

# THE SEASONAL RECLUSE



Christopher Andel

*This booklet is one of seven new Christmas stories from Wageningen, the Netherlands. With these stories, ZinZin – a local cultural center without a permanent residence – and the Wageningen public library (bblthk) celebrate the Christmas season of 2021 in a connecting way.*

*Wageningen residents contributed to these new Christmas stories in various ways. It started with a request to all residents: send us a photo, drawing or painting telling what this Christmas means to you. These images were the source of inspiration for seven amateur writers from all corners of Wageningen society, who attended a writing workshop together. The image the author of this story chose is featured on the front of this card.*

Photo cover: Marijke van der Giessen

## The seasonal recluse

### GONE FISHING

Those are the words he had posted on all his social media accounts. It was a desperate attempt to minimise the number of calls he would undoubtedly receive and thus feel compelled to answer. The house was deprived of any seasonal lighting arrangements, there was no wreath nailed to the front door. He had even draped sheets over the living room furniture as a precautionary measure, just in case anybody wished to spring a surprise visit on him.

He had no desire to attend the office Christmas party. It was the season to be jolly, supposedly, yet all those that would be present had brought him very little joy throughout the course of the year. The self-discipline required to be able to fool anybody into believing that he actually wanted to be there was no longer part of his psychological arsenal. His energy levels were far too low, systematically drained by the medley of first world problems confided to him during all those dreadful forty hour working weeks. Since he generally did such a fine job in treating his fellow human beings with kindness and understanding, he did not see why he should feel

obliged to exert himself to an even greater degree over the festive season. In his mind, he had already accumulated more than enough karma points. Now the time had come for him to take a step back and let someone else grab theirs.

His siblings had repeatedly reminded him that he was always welcome in their respective homes, that they would make room at their elegantly decorated dinner tables, but he could not be bothered to traverse the distances between them, be it by plane, train or rubber dinghy. Besides, they had families of their own to cherish and in-laws to please. There was no reason for them to feel lonely in his absence. They would not miss his Christmas cheer.

He would have liked nothing more than to celebrate in the company of his parents but they had already embarked on a journey that he too would make someday, when his time had come. Until then, he would be resigned to closing his eyes and reliving memories that unravelled like familiar stories. At least he knew how these memories drew to a close and he was grateful for each and every one of them. This was the core of his Christmas spirit.

His closest friends had figured out that they should let him be. They were no longer surprised, worried, nor insulted by his reluctance to partake in the feasts they would organise. He would surely reach out to them once

he was sufficiently decompressed. They would then go on long walks underneath gloomy skies, conversing for hours on end about the thoughts he had entertained and the insights he had gained as a result. Somewhere along the line, these insights could very well guide them through one or two of the quagmires they would inevitably stumble into. That is how he shared his wisdom and spread his love.

Come Christmas Eve, he would prepare his favourite meal and pour himself a generous drink. He would light a candle, read a passage from his great-grandmother's Bible, and raise a toast to the dearly departed. With a selection of Christmas carols playing in the background, he would ultimately proceed to lose himself in the wonders of the written word. There, where nobody could possibly coerce him into participating, he would be a happy observer until it was time to re-immense himself into society. Back in the passageways of the rat race, when asked what he had done for Christmas, he dared not speak of his travels to those fantastic spaces where the likes of Odysseus, Don Quixote, Anna Karenina, and Ebenezer Scrooge grapple with their relentless predicaments. He would not venture to explain how their stories had impacted him. No, if anyone wanted to know, he would simply tell them he had gone fishing.

*I just want to tell you:* 

*Now it's your turn. We hope the card inspires you to surprise someone with a personal message. And if you got this message: feel the connection and celebrate Christmas your way!*



Born in Bangkok to a Dutch father and German mother, Christopher has spent much of his life pedalling back and forth between Europe and South East Asia. A true 'Jack of all trades', he has worked as an environmental consultant, language tutor, and roadie for the Chippendales, just to name a few.

Christopher currently resides in Wageningen. He compiled a number of pieces that have been published on a website called [beerasia.net](http://beerasia.net).

