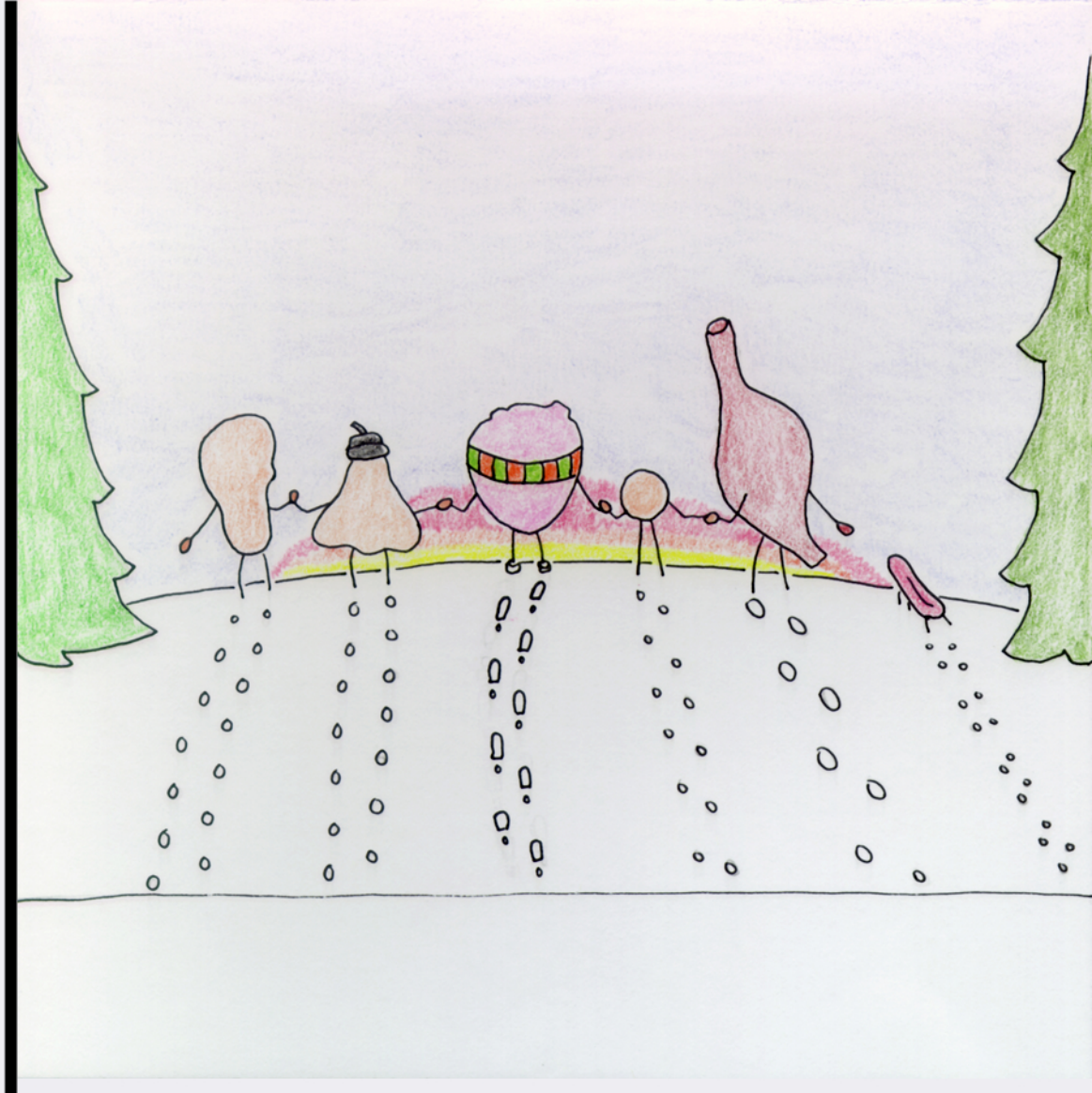
"Why, don't you know that I need you, too?" she said.

"Without Eye growing misty at holiday kindness, how would I feel love? Without Stomach full and satisfied with treats, how would I feel grateful to have plenty to eat? Without Nose relishing the nostalgic smells, how would I feel tied to family and friends? Without Ear delighting in songs and laughter, how would I feel joy?"

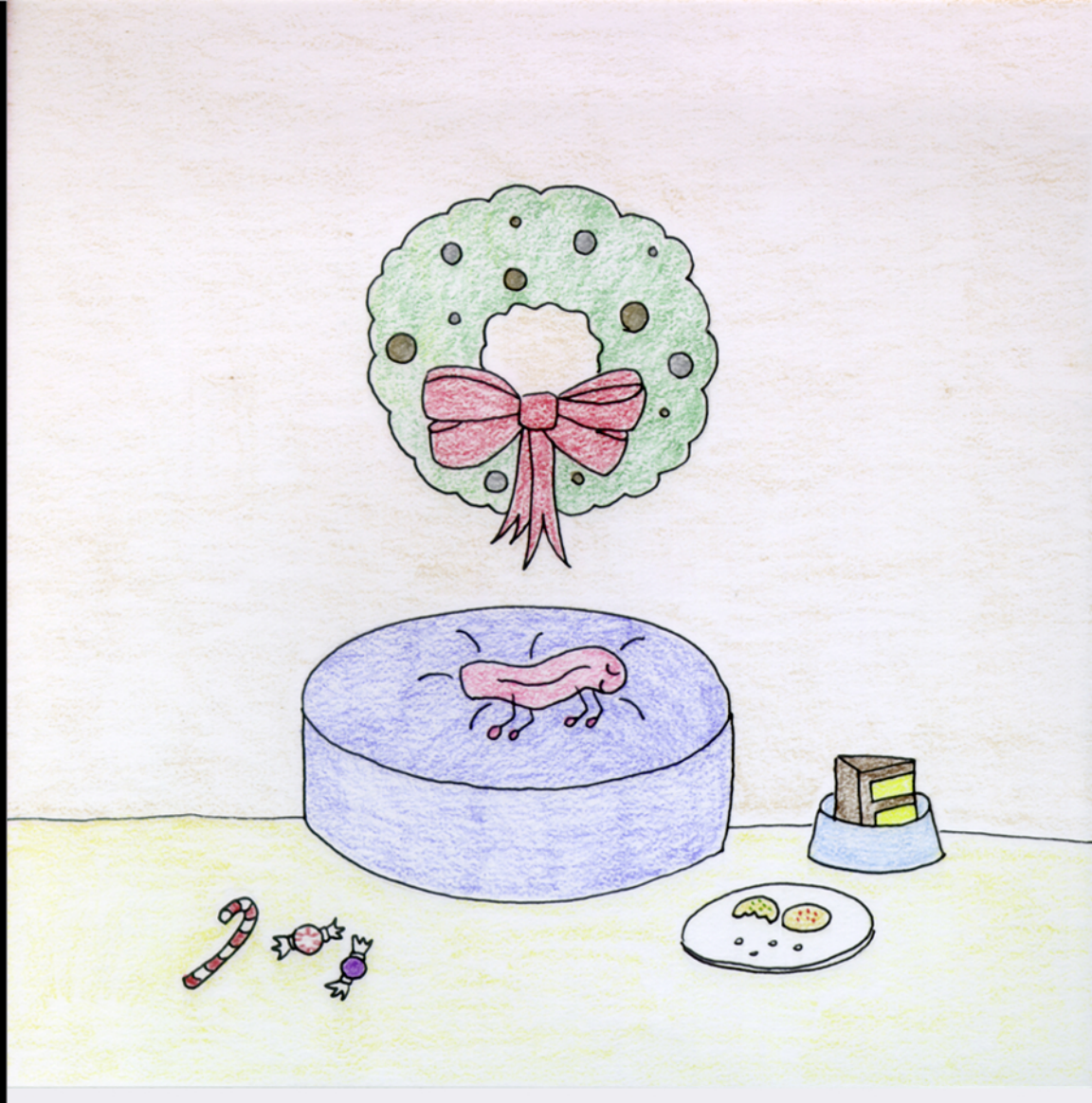
With that, she led them all back home to start the celebration anew.



Christmas with Heart had brought purpose and meaning.



And the food and the music?
Well, they weren't bad, either.



The End





About the Author

Hilari Kleine Jones lives in Salt Lake City, Utah, with her husband, Bryan, and cat, Otto. She is also the author of *December in the Deep*.

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