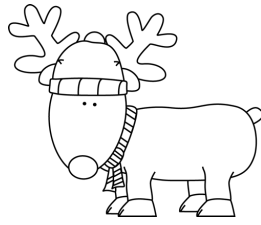


*"Twas the night before Christmas
When all through the House
Not a creature was stirring
Not even a mouse"*



18

BOOK STUFF

A moral dilemma for all seasons

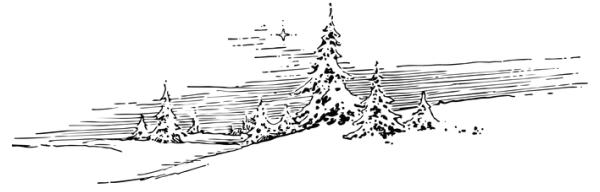
'Avenue of Poplars at Dawn was set to join the ranks of Van Gogh masterpieces. This 'lost' work would sell for millions and generate volumes of scholarship comparing it to the two other paintings Van Gogh made of the same scene at different times.

This pleased Joris van der Berg, for he, not Van Gogh, had painted *Avenue of Poplars at Dawn*. Joris was an expert forger and he was certain that his latest creation would be authenticated as genuine. That would not only increase his wealth enormously but also give him tremendous professional satisfaction.

Only a few close friends knew what Joris was up to. One expressed serious moral misgivings, which Joris had brushed off. As far as he was concerned, if this painting was judged to be as good as a Van Gogh original, then it was worth every penny that was paid for it. Anyone who paid more than it was really worth *just because* it was a van Gogh was a fool who deserved to be parted from his money.'

From Julian Baggini, *The Pig that Wants to be Eaten and 99 Other Thought Experiments*

What do you think?



A poem for Christmas

Christmas Eve, and twelve of the clock.
"Now they are all on their knees,"
An elder said as we sat in a flock
By the embers in hearthside ease.

We pictured the meek mild creatures where
They dwelt in their strawy pen,
Nor did it occur to one of us there
To doubt they were kneeling then.

So fair a fancy few would weave
In these years! Yet, I feel,
If someone said on Christmas Eve,
"Come; see the oxen kneel,

"In the lonely barton by yonder coomb
Our childhood used to know,"
I should go with him in the gloom,
Hoping it might be so.

Thomas Hardy (1840 – 1928)

Some seasonal puns - Beware: they're turkeys!

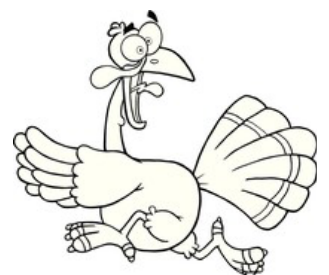
Don't do that or yule be sorry

But wait – *there's myrrh!*

How many letters are there in the angels' alphabet? 25 – no 'L'

How does King Wenceslas like his pizza? *Deep pan, crisp and even*

Christmas has me feeling extra *Santa-mental*. Not me, I'm *Claus-trophobic!*



Quiz time

1. How many presents did the 'true love' give in total in the *Twelve Days of Christmas* song?
2. How many ghosts appear in Dickens's *A Christmas Carol*?
3. Which city has been donating the Trafalgar Square Christmas tree since 1947?
4. In which country is it traditional to eat KFC for Christmas dinner?
5. What Christmassy song plays at the end of the 1988 film *Die Hard*?
6. Which British monarch delivered the first ever Christmas message to the nation?
7. Dr Seuss's Grinch tries to steal Christmas from which unsuspecting town?
8. Which Doctor made his debut in Doctor Who's 2005 special called *The Christmas Invasion*?
9. In *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, what do the Dursleys give Harry for Christmas?
10. In which children's classic book is it 'always winter but never Christmas'?



The Handbag

A certain Blunk, who has made a name for himself as a professional thief of handbags, finds himself, on the occasion of one of his assaults, confronted with eighty-two-year-old Elisabeth Schroder, whose handbag he intends to snatch by applying the usual quick, jerking motion.

Now, what frequently happens in this situation is that elderly ladies, out of sheer fright, forget to release their grip and thus are pulled to the ground, whereupon they invariably acquire a fracture of the upper part of a thighbone before they finally let go of the strap and the robber, who runs away.

Completely different, however, is the case with eighty-two-year-old Elisabeth Schroder. It doesn't even occur to her to let go of the handbag. As a consequence, Blunk is compelled to drag the old lady behind him, through the bushes, diagonally across the extensive lawns of the park, yes, through the entire inner city, straight into a commuter bus and right out again, for hours on end, until Blunk, who is really quite a strong and athletic young man, can barely continue due to exhaustion, and so finally has to come to a standstill, right in the middle of the street.

This, of course, is the moment that eighty-two-year-old Elisabeth Schroder has been waiting for. In a jiffy she bounces back to her feet, and it's now her turn to drag the horrified Blunk behind her until she is so tired she can't anymore, and then it's his turn again.

This has been going on for three years now and everyone thinks there's something sweet cooking between the two of them.

QUIZ ANSWERS

- | | | |
|---|--|--|
| 1. 364 | 2. Four: Jacob Marley and the ghosts of Christmas Past, Present and Future | 3. Oslo, Norway |
| 4. Japan | 5. Let It Snow, Let It Snow, Let It Snow | 6. George V in a radio broadcast in 1932 |
| 7. Whoville | 8. David Tennant | 9. A 50-pence piece |
| 10. CS Lewis, <i>The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe</i> | | |

