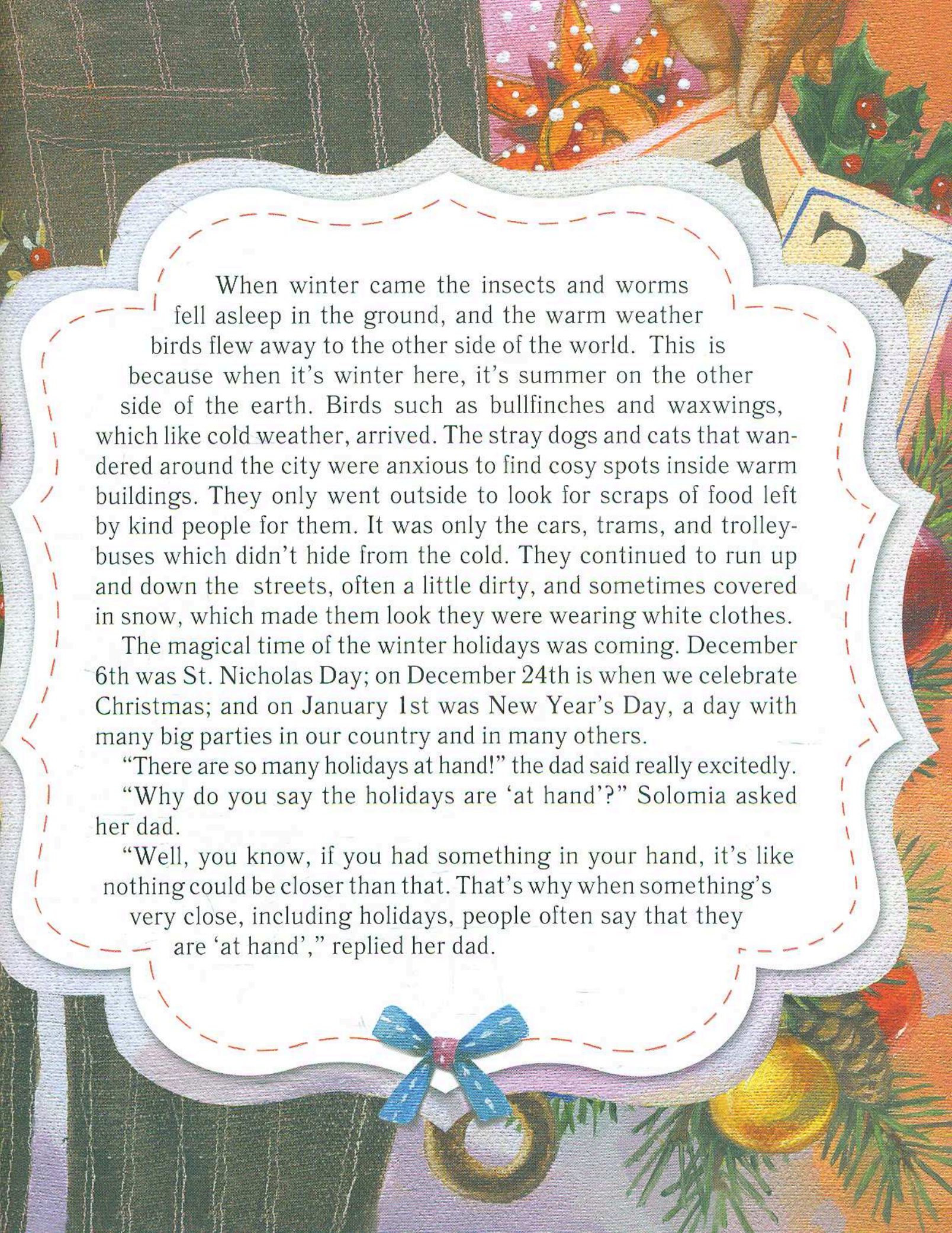


Once upon a time there was a girl whose dad's name was Solomon and whose mom's name was Mia. When she was born, her parents decided to make her name a combination of their most favorite names, their own. The names Solomon and Mia were put together, and she became Solomia.

This family lived in a big city, where many other people lived too. Like many other big cities, there were trams, trains which ran above the ground and below, trolleybuses, cars, bicycles, and many other vehicles. There were so many busy people living there, driving and riding so many different kinds of vehicles, that not many living things, such as cats, dogs, worms, insects, or birds lived there with them.







When winter came the insects and worms fell asleep in the ground, and the warm weather birds flew away to the other side of the world. This is because when it's winter here, it's summer on the other side of the earth. Birds such as bullfinches and waxwings, which like cold weather, arrived. The stray dogs and cats that wandered around the city were anxious to find cosy spots inside warm buildings. They only went outside to look for scraps of food left by kind people for them. It was only the cars, trams, and trolley-buses which didn't hide from the cold. They continued to run up and down the streets, often a little dirty, and sometimes covered in snow, which made them look they were wearing white clothes.

The magical time of the winter holidays was coming. December 6th was St. Nicholas Day; on December 24th is when we celebrate Christmas; and on January 1st was New Year's Day, a day with many big parties in our country and in many others.

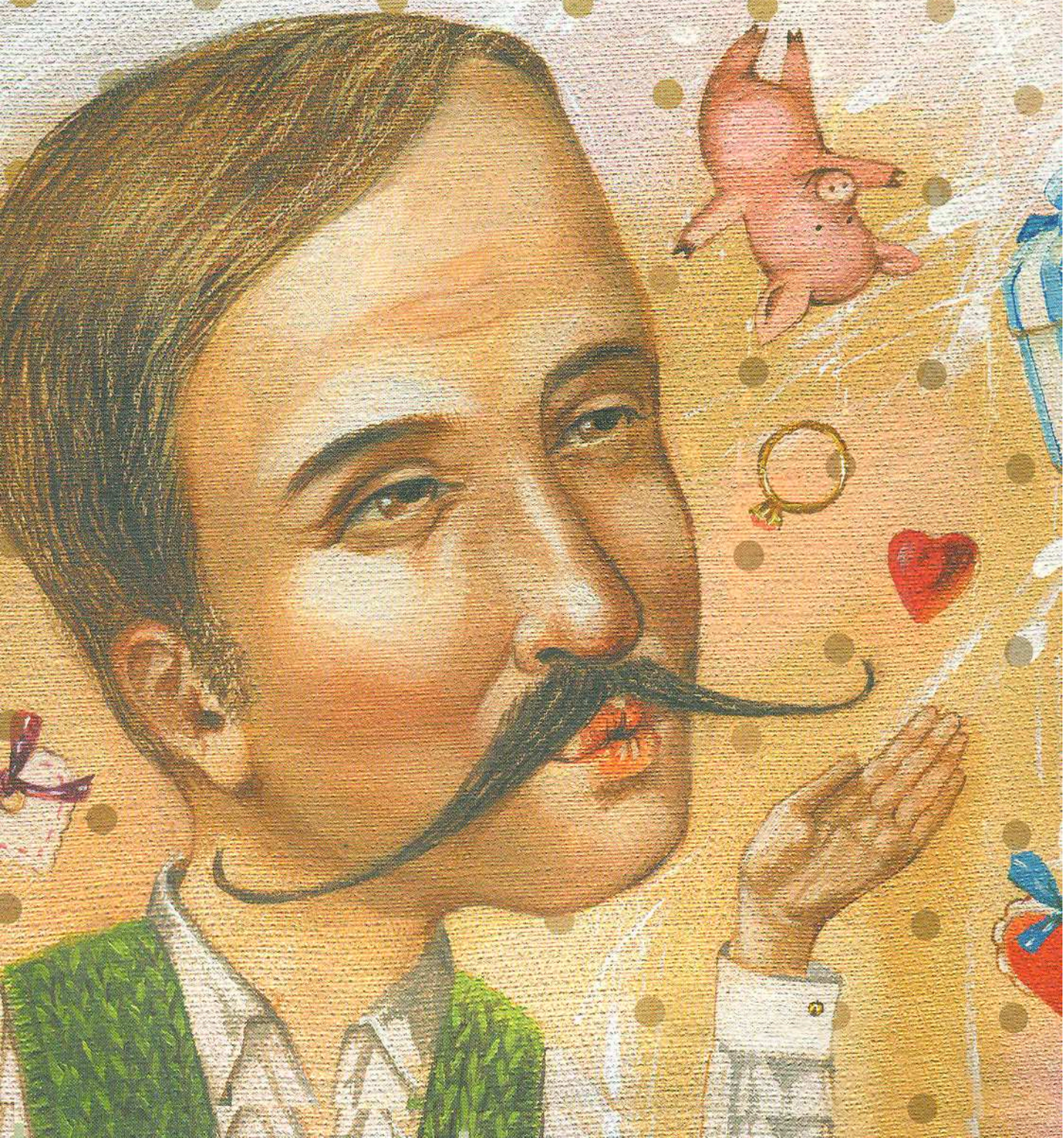
"There are so many holidays at hand!" the dad said really excitedly.

"Why do you say the holidays are 'at hand'?" Solomia asked her dad.

"Well, you know, if you had something in your hand, it's like nothing could be closer than that. That's why when something's very close, including holidays, people often say that they are 'at hand'," replied her dad.



Solomia liked holidays very much. On such days she was given many, many gifts, and she was hugged and kissed much more than usual. Even better, because her mom and dad didn't have to go to work on holidays, they could spend those entire days with her.







For their family, there was another big holiday coming too — December 5th, mom’s birthday. Solomia loved her mother very much. She decided to make a gift for her by herself. This was a **BIG SECRET**. On the morning of the big day, Solomia was the first one to give a gift to her mom.

*secret!*