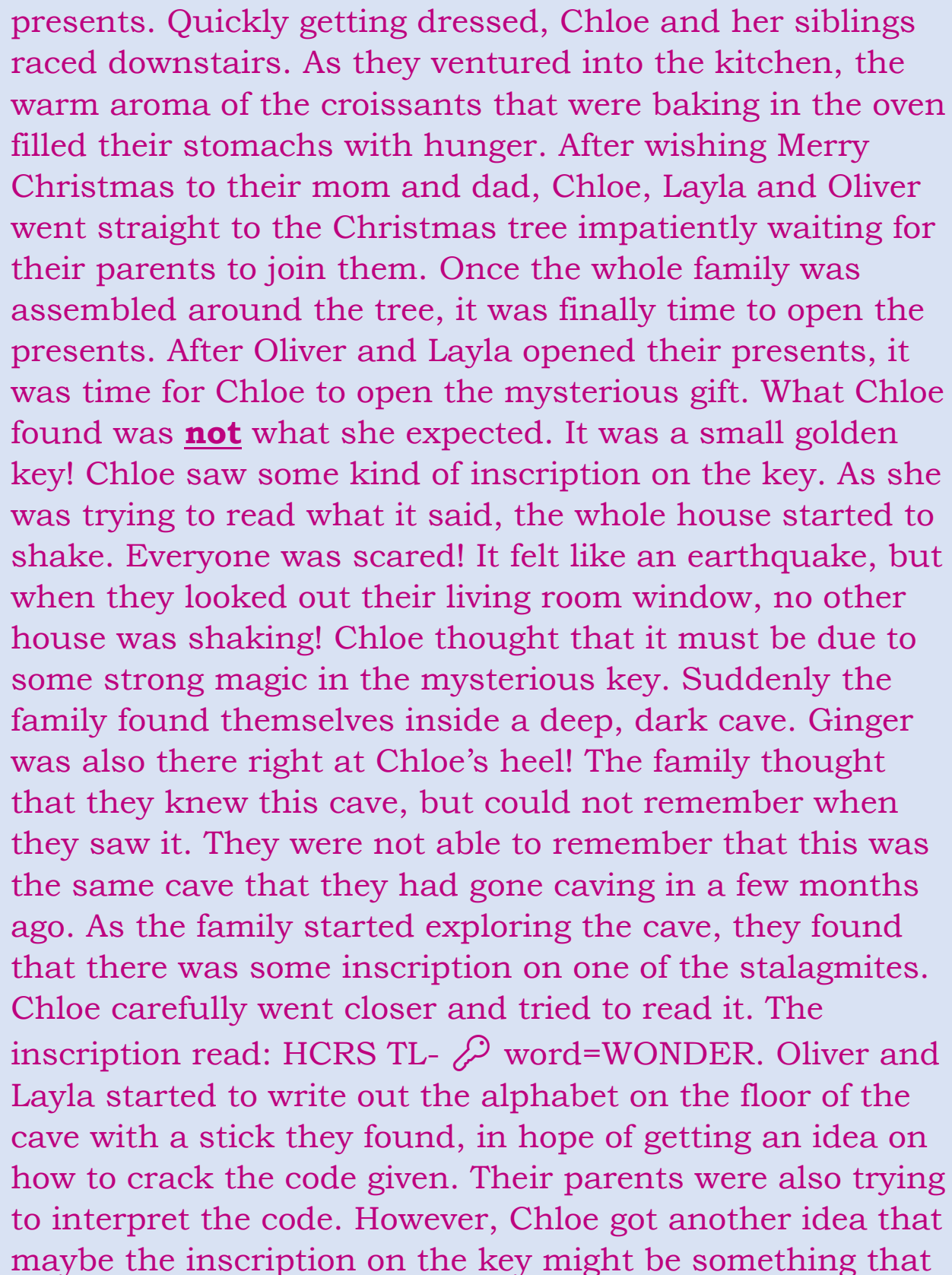




The Mysterious Gift

It was the first day of winter break for 10-year-old Chloe. She has been waiting for this day for ages! Chloe loves to spend time with her adorable puppy named Ginger. Chloe got to pick her own puppy when her family visited the animal shelter a couple months ago. After they got Ginger, it is hard to imagine their home without a jumping Yorkshire terrier. If Chloe is not spending time playing with her puppy, you will find her curled up on the cream sofa-bed in the corner of their living room with a mystery book in her hands.

On Christmas Eve, as Chloe stepped out onto the porch to take Ginger on a walk, she noticed a small, shiny box wrapped in silver paper, which shimmered even in the dim morning light. As she walked closer, Chloe found a little red tag which read, "To the one who believes in wonder," but there was nothing which mentioned where it came from. She decided to just leave the box under the Christmas tree and look into the matter later. After Chloe and Ginger came back inside from their walk, her family sat down to talk about who should get to open the mysterious gift on Christmas. Chloe's younger sister Layla, and brother Oliver wanted to open the gift, but Chloe thought that she deserved to open it because she found it. Their parents were trying to contemplate on who had the best reason to open it. In the end, it was decided that Chloe will get to open it because she is the one who found it and also the oldest among the children. As the Christmas day dawned, the children got up early eager to open their



presents. Quickly getting dressed, Chloe and her siblings raced downstairs. As they ventured into the kitchen, the warm aroma of the croissants that were baking in the oven filled their stomachs with hunger. After wishing Merry Christmas to their mom and dad, Chloe, Layla and Oliver went straight to the Christmas tree impatiently waiting for their parents to join them. Once the whole family was assembled around the tree, it was finally time to open the presents. After Oliver and Layla opened their presents, it was time for Chloe to open the mysterious gift. What Chloe found was **not** what she expected. It was a small golden key! Chloe saw some kind of inscription on the key. As she was trying to read what it said, the whole house started to shake. Everyone was scared! It felt like an earthquake, but when they looked out their living room window, no other house was shaking! Chloe thought that it must be due to some strong magic in the mysterious key. Suddenly the family found themselves inside a deep, dark cave. Ginger was also there right at Chloe's heel! The family thought that they knew this cave, but could not remember when they saw it. They were not able to remember that this was the same cave that they had gone caving in a few months ago. As the family started exploring the cave, they found that there was some inscription on one of the stalagmites. Chloe carefully went closer and tried to read it. The inscription read: HCRS TL- 🔑 word=WONDER. Oliver and Layla started to write out the alphabet on the floor of the cave with a stick they found, in hope of getting an idea on how to crack the code given. Their parents were also trying to interpret the code. However, Chloe got another idea that maybe the inscription on the key might be something that

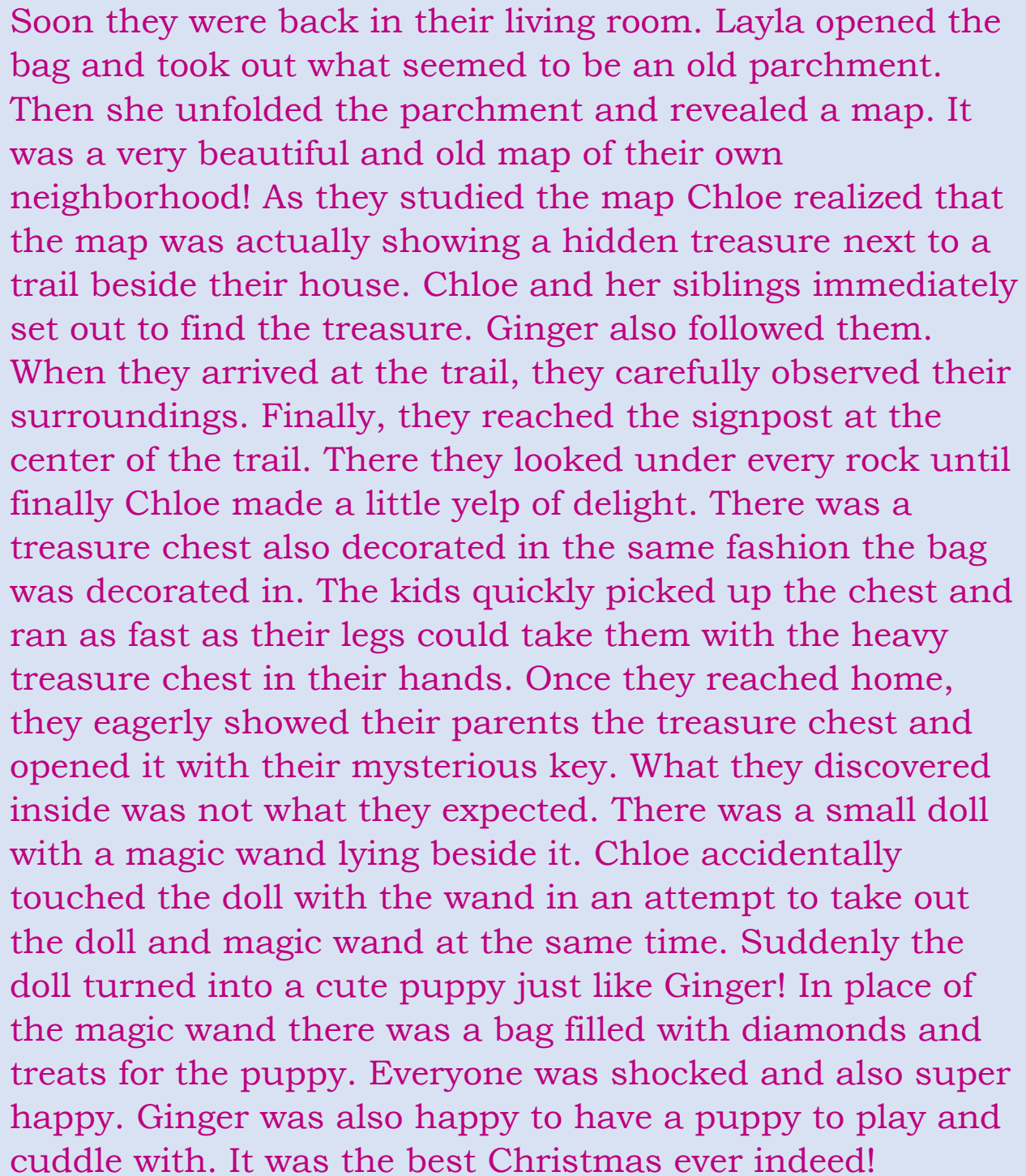
will help in cracking the code. She observed that the key had the alphabet written on it in an interesting way.

W O N D E R A B C F G H I J K L M P Q S T U V X Y Z

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V	W	X	Y	Z
W	O	N	D	E	R	A	B	C	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	P	Q	S	T	U	V	X	Y	Z

L I F T U P

Chloe then decided to write the alphabet the way it was on the key under the normal alphabet that Layla and Oliver had written. Soon an idea clicked in Oliver's mind. He thought that if they substitute the letters in the code with the ones in the normal alphabet, they might get the answer. The whole family liked the idea and started to work on substituting the letters. Finally, they got "LIFT UP" as the answer to the code. Chloe then went to the stalagmite and started trying to lift it up. After a few minutes of tugging, she decided that the whole family should try together to lift up the stalagmite. Soon the mini mountain (the stalagmite) gave a little groan and suddenly launched itself upwards and landed a few feet beside the family. Although everyone was surprised and knocked out of their senses for a minute, they quickly regained their original self and looked around in astonishment. Right in front of them they found a small bag which was decorated very grandly, like something that belonged to a king of the olden Chinese periods. Layla bent down to pick it up. While she was trying to open it up, the whole cave started to shake! It again felt like an earthquake! This time though the family was not scared thinking it was only the magic of the bag.

A decorative border of gingerbread men surrounds the text. The border is composed of two rows of gingerbread men, one along the top and one along the bottom, with the text centered between them. The gingerbread men are brown with white icing details for eyes, buttons, and limbs. They are arranged in a slightly staggered pattern, creating a festive frame for the story.

Soon they were back in their living room. Layla opened the bag and took out what seemed to be an old parchment. Then she unfolded the parchment and revealed a map. It was a very beautiful and old map of their own neighborhood! As they studied the map Chloe realized that the map was actually showing a hidden treasure next to a trail beside their house. Chloe and her siblings immediately set out to find the treasure. Ginger also followed them. When they arrived at the trail, they carefully observed their surroundings. Finally, they reached the signpost at the center of the trail. There they looked under every rock until finally Chloe made a little yelp of delight. There was a treasure chest also decorated in the same fashion the bag was decorated in. The kids quickly picked up the chest and ran as fast as their legs could take them with the heavy treasure chest in their hands. Once they reached home, they eagerly showed their parents the treasure chest and opened it with their mysterious key. What they discovered inside was not what they expected. There was a small doll with a magic wand lying beside it. Chloe accidentally touched the doll with the wand in an attempt to take out the doll and magic wand at the same time. Suddenly the doll turned into a cute puppy just like Ginger! In place of the magic wand there was a bag filled with diamonds and treats for the puppy. Everyone was shocked and also super happy. Ginger was also happy to have a puppy to play and cuddle with. It was the best Christmas ever indeed!

The End