

Transcript

Welcome to Easy Stories in English, the podcast that will take your English from OK to Good, and from Good to Great.

I am Ariel Goodbody, your host for this show. Today's story is for intermediate learners. The name of the story is *A Lucky New Year*. You can find a transcript of the episode at EasyStoriesInEnglish.com/Year. That's EasyStoriesInEnglish.com/Year. There, you can also download the episode as a PDF.

If you listened to my announcement last week, then you will know that I intended to release this episode on New Year's. Of course, because the story is about New Year's, it is a bit less relevant now, but hopefully it will still be enjoyable. The New Year's episode from 2020, [New Year. New Me](#), is one of the most popular episodes of the podcast, so I would be lying if I said I didn't want to try and repeat that success.

The day before the new year, the 31st of December, is called New Year's Eve, and this is typically when people celebrate around the world. Although last year I celebrated in quite a relaxed way. We just went to a friend's house and watched some films. There are many New Year's traditions around the world, which you'll find out about in this story, but a tradition that I think is practised in many places is making New Year's resolutions.

New Year's resolutions are when you say, 'This year, I'm going to do something different.' Going to the gym, quitting smoking or drinking, or going on a diet are common New Year's resolutions. Resolutions are, in theory, a great idea, except it seems like they don't actually work for most people. It's especially hard to quit drinking the day after you've just had a really big party, after all! And I've heard lots of gym-goers complain that the gym is always really full of resolution-makers in January, but that by March most of them have given up.

However, today's story isn't just about traditions and resolutions, but also **superstitions**. Superstitions are beliefs that are not based in reality, but are very popular in all cultures. For example, in the UK we have a superstition that you shouldn't step on a crack in the road. Another superstition is that if you break a mirror, you'll have seven years of bad luck. Another way to get bad luck is to see a black cat. Some people will throw salt over their shoulder to negate a superstition, to stop a superstition from hurting them. A superstition that is found all around the world is the evil eye, the idea that, if someone looks at you with a lot of hate, they can cause you harm. A person who believes in these kinds of superstitions is **superstitious**.

One way you can fight back against superstitions is with a **good-luck charm**. A good-luck charm is an object that is supposed to protect you from evil, but of course, it is just another form of superstition. In the UK, common good-luck charms are four-leaf clovers, horseshoes and rabbit's feet. To be honest, I've never seen someone wearing a good-luck charm, although I did have a friend in school who brought 'lucky spoons' to his exams.

OK, I'll just explain some other words that are in today's story.

Signify means, well, to mean something! If you open all the cupboards in your house and they are empty, that signifies you don't have any food. In Christianity, a cross often signifies Jesus Christ. Red and yellow signs on roads and in buildings often signify dangerous things you should avoid.

Noodles are a form of pasta. Noodles are specifically long, thin pastas that you often eat with a soup or sauce. Spaghetti is a form of noodles, although in English, we usually associate the word 'noodle' with Asian noodles like soba, udon and so on. Ramen is a popular dish made with noodles.

A **doughnut**, or **donut**, is a sweet fried food. Doughnuts are a bit like bread, but they are fried in oil. They often have sugar, chocolate and other sweet things on them. In *The Simpsons*, Homer Simpson loves eating doughnuts, and to be honest, so do I.

A **pomegranate** is a red fruit with a very hard outside. Inside, it is soft and has lots of red seeds. It is the seeds of the pomegranate that people eat. Pomegranates can be quite hard to open, but the seeds are delicious. In Greek mythology, Persephone, the daughter of Demeter and Zeus, ate a pomegranate while in the underworld with Hades. Because she ate six seeds of the pomegranate, Hades made her stay in the underworld for six months of every year.

Lead is a type of grey metal. The chemical symbol for lead is Pb. Lead is mainly used for electronics now, such as in car batteries, and in the past it was used for water pipes and to store food. However, lead can poison you, so we don't use it for those things anymore.

Ashes are what you get when you burn something. When you set something on fire, it burns, goes black and eventually turns into thin grey things called ashes, which float through the air. Wood produces the most ashes, and if you have a traditional fireplace, you have to clean the ashes out regularly. Many people, when they die, choose to be cremated, burnt, and then their family keeps their ashes in a jar called an urn.

When you cannot breathe because something is in your throat, you are **choking**. You have to be careful when eating certain kinds of food, as they can get caught in your throat and you will start choking. You go [chokes], and if you don't get the food out fast, you will choke to death. The Heimlich manoeuvre is something you can do when someone is choking. You stand behind the person and put your hands around their stomach and then pull upwards. This forces the food out of their throat.

There is an old-fashioned type of clock called a grandfather clock. Every hour, this clock makes a loud sound. We call this **striking**. The clock **strikes** once for each hour it is. So at five o'clock, the clock strikes five times. On New Year's Eve, everyone waits for midnight, when the clock strikes twelve times.

Coal is a black rock that you find underground. Coal's chemical symbol is C, and it is sometimes referred to as 'carbon'. When you burn coal, it produces a lot of energy. So in the past, people burned coal to power machines. You can also burn coal on a fire to make the fire very hot, and then the coals will shine red. If you are very bad before Christmas, Santa Claus will bring you coal instead of presents.

Shortbread is a traditional biscuit made in Scotland. Shortbread is very simple, made with butter, flour and sugar, but it is delicious. Shortbread is often given as a present in the UK, and it goes very well with a cup of tea.

A big, big thank-you to my new supporters on Patreon: Anja, Jens, Doreen, Sussana, Chaowat, Márton, Zsolt, Fanny, Hunty, Girolami, Yana, Vadzim, Michal, L Tutkova, Rafael, Lutfi, Fabien, Guimarães, Saffet, Davide, Marie, Vitalina and Joanna. Phew! So many people joined while I was taking a break, which I did NOT expect! So thank you so much. Your support really means a lot to me.

If you also want to get exercises and exclusive live streams, you can go support me at Patreon.com/EasyStoriesInEnglish. That's Patreon.com/EasyStoriesInEnglish.

OK, so listen and enjoy!

A Lucky New Year

Most people celebrate New Year's the same way every year. They have a big party with all their friends, or they go and watch fireworks in the street. Maybe they have a quiet dinner with their family. In many countries, people make special food.

And then, of course, there are the more specific traditions. In England, everyone sings *Auld Lang Syne* at midnight, and by then most people are very drunk, so they sing very poorly. These traditions are supposed to bring you luck in the New Year, and some people take them very seriously.

Harold was one of these people. He believed strongly in traditions and **superstitions**. He never walked under ladders, he always carried salt around with him to throw over his shoulder, and he never touched a mirror in case he broke it. He didn't even have a mirror inside his house. One time, he found out his neighbour had got a black cat, so he moved somewhere else.

Despite this, Harold had terrible luck.

One time, while waiting for the bus to go to work, the roof of the bus shelter collapsed on his head, and he had to go to hospital. Luckily, he wasn't seriously hurt, but his boss didn't believe him when he told him what had happened, and Harold lost his job. It was, after all, the third time that week that he had been late because of an unlucky accident.

Another time, he went on a date with a woman he liked very much, so he decided to take her to a seafood restaurant. She had never tried seafood before, and that night they found out why: she got sick and threw up all over him, and he never saw her again.

The worst thing happened on Halloween. He had a party at his house, and he decided to dress up as a black cat. He thought that that way, he could give some of his bad luck to other people. But no. He got locked out of the house, and the music was playing so loudly that nobody heard him when he knocked on the door. He went to the window to try and get people's attention, but because he was dressed in all black, nobody noticed him in the night. Then, one of his neighbours saw him, and thought he was a burglar. He had a tough time explaining to the police why he was breaking into his own house.

Harold decided that his bad luck came from not being **superstitious enough**. So he started carrying around **good-luck charms**, and charms to keep away the **evil eye**. But still, this wasn't enough. His bad luck continued, and Harold began to lose hope.

At the end of the year, he knew that he had to do something dramatic. So he researched New Year's traditions and superstitions from around the world, and made a plan.

On **New Year's Eve**, he had a big party at his house, as he often did for the holiday. But this year, things were a lot more organised than usual.

First, Harold made sure he was wearing red underwear under his outfit. In Italy, wearing red underwear on New Year's gave you good luck. Well, it was actually because the colour red **signified** fertility—the ability to have children. Harold probably wasn't going to try and have a kid during the next year, but who knew? If his luck was good, he might have a wife by February.

'Why do you have onions hanging outside your door?' one of his friends asked, as they came in.

'Ah!' he said, smiling. 'It's a Greek New Year's tradition that brings good luck. Onions signify being born again, because they lay their roots wherever they want. Don't worry, it's nothing to do with vampires.'

After that, they sat down for dinner. Harold loved cooking for his friends, but this year they were having something a little different.

'What is *this*?' asked his friend. 'I thought we would be having turkey or chicken, not **noodles**.'

'They're not just any noodles!' said Harold. 'They're Japanese toshikoshi soba noodles. They signify long life, because the noodles are longer than other kinds. And they're very tasty!'

Or they would have been, if Harold had cooked them right. He couldn't find the noodles at any of the supermarkets, so he had tried to make them himself, but it hadn't gone well. They tasted of flour, and fell apart in the soup.

'That can't be good,' thought Harold. 'Does that mean I'll have a short life?'

Luckily, he had a dessert, too: oliebollen, a fried **doughnut** that Dutch people ate around New Year's.

'Hang on,' said his friend, 'why are doughnuts lucky?'

'Well,' said Harold, 'they used to believe that a female god called Perchta would come and cut your stomach open and fill it with rubbish, but if you had doughnuts in there, the fat would make her sword slide off.'

'Riiiiight. I'm not hungry anymore, actually.'

After the doughnuts, everyone wanted to start partying, but Harold insisted on more traditions first.

'We have to all cut apples open,' he said, pouring a huge bag of apples onto the table. 'In the Czech Republic they do that. If you have a star in the middle of your apple, you'll have a good year, but if you have a cross, it'll be bad.'

Everyone did so, and everyone found a star in the middle of their apple... except for Harold.

'Uh, not to worry!' he said, turning red. 'There's still a chance for good luck for me tonight. Here, take these.'

He gave some of his guests plates, and some of his guests **pomegranates**.

'Now in Denmark it's good luck for you to smash plates outside my door, and in Greece it's good luck to smash pomegranates *on* the door.'

'Got it!' said his friends. 'Smash plates on the door and pomegranates outside it.'

'No, wait!'

But he was too slow. His friends were so excited to party that they ignored him. They smashed the plates against his front door, which did considerable damage to it, and they smashed the pomegranates on the ground. Harold looked at the pile of broken plates and pomegranate seeds in horror. Nothing was going right tonight!

The number of pomegranate seeds that came out of the pomegranate was supposed to signify how lucky the new year would be. Naturally, very few seeds came out of Harold's pomegranate. And the broken plates were supposed to be a way for friends to get out their anger before the new year, but when Harold told them that they were going into the house for *more* New Year's traditions, they seemed to have plenty of anger left over.

So they ignored him. They put on some music, opened the champagne and started dancing, and Harold was left to try out the German tradition of pouring **lead** by himself.

In this tradition, you had to melt pieces of lead over a spoon and pour them into a bowl of water. The shape the lead formed signified how the New Year would go for you. For example, a fox-shaped piece of lead meant that you're clever, and a mask-shaped piece of lead meant you would be welcome wherever you go.

Harold sat in a corner and poured lead while everyone else danced and had fun. Just as he was moving the spoon, one of his friends bumped into him. The lead jumped off the spoon and formed a very strange shape in the water.

'What is that...?' Harold wondered.

One of his drunk friends looked at it. 'I think it's a jug.'

Harold looked at the sheet of paper which explained what each shape signified.

Jug = unpleasantness

'What does that mean?!' cried Harold.

He wanted to go to bed and cry, but he still had one more tradition to do before midnight. He took a piece of paper and wrote down his wishes for the new year.

I wish that all the bad luck from tonight would go away. Oh, and also I want to win the lottery.

Then he burned the piece of paper and put the **ashes** in a glass of champagne. Apparently in Russia, they drank their wishes for the new year, and Harold thought this was a great idea. What could go wrong with it?

But as he drank the ashes, he started **choking**. His friends saw him choking and immediately came and helped him. They hit him on the back until he coughed up the ashes, but now his wishes were all over the floor.

'Oh, what awful luck!' he said.

'It could be worse luck,' said his friend. 'You could have choked to death!'

That was the last tradition before midnight, but Harold could hardly rest. Many New Year's traditions took place just as the **clock struck midnight**, and he had to make sure he was ready for them.

When the time approached, he took a bowl of salt and a bowl of grapes and went out the front door.

'What are you doing, Harold?' said his friends.

But he ignored them. They wouldn't understand his superstitions. They never did.

Once the clock struck midnight, Harold's mad dance began. First, he poured the salt outside his door, and then he started eating grapes. In Turkey, they poured salt on the doorstep to signify peace for the new year, and in Spain, they ate one grape for **each strike of the clock**. That meant twelve grapes in twelve seconds!

Even though he had just choked on the ashes, Harold did surprisingly well with the grapes, quickly eating the first eleven of them with each strike of the clock.

But when it came to the twelfth grape, he realised something awful. He had been so desperate to prepare his New Year's traditions that he had bought the grapes weeks in advance, and he hadn't noticed that they had gone off. As he put the twelfth grape in his mouth, he felt sick, and before he could stop himself, he'd thrown up *all* the grapes.

His sick landed on the pile of salt, ruining any good luck the Turkish tradition had brought. Meanwhile, his friends came outside to sing *Auld Lang Syne* and watch the fireworks.

Harold started crying, and his friends took him inside. They gave him some water, and then some champagne and cake, and tried to make him feel better.

'It's no use!' said Harold, eating slice after slice of cake. 'All of my New Year's traditions went badly! I'm not even sure my underwear is the right shade of red. I think it might be blood orange.'

But just as Harold was feeling his most miserable, a knock came from the front door. Everyone looked at each other.

'That's strange,' said Harold. 'Who would be coming over at this time?'

He went to open the front door. And who did he find there, but his black-haired Scottish friend, Hamish!

'Harold!' cried Hamish. 'I'm so, so sorry. There was an accident on the motorway, and I'm completely late... But I know you love your traditions, so I'm bringing you a wee bit of Scotland.'

'Hamish?' said Harold. He hadn't even known his Scottish friend was coming to the party. 'What tradition?'

'What, you've never heard of the first foot? In Scotland, the first person to come through your door after midnight should be an attractive man with dark hair, and he's called the "first foot". Well, I hope I'm attractive enough! And he'll come bringing gifts of coal, salt, shortbread and whiskey.'

Harold noticed that Hamish was carrying a basket under his arm, which had coal, salt, shortbread and whiskey in it.

Harold's heart filled with joy.

'Come in, come in!' he said.

Hamish walked inside and saw how quiet everyone was.

'What, is the party over already?'

'No!' someone cried. 'But you've just made this Harold's best night ever.'

They put the music back on, opened the bottle of whiskey and enjoyed the shortbread. Harold felt so happy he could cry.

This was going to be his year after all. And it was all thanks to his beautiful Scottish friend.

At the end of the night, Hamish said to Harold, 'Say, you got any New Year's resolutions, Harold?'

Harold thought for a moment, and then said, 'You know what? I think this year, I'm going to be less superstitious.'

Hamish smiled. 'Good luck with that!'

THE END

If you enjoyed the story and want to say thank you, you can buy me a coffee on [Ko-Fi](#). Just go to [EasyStoriesInEnglish.com](#) and click the orange button that says [Buy me a coffee!](#) Or you can write me a nice review on Apple Podcasts, or follow me on Instagram and Twitter, [@arielgoodbody](#). Thank you for listening, and see you in two weeks!