

The Christmas Tree

By Melanie Harrison

Mum said our Christmas tree was a locally grown, organic, sustainable, non-drop Norwegian Spruce. Baubles from Harvey Nicks, and an angel with Swarovski crystals for her eyes.

And man, did it burn well. Along with the rest of the house. Scarlet and gold flames thrashing up the stairs. There's me standing in the frosty garden with the rooted evergreens, heat scurrying through my veins and a smile on my face.

This year I'm sharing a room with Kayla and Shelby. The windows are high up, so I can't see the snow, and we all pee in the same toilet. The guards know if I've been nice or naughty and take away my fags accordingly.

Here, days shrink and nights expand, girls yell carols down the corridors and I stick up my cards with blu-tack. At noon we traipse down to the cafeteria: Bernard Matthew's turkey slices congealing in gravy, balls of stuffing like lead shot and three yellow sprouts rolling back and forth on a plastic tray.