

- THE POEM by A.C.R. -

On a wintry day, the adventurer and renowned archaeologist Lara Croft is sitting in front of her laptop very focused. She woke up early in the morning as she made a decision: to enter in a poem contest and prove herself she was capable of anything and everything. Anaya suggested her joining in, she was sure Lara would be the perfect candidate to win the prize: an amazing trip to Vigo, in Spain!

Vigo's said to have the best Christmas lights display in Spain and it'd also be the perfect time to meet up there with Maria (their lovely Spanish teacher), do some sightseeing and try some of the delicious local food, which is an amazing activity to do these days by the way.

The sound of typing filled the entire office, the snowstorm banged hard against the windows, the crackling of the fire made it impossible to concentrate. And then... Then there was Zip.

He was staring at Lara the whole time, right outside the door, without saying a word! Spying on her: every breath she took, every move she made, every word she typed... And out of the silence, Zip spoke:

"Oh man, you should see your face while doing whatever it is you're doing now." Zip commented hilariously.

"Maybe if you'd been kind enough to announce yourself, I might have known you were in there!" Lara replied a bit annoyed.



"No way! It's so much fun to catch people off guard!" Zip started to laugh.

"Hmm, let's see if you're this happy once I do it to you when you're not in your element." Lara sounded challenging.

"Aha, so it's that, right? You're doing something new! Ooooooooooh." Zip can be a little tiring if he really wants to be.

"Zip? Don't start!" Lara started to get really annoyed at this point.

"Sorry! That probably explains why you're secluded in the office all morning. And still nothing, I suppose?" Zip tried to calm the waters.

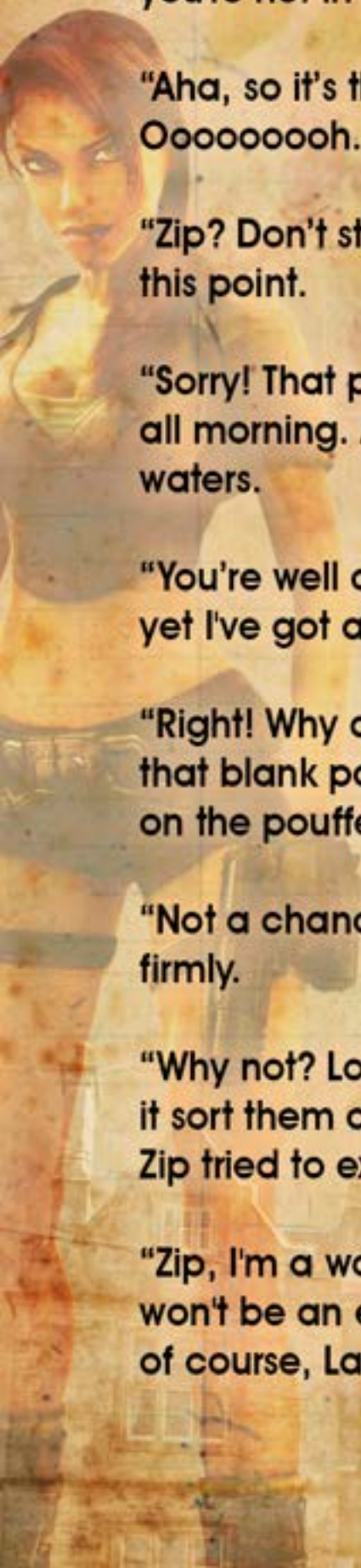
"You're well on your way. Words don't come easy to me... And yet I've got a lot to say... to write, I mean..." Lara explained.

"Right! Why don't you use AI? That would help you to fill that blank page." Zip said while he was sitting on the pouffe next to the desk.

"Not a chance I'm using AI!!!" Lara replied firmly.

"Why not? Look, you've got your ideas, let it sort them out. You'll do the final fixings." Zip tried to explain his position.

"Zip, I'm a woman of many talents and this won't be an exception. I'll do it myself!" Yes, of course, Lara is very determined.



"Sheesh! New technologies exist for a reason! That's why the world will never progress!" Zip commented a little outraged.

"Sure! But your little rant won't help me get this poem done today. So now, if you excuse me, sir..." Lara asked Zip politely.

"Fine! Fine! I'll help Winston hang all the Christmas wreaths and garlands and then cook something for dinner. If you're late, you won't have anything left to eat, assuming you'll finish today that is! Unless you want to gorge yourself on letters..." Zip said while leaving the office smirking.

Some calm returned to the surroundings, except for the bad weather. Lara started to wonder:

"Ahh... I know there are worse concerns than this one. But why would I get into this mess in the first place? I could always make use of my jet and visit Maria with Anaya..." She could indeed do it.

And after a few hours of quiet inner dilemma, Lara made up her mind and finally started to type:

"I think I'll start this way..." Lara added.

*Let the sleigh bells ring, for Christmas
is coming,
Our hearts are full, we remember
that feeling.*

*So many memories and dreams our houses are
overflowing of,
With baubles and wreaths, lights and colours
are sorted of.*

*And at the centre of the table, the best is yet to be found,
But look! Meals and cakes are being devoured by Ellie the Hound!*

*The time spent with mama and grandma was what counted,
As warmth embraced our tender souls, 'cause we're united.*

*Ellie the Hound didn't prevent the family from being excited,
Celebrating this cherished holiday with the tallest fireplace ignited.*

*Some believe that health is the key to felicity,
And so is Christmas Eve such an amazing festivity.*

*The old longcase clock clocked 12, oh well,
Kisses and hugs, Merry Christmas ye yell.
After that, grandma sang a special carol for us all,
My cousins didn't remember it, but it was the same one at the mall!*

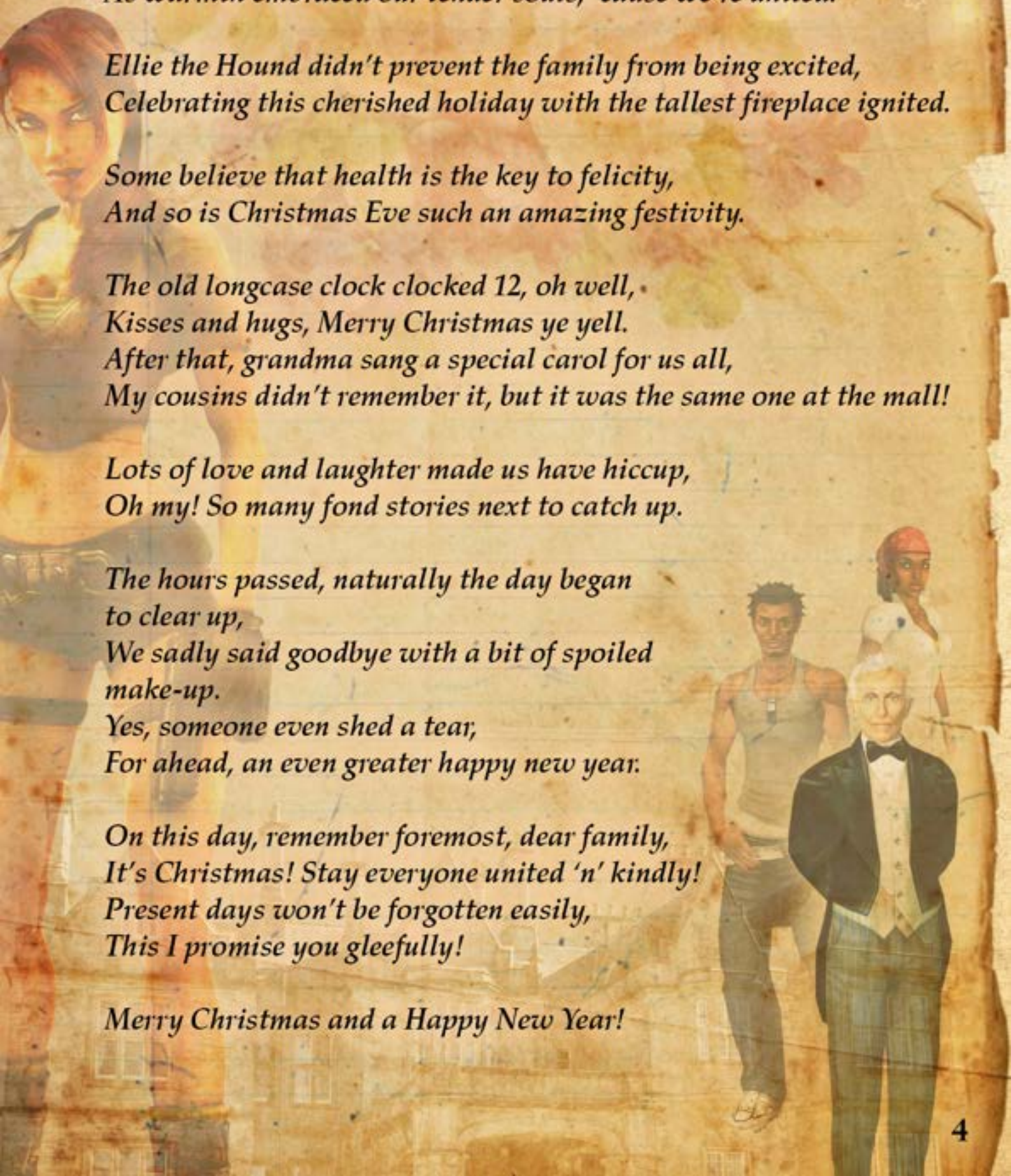
*Lots of love and laughter made us have hiccup,
Oh my! So many fond stories next to catch up.*

*The hours passed, naturally the day began
to clear up,
We sadly said goodbye with a bit of spoiled
make-up.*

*Yes, someone even shed a tear,
For ahead, an even greater happy new year.*

*On this day, remember foremost, dear family,
It's Christmas! Stay everyone united 'n' kindly!
Present days won't be forgotten easily,
This I promise you gleefully!*

Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!



It was past 9 pm and Lara was still in the office, constantly revising her writing, when she suddenly started to smell something really tasty coming to her. And out of the shadows of the corridor, both Zip and Winston appeared with a small food cart:

"See? I told you she was still here... Tsk, tsk." He confirmed to Winston.

"Miss Croft, forgive us for interrupting you, but we both decided it was correct to have dinner here in the office accompanying you." Winston informed Lara with his well-known educated manners and calm voice.

"Oh, you two... But I'm finished, just thinking about the finishing touches." Lara remarked.

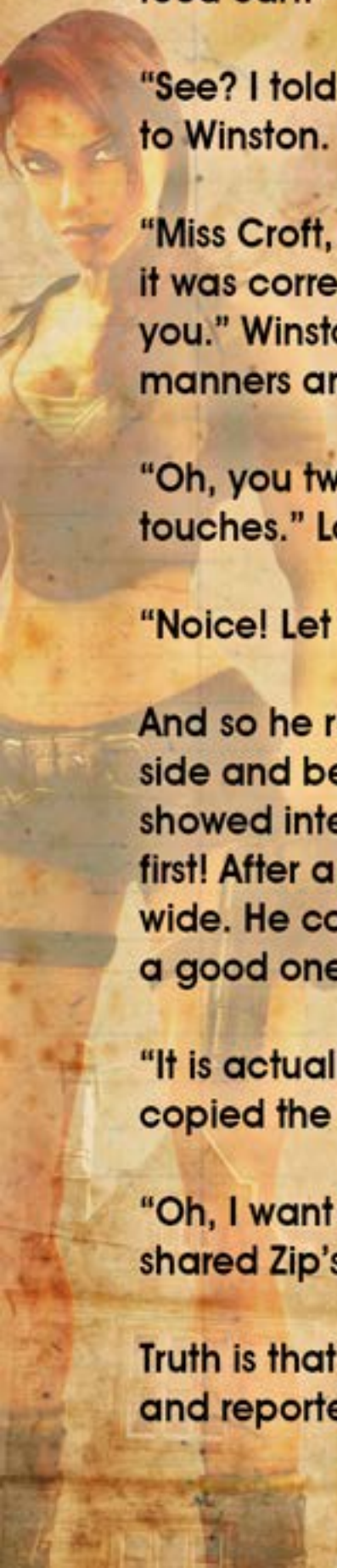
"Noice! Let me see it!" Zip exclaimed enthusiastically.

And so he rushed to the desk, turned the laptop to his side and began to read non-stop. He really showed interest in this poem. It'd be Lara's first! After a few minutes, his eyes opened wide. He couldn't believe it: it was actually a good one!

"It is actually a good one!" Zip (almost) copied the narrator.

"Oh, I want to read it too, please!" Winston shared Zip's excitement.

Truth is that they both enjoyed the reading and reported back to Lara that the poem



had real opportunities to be a good candidate for the prize. This made our dear Croft feel extremely happy and pleased with the fruits of her labour.

What mattered in the end was the challenge of doing something new, something out of the comfort zone and feeling accomplished.

The hours that followed were pure joy and excellence: delicious and exotic meals courtesy of Chef Zip, playing Scrabble on an exquisite and recently purchased Japanese rug, telling stories of past adventures... Pretty much the usual stuff I'd say, but an appreciated one, because it's these kinds of moments that are remembered.

The next morning, Lara sent the poem and texted Anaya about it. The fellow friend congratulated Croft on her efforts and confirmed that she'd done the same. Now all they had to do was wait for the results of the contest... What happened next, well, that's a story for later.

