

# CHRISTMAS in a time of covid

A special edition of the NAOMI LOVES  
newsletter, by Naomi Bulger.

JOY - CALM - CREATIVITY - SUSTAINABILITY - TOGETHERNESS

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*Hello dear friend! I think that, after the year we are having, we could all do with a little bit of joy, lightness, and a sprinkling of celebration, don't you think? With that in mind, these pages are dedicated to creativity, nature, generosity, mindful living... and Christmas!*

*I've steered away from religious reference because I want you to feel free to celebrate with abundance and joy whatever you believe or don't believe, and whether it's Christmas or another holiday that inspires you. Really, I just want to give all of us something to look forward to and enjoy.*

*I hope you have a lovely time inside these pages. If you have any questions, or you'd just like to reach out and chat, please feel free to email me at [hello@naomiloves.com](mailto:hello@naomiloves.com). And if you're not a subscriber but you'd like to receive my newsletters in the future (they're not usually this long!) you can subscribe via my website at [naomiloves.com/newsletter](http://naomiloves.com/newsletter).*

*In love and light,  
Naomi x*



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# WRITE A CHRISTMAS LETTER

*"Letter-writing on the part of  
a busy man or woman is the  
quintessence of generosity."*

- Agnes Repplier

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Of course, we have Zoom. And FaceTime. And Skype, and all the others. And it is *something*, isn't it, to be able to see the people we love, even if we are looking up their noses or inspecting the freckles at the tops of their hairlines. In this topsy-turvy year we have been having, it sure has been something to be able to connect in this way with the people we love.

But I also know that most of us are well and truly sick of our screens. The bad connections with every third word going missing, the genuine fatigue on eyes and brains, the frustratingly intangible nature of our contact (all I want is a hug!), and the maddening inadequacy of multiple tiny boxes on a screen trying to replace the joy and laughter of friends and family gathering around the dinner table for spaghetti-night.

And I wonder if this Christmas, when many budgets are strapped

and nerves are raw, this might be the time to sit down and pour all your love and stories and hopes for the future into a letter, and post it to someone you care for?

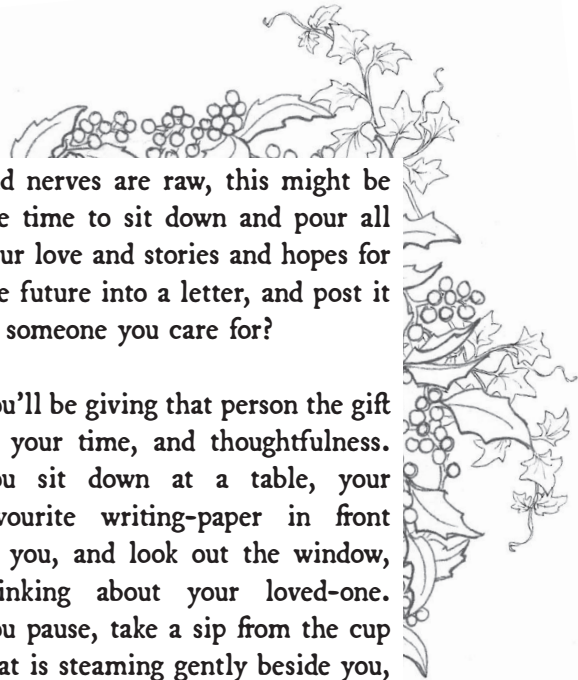
You'll be giving that person the gift of your time, and thoughtfulness. You sit down at a table, your favourite writing-paper in front of you, and look out the window, thinking about your loved-one. You pause, take a sip from the cup that is steaming gently beside you, picture your friend in your mind's eye, and write. You tell them a funny story about something that happened to you recently, you pour out your hopes, dreams and plans for 2021, but most of all you tell them what you love about them, and what having them in your life means to you.

When they receive your letter, it will be something they can hold and keep. To read and re-read, carry around in their pockets, store among precious keepsakes.

If they are lonely, and if the two of you are being kept away from each other during these seemingly-endless lockdowns and restrictions, it will be something of you that they can hold. Long after the blue light of their computer screen has turned off, they can touch the paper of your letter, knowing that you, also, touched the paper of that letter. It connects the two of you almost as much as your words on the page.

That is the joy of a Christmas letter.

Right: Christmas mail-art entirely optional, but this festive bear is yours to colour in on page 33





*"When they receive your letter, it will be something they can hold and keep. To read and re-read, carry around in their pockets, store among precious keepsakes."*





*“For your first Christmas, I have the honour to send you my most affectionate greetings; and in wishing you all good health, I take the liberty humbly to indicate some of the favours of fortune that I am pleased to think I enjoy in common with you.*”

*“First—I hear with pleasure that you are quite well content with yourself—not because of a reasoned conviction of your own worth, which would be mere vanity and unworthy of you, but by reason of a philosophical disposition. It is too early for you to bother over problems of self-improvement—as for me it is too late; wherefore we are alike in the calm of our self-content.*”

*“...And sleep is good—long sleep and often; and your age and mine permit us to indulge in it without the sneers of the lark or the cock or the dawn.”*”

Journalist and diplomat Walter H Page, in a letter to his one-year-old grandson: Christmas, London, 1915. Later published for its charm and heartwarming humour.

## WHAT TO WRITE

*Stuck for ideas? While it is undoubtedly special to say “I love you,” it is even more special to say “I love you because...”*

Here are some prompts that might help you, adapted from my Calm Christmas zine:

- \* Recount something they once did or said that made you laugh (in a good way, not at their expense)
- \* Tell them something they once did or said that made you feel loved
- \* Describe your favourite thing that they do / make / cook / say
- \* Remind them of a happy memory that you share together
- \* Tell them something they taught you that you really appreciate
- \* Tell them about something you

deeply admire in them (and ask them to teach it to you)

In your letter, resist the urge to include hidden morals or half-hearted compliments. Don't say “I love you even when you do X bad thing,” just say “I love you.” Don't say “It doesn't matter what other people think...” just tell them the good things you think.

Even if the caveats are true (they probably are - nobody is perfect!), leave them out of this letter. Your goal is to spread joy. 'Tis the season, after all. Just say truthful, positive things about them, so they'll always have your precious Christmas-letter words to read and re-read for many years to come.

# GIFT CERTIFICATES

*A thoughtful gift for a lover of letters*



'THE MOST BEAUTIFUL LETTER YOU'VE EVER WRITTEN' e-course makes a unique and lasting Christmas gift for lovers of snail-mail.

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## A WONDERFULLY WASTE-FREE GIFT... THAT LASTS

All gift memberships include lifetime access to:

- \* Five weekly modules of lessons on letter-writing, mail-art, handmade stationery and more, accessible forever
- \* Original printable resources
- \* A private (not on Facebook!) community of 300+ fellow letter-writers
- \* Our closed, safe, pen-pal matching service
- \* Access to the letter-writers' calendar for fun and creative projects

When you purchase this gift for your friend, you set the date you'd like me to send it to them, as well as a personal message from you.





# THE GENTLE SOLACE OF A GARDEN

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First published in my  
blog earlier this month:  
[naomiloves.com/blog](http://naomiloves.com/blog)

When the world closed back in March, and the us of our familiar communities, neighbourhoods and even entire nations was reduced to the surprising smallness of the we, or me, that inhabited each of our individual homes, Nature welcomed us like a mother hen.

We tended seedlings on windowsills, pruned back overblown autumn branches, and finally learned how to pronounce the names of our house plants. (Note

to self: it's *Monstera Deliciosa*, not *Monstera*).

I would rest my palms on the soil beneath the Japanese maple tree, fingers outspread, and imagine the way the soil connected me to the trees and through them the root systems and through those root systems all the other root systems that spread across my yard and my neighbourhood and beyond the closed borders, all of us belonging to one giant ecosystem, even while



we were apart. At night I would look up at the moon and imagine all the other people alone in their houses, looking up at that same moon.

(Outside our tiny lockdown worlds, Nature didn't weaken her embrace. Ducks swam in the Trevi Fountain. A herd of wild goats wandered through a Welsh town. The skies above some of the world's most polluted cities shone clean and clear.)

Nature, and in particular for many people their gardens, became a place of solace. Even more so than usual. For me and my children, our tiny garden became the one place where we could go outside for as long as we wanted to. When the weather was warm we'd carry their schoolbooks into the garden and read on the grass. We'd eat out there when

we could, and together tend to the plants: pruning the roses, netting the fruit trees to protect them from marauding possums, and planting rows of tiny carrot seedlings, celery, and Brussels sprouts.

Now spring is here and though my garden was late to bloom this year, it is well and truly making

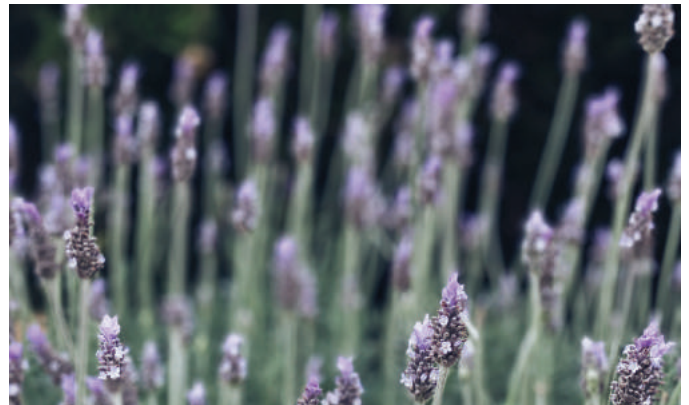
*"I would rest my palms on the soil beneath the Japanese maple tree, fingers outspread, and imagine... all of us belonging to one giant ecosystem, even while we were apart"*

up for lost time now, showering us with an abundance of colour and perfume. For a little while I congratulated myself on a gardening job inadvertently done well, until I began to notice the roses blooming in front gardens and over fences and along road-edges, all over my city.

Nature is having a moment.

I don't know if it is the extra love and attention, the cleaner air and water, a sign of resilience after last year's climate disaster, or something altogether different, but right now, it seems to me that the gardens of Melbourne are singing. I shared this thought on Instagram recently and was surprised by the sheer number of people - not just in Melbourne but all over Australia and the world - who are noticing the same thing.

There is such sweet solace in a garden. Even in the tiniest of gardens, just a pretty pot with one happy houseplant growing, changing, reaching up and out - ever toward the light - and I have never been more grateful for my little pocket of green-and-rainbow than I am right now. Can you hear the gardens singing?





# A CANDLE IN THE WINDOW



*"All the darkness in the world cannot extinguish the light of a single candle."*

- St. Francis of Assisi

In 17<sup>th</sup> Century Ireland, British penal law decreed that all Catholic clergy must leave the country on threat of imprisonment and exile. If they later returned to Ireland, they would be liable to being hanged, drawn and quartered. Many of the clergy went into hiding, travelling the country and offering Mass and teaching children in open fields.

At Christmas, faithful Catholic families would place candles in their windows as silent, shining messages to the itinerant bishops and priests that the doors to their homes were unlocked and that inside, they would find welcome and safety. The tradition outlasted the persecution and today, people all over the world still light candles at Christmas.

Lighting a candle carries something of a ritual to it. The purposeful striking of the match and then that moment - one beat of a heart - in which we wait for it to catch, sizzle, and flare. Then we lower the match to the wick, gently cupping one hand around the other side to shelter the candle from any breeze, and stand back as the flame takes form to watch the ancient

*"The hypnosis of the flame is as old as humanity itself"*

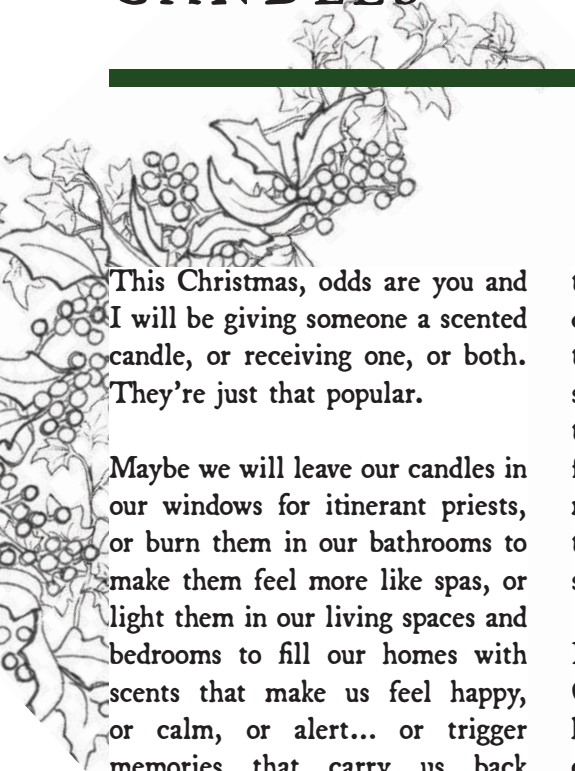
glow. Faces behind a candle grow warm, shadows soften, shoulders relax. The hypnosis of the flame is as old as humanity itself.

Candles will flicker and glow on window sills across the world this year. Beacons of welcome to persecuted priests, Father Christmas, the Holy Ghost, or the neighbours two doors down, depending on the window sill in question. But the common theme is *welcome*. In March we put rainbows and teddy bears in our windows. In April we lit candles for the Anzac soldiers. Come December, I'll be lighting a candle again.

I like to think our candles are saying, collectively, despite the fear, sickness, outrage, loss, lockdown and isolation that has marked this horrible year, "I'm still here." And also, "I'm still here *for you*."



# A GUIDE TO SCENTED CANDLES



This Christmas, odds are you and I will be giving someone a scented candle, or receiving one, or both. They're just that popular.

Maybe we will leave our candles in our windows for itinerant priests, or burn them in our bathrooms to make them feel more like spas, or light them in our living spaces and bedrooms to fill our homes with scents that make us feel happy, or calm, or alert... or trigger memories that carry us back through time to moments when we felt safe, free, and full of joy.

But if you've ever ended up with a headache from an overbearing scented candle, or inadvertently made your bedroom smell like child's cough syrup, or wondered about the potential impacts on your own health - or the health of our planet - from the various waxes, oils and chemicals that go into that innocent-looking jar... well, if any of these things has ever happened to you, you and I have something in common.

I've been working with my friend Clare Burrows, a myotherapist, aromatherapist and candle-maker, to learn how candles can be made naturally, ethically and in a way

that will enhance, rather than damage, our wellbeing. Down the track Clare and I hope to offer some courses for people who want to make candles at home, either for work or for business. But in the meantime, I asked her for some tips when it comes to shopping for scented candles this Christmas.

## FIRST, WHY THE HEADACHES?

Clare says that if you tend to get headaches from burning scented candles, they were probably made using petroleum-based paraffin wax, which is the most common wax used in candles and some claim it produces harmful by-products when burning; or it's possible the candle was scented with synthetic fragrances, which also cause reactions in some people.

Palm wax is a healthier alternative for us, but unfortunately it is an unsustainable product created by rapid and widespread deforestation of ancient rainforests, making it a less desirable choice for our planet.

## WHAT'S A BETTER WAX TO USE?

Look for candles that say they are made from soy or cocoa soy wax. These contain nothing artificial (no paraffins or palm oil), making them better for you and our planet.

Beeswax is also natural but doesn't carry scent as easily, so is not often sold as a fragranced candle. (Clare and I will do some experiments for you on this, ahead of our course.)

## SYNTHETIC V NATURAL...

Not all fragrances are made equally and, unfortunately (at least here in Australia), candle-makers are not obliged to share whether their scents are made from natural or synthetic oils.

First, look for labels that promise "natural fragrance based," "fragranced naturally," or "no synthetics." If there's nothing on the label, sniff: if the fragrance is overtly sweet or strong, it's more likely to be made with synthetics.

## HOW TO CHOOSE A FRAGRANCE

Clare says to follow your instinct, and go with a blend that resonates with you at the first sniff (in other words, don't over-think it). Choose something that you'd like to live with, rather than wear (there's a difference!).

Clare's recipe for a home-made festive candle is on the next page.

*Find Clare (and her candles) online: [remedialmassagebrunswick.com.au/shop](http://remedialmassagebrunswick.com.au/shop)*

Right: I like to repurpose old teacups into vessels for scented candles... which makes a pretty gift that can be reused when it's finished, for actual cups of tea



## DIY FESTIVE, FRAGRANT, ETHICAL CANDLE

*Clare makes this festive candle to sell in her shop around Christmas time. She says the scent is warm, rich and robust, like Christmas pudding, with a lightness brought in by the orange oil. It would make a wonderful gift, and Clare's recipe is here for you to try.*

### YOU'LL NEED:

- \* 300 grams soy wax (find online or in craft stores)
- \* 24 grams essential oil (available at most pharmacies)
- \* A container (eg. coffee mug, flower-pot, jam jar)
- \* A cotton wick (find online or in craft stores, and select the size according to the diameter of your container. eg. for a 7cm diameter container, Clare uses a "CD-20" wick)

**Step 1:** Carefully measure 300 grams of soy, then remove 24 grams (because you'll be replacing that with the essential oil)

**Step 2:** Gently melt the wax in a double-boiler (don't use your best pots as wax can be hard to clean -

I'm speaking from sad experience!). Once it has melted, stir in the following blend of essential oils:

- \* Nutmeg (4 grams)
- \* Cinnamon (7 grams)
- \* Clove (7 grams)
- \* Orange or sweet orange (5-6 grams)

**Step 3:** Secure your wick to the bottom of the container (sticky-tape or blu-tac will do the trick), and tie it to a pencil or chopstick over the top of the container so it doesn't fall in

**Step 4:** Pour your wax-and-oil mixture into the container. When the wax has set, trim the wick to about two centimetres long

Burn it at home for festive perfume to cheer you as you bake cookies, snip paper snowflakes, sip mulled wine or watch Love Actually again... or wrap it in some lovely ribbon and give it to a friend!

# TO MARKET TO MARKET, BUT WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

I call it “farmers market malaise,” that moment when you realise the reality of shopping at the farmers markets doesn’t always match up with the dream.

The farmers markets are my happy place. A cold but sunny morning. A neat gathering of tents, tables and truck-beds, each of them abundant with glowing produce, pulled from the earth or plucked from the tree only days or even hours earlier. We pause to smell fragrant herbs, taste-test whipped honey, and marvel at all the many-coloured wild mushrooms, until the breeze carries in it freshly-brewed coffee and artisanal sourdough bread - still warm from the bakers’ oven - and we follow like children behind the piper’s song.

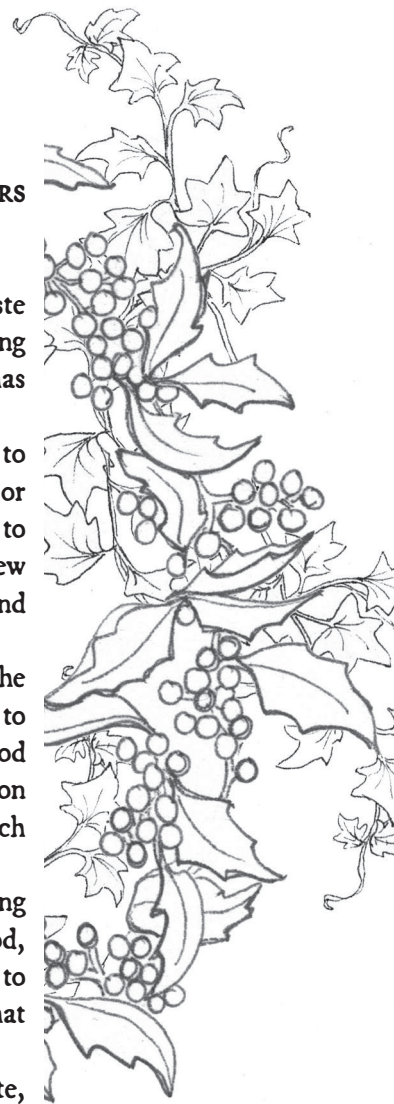
If you want to feel smug (and I do so love feeling smug, don’t you?), take your shopping bags to the farmers markets.

## 7 REASONS TO VISIT THE FARMERS MARKET

1. You’ll benefit from all the taste and nutritional benefits of eating food that is in season, and has been freshly harvested
2. You’ll have the opportunity to meet the people who grew or raised your food, and be able to ask them about how they grew it and how you can prepare and store it
3. You’ll be minimising the distance your food has had to travel to get to you, so the food will be fresher and its impact on the environment will be much lower
4. You’ll be directly supporting the people who grow your food, rather than leaving them to the mercy of supermarkets that drive prices down
5. You’ll be reducing food waste, by being open to different colours and shapes in your food, as opposed to the cookie-cutter sameness that is all that the supermarkets accept (which forces the farmers to throw anything ‘non compliant’ away)
6. You can ask specific questions about the farmers’ use of pesticides and preservatives, so you know exactly what is in your food
7. Often, you’ll come across foods or varieties you’ve never seen before, and have the opportunity to try something completely new

*“Take inspiration from what’s actually available at the market on that day to plan out your week’s menu. I know this isn’t easy...”*

We’re all feeling smug now, aren’t we! Pick up your pretty, wicker basket, don your sun-hat, and let’s go to market...



Right: Thursday morning was market day when we lived in France. After shopping, we’d pack a basket and head to the castle ruins for a picnic









...Only, I have so many questions!

“I wanted to make apple pie, but I can’t find apples anywhere! And while we’re at it, where’s the cucumber? When will they next be in season?”

“What’s that wonky-looking fruit with the purple skin? And what am I supposed to do with it?”

“How can I tell if this is fresh / ripe / the right variety for what I want to make?”

“It all looked so good, I bought way too much. What can I do with it before it all goes off?”

“I could barely find anything on my shopping list, and now I have to plan a week’s meals around completely different ingredients. What should I do?”

“How should I store this, to keep it fresh?”

“How should I cook it? What else goes well with it?”

And, all too often, “How am I going to carry all this home?”

Farmers market malaise, my friend.

## WHAT TO DO AT THE FARMERS MARKET

*Here are some ways to stem the overwhelm:*

1. Educate yourself on what’s in season, when. Google something local (eg. “What’s in season in my region”) so you’ll know ahead of time not to expect mushrooms in summer, or mangoes in winter.
2. Take inspiration from what’s actually available at the market on that day to plan out your week’s menu. I know this isn’t easy, so you can ask for help: ask the farmer how to prepare the food, and what to pair it with.
3. Before you buy, think about how many people you’ll be feeding, and how long you’ll have before you need to use up that food (30 different varieties of tomatoes and a dozen duck eggs may look tempting, but can you actually get through them all - as well as everything else you’re buying - before they simply go off?)
4. Bring more tote bags than you think you’ll need (trust me).





# A YEAR AT THE MARKET

*An idea born in rural France, created in inner-city Australia, and made for food lovers everywhere*

I've called this project "A Year at the Market" but it has taken more than two years in the making and I am genuinely so excited to share it with you *at last*.

The seeds of this idea came while I was living with my children in a rural village in France, in 2018. Shopping in our village was done the traditional way, at the farmers markets each Thursday morning. Here, people from the entire village - and all the outlying villages - would come to buy all the fresh vegetables, fruit, cheese, meat, fish and eggs they needed for the week to come. I learned to arrive early to get my hands on the freshest produce, but this came with its own set of hazards because all the French grandmothers likewise got to the markets early, and nobody wants to come between a French grandmother and the best looking leek on the table.

At first, navigating the markets was as confusing as it was frustrating. I'd arrive clutching a shopping list in my fist, all the ingredients for all the meals I'd hoped to cook that week, and make my way in a somewhat haphazard fashion from stall to stall, searching for everything I needed. Only to realise half way into my shop that a third of the ingredients on my list were not in season, and another third were not even grown in this region.

One week, after my children and I had been collecting chestnuts, I tried to buy Brussels sprouts so that we could pan-fry them together with the chestnuts and some local bacon. When I asked one of the

farmers if they had sprouts, she said, "they're not in season... not for two weeks!" The food available at the market didn't change season-by-season, it literally changed week-by-week.

As the weeks and months went by, I learned that pre-planned menus and shopping lists were all-but useless. If I wanted to shop locally and eat seasonally (and I did), I'd have to learn to accept whatever happened to be available at the farmers market on each particular week, and build a week's worth of family menus from the best and freshest food I could find.

The problem was that this is not as easy as it sounds. (Or does it sound easy at all?) I'm not a naturally confident cook, and certainly didn't have a ready-made repertoire of meals and recipes that could be planned on the fly, depending on whether tomatoes were good this week, or mussels, or romanesco broccoli, or spring lamb.

I found myself wishing there was some kind of field guide that could help me navigate the seasonal markets, in the moment. Not a recipe book to look up when I got home, but one that could tell me - while I was at the market - how to choose the best of the produce I was looking at, what to expect from it, what to cook with it (so I could plan my meals while I shopped), and what to do with it if I happened to buy too much, and couldn't eat it all in time.

When I couldn't find the kind of field guide I was

*"I found myself wishing there was some kind of field guide that could help me navigate the seasonal markets, in the moment"*

Right: This was just around the corner from our home in Dinan, France. I took this photograph while walking the children to childcare one morning



looking for, the idea began to bloom in my mind to create one myself. Even after we returned to Australia, in a city with (relatively) fresh produce at grocery stores and supermarkets, it was still important to me to shop at the farmers markets (for all the reasons listed on the previous pages), and I still needed help navigating the seasonal nature of shopping in such an exciting and spontaneous way.

At first I planned to write my field-guide as a book, but it occurred to me that covering all the potential produce at a farmers market would make for a very **BIG** book, not something any of us could easily carry with us to market each week. So instead, I decided to create a series of pocket-sized booklets, colour-coded

according to season, so that I could simply pop the in-season booklets into a produce bag and take them with me on my way to the market, as a quick reference guide to use while I shop.

And that (finally!) brings me to today's announcement. It occurred to me that if this was a resource I'd find handy, maybe it would be something that you'd find handy, too. Which is why I am over the moon to announce a completely new and super exciting annual subscription service: **A Year at the Market**.

Ready for the big reveal? Turn the page...



Shop the farmers markets with confidence, learn to recognise what's fresh, local and in-season at the supermarkets, and make the most of all that fresh bounty with meal ideas and preserving recipes that making seasonal eating accessible and enjoyable.

## INSIDE EVERY FIELD GUIDE

- \* An overview of when to expect to find this produce in season
- \* What to look for at the farmers market *and* the supermarket
- \* Handy questions to ask the farmer
- \* An explanation of different varieties
- \* Other foods that pair well with this produce, and what to cook with it



- \* Recipes for preserving your produce if you buy too much, or if you have a glut in your back yard
- \* Tips for growing or picking your own

In addition, every issue is colour-coded according to the dominant season in which you'll find it (including a colour for multi-season produce) so that you can

easily pick up just the in-season guides you need and take them with you to market.

Further, every issue features a botanical watercolour illustration by me, painted specifically for these guides. These are also made into postcards, which you'll receive free alongside your monthly field guides.



A thoughtful gift for lovers of good food, seasonal cooking, and local, sustainable shopping



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WHEN YOU SUBSCRIBE TO "A YEAR AT THE MARKET," I'LL POST YOU...

...a veritable cornucopia of goodies, including:

- \* 12 issues (one per month) of the pocket-sized Farmers Market Field Guide, see the facing page for an overview of what's in each issue
- \* Two postcards every month, printed on uncoated, recycled cardboard, featuring prints of botanical watercolours by me
- \* A copy of the Farmers Market Handbook, containing tips and ideas for navigating both farmers markets and supermarkets alike in a quest for fresh, local food, as well as a roadmap for using the monthly Farmers Market Field Guides week by week and season by season
- \* A jute produce bag in which to carry your potatoes, walnuts, mirabelle plums... or the appropriate season's stash of Field Guides, ready for handy reference while you're at the market
- \* The Farmers Market Food Calendar, an A3 poster printed on recycled, 120gsm paper, with a handy checklist to know what's in season, when, featuring botanical watercolour illustrations
- \* A discount of 10% off anything in my shop (including gift certificates), for the duration of the subscription



# CHRISTMAS

## IN A TIME OF COVID

Back in March, could any of us have imagined that now, on the eve of Christmas, we'd still be limiting gatherings, unable to cross borders, and donning festive face-masks to match our reindeer sweaters and Christmas-bauble earrings?

Many of us won't be able to celebrate the way we want to this year, and yet the people we love are probably more on our minds than ever before. Having just gone through an intense lockdown that lasted the entire winter (and a good portion of autumn and spring either side), my heart goes out to those of you who are now being forced back into your homes and away from the people you love.

In the midst of our long lockdown, my husband came up with the idea of celebrating "Christmas in July," just for fun. The idea was to give us something to look forward to, and work towards, creating a bright patch in a series of days that were otherwise quite dark, and marked by a surreal and lonely kind of sameness.

His original idea was simply to cook up a Christmas feast, with enough to share with his two adult daughters and their housemates. Of course we couldn't welcome them as guests, but we *could* deliver the feasts to their homes. When we explained the idea to

our younger children, they were more excited than we could have anticipated, and took the idea to a much greater level. A Christmas feast became a true Christmas, in almost every respect. It gave us a whole week of excited joy and anticipation: decorating the house, planning the menu, thinking up little gifts we could give each other, baking sugar cookies, digging out the Christmas movies and watching a new one every night, and even writing to Father Christmas (who kindly wrote back explaining that the elves were on holidays and

he wasn't in the habit of delivering presents *twice* a year, but he wished

us all the festive cheer in the world to sprinkle joy in troubled times).

The timing of our "Christmas in July" couldn't

have been better because it actually fell on the first weekend of August, on the same day that our Premier announced even tighter lockdown regulations, including nighttime curfews, a strict one hour outside a day maximum and only for sanctioned reasons, and no travel beyond five kilometres from home for any reason, without a permit.

*"Many of us won't be able to celebrate the way we want to this year, and yet the people we love are probably more on our minds than ever before."*



It was a lot to take in, and the fact that we were merry with good food, mulled wine, candles and carols helped to soften the blow of the news.

All of this means that I am possibly more experienced than most right now to know the strangeness - and also the beautiful benefits - of celebrating a holiday like Christmas during a period of sickness and lockdown. And I learned a few practical lessons along the way, which I've shared with you in these pages.

For starters:

1. Decorate the billyo out of your home, even if you live alone. You want to turn those festive feelings up a notch, and putting up decorations can be a tremendous mood-booster (Christmas music and/or Christmas movies in the background are optional, but highly encouraged)
2. If you can't (or don't want to) shop for decorations, make like Buddy the Elf and decorate your home in handmade snowflakes and paper chains (I've shared a how-to on the facing page)
3. Make a list of all your favourite Christmas movies, and watch one a day for a week (or more)
4. Bake some Christmas cakes and give them away to friends and family. If you're not allowed out, Christmas cake is a great one because it keeps long enough to be posted (and the smell of all that fruit and brandy is bound to get you into the spirit of things while you're stirring)
5. If you have friends, family or lonely neighbours nearby and you can't have them in your home, why not pre-cook a Christmas feast and take it over to them? I made a feast for three separate households back in July, so I've shared my menu with you on the pages that follow.

Below: We made paper snowflakes and paper chains, and festooned the dining room while watching Home Alone  
Right: How to make paper snowflakes



## 'ELF' YOUR HOME WITH PAPER SNOWFLAKES AND CHAINS

your paper. Later, cut these into three long strips and use them to make paper chains.

Snowflake making is festive-making, setting a wonderful, Christmassy scene to get you into the mood. It's best done to Christmas music or a Christmas movie, with plenty of mulled wine and fruit-mince tarts to hand.

If you want to festoon your home in snowflakes and paper chains like Buddy the Elf, I've shared how to do it on the facing page, using ordinary copypaper (recycle paper you've printed or written on if you don't mind the snowflakes not being pure white).

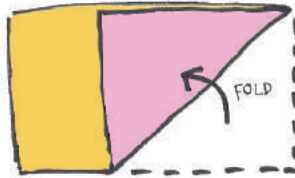
Snowflakes are easy to post if you want to spread the festive cheer to people you love through the post: think about stringing them together into a garland that they can pull from the envelope, creating a wonderful, Christmassy surprise. Maybe you could write little notes of love and cheer onto each snowflake?

You'll see I've told you to keep the cast-off pieces when you first trim

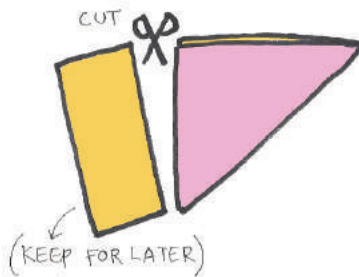




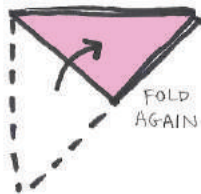
1. Ordinary copy paper



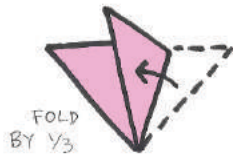
2. Fold into a right-angled triangle



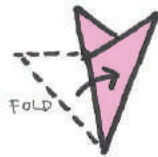
3. Trim off the edge (but keep it for later)



4. Fold your triangle in half



5. Fold it back by a third



6. Fold to overlap the thirds in the middle (jiggle around to get a good, sharp point)



7. Cut off the ends to make a neat triangle



8. Snip around the edges to make a pattern. Unfold to reveal a beautiful snowflake

# Christmas Menu



Pork with chestnuts & pears  
Honey-roasted ham  
Roast beef in peppercorns  
Vegetarian wellington with cranberries

\*

Baked potatoes with rosemary  
Orange & maple-glazed baby carrots  
Roasted parsnips with nutmeg  
Green beans with almonds & feta

\*

Traditional Christmas pudding  
Brandied custard

OR

Pavlova topped with berries

\*

Champagne  
Mulled wine  
Fruit punch





## A Christmas menu TO SHARE

If covid restrictions stop you welcoming big numbers into your home at Christmas, could you prepare a feast to deliver?

The idea is that you deliver pre-cooked (or pre-prepared) Christmas food to family, friends or lonely neighbours nearby. Then on the day (Christmas lunch maybe? or a dinner the week before?), you all cook/heat up the meal, and eat together “in spirit.”

You’ll need to think about how you can prepare your meal to travel to your loved ones’ homes, ready for them to enjoy hot and fresh on the day.

On the left is a Christmas menu I created for our “Christmas in July,” which I then made up into three separate portions. One portion was for us to eat at home, while the other two were made to be delivered to family members in two other homes.

We couldn’t race around delivering the feast while it was still hot (not without eating our own cold), so I designed the meals to be “mostly cooked,” and delivered them a day early, ready to be finished or reheated for lunch.

I’ve shared tips on how I did this on page 30, in case you’d like to try something similar for yourself.

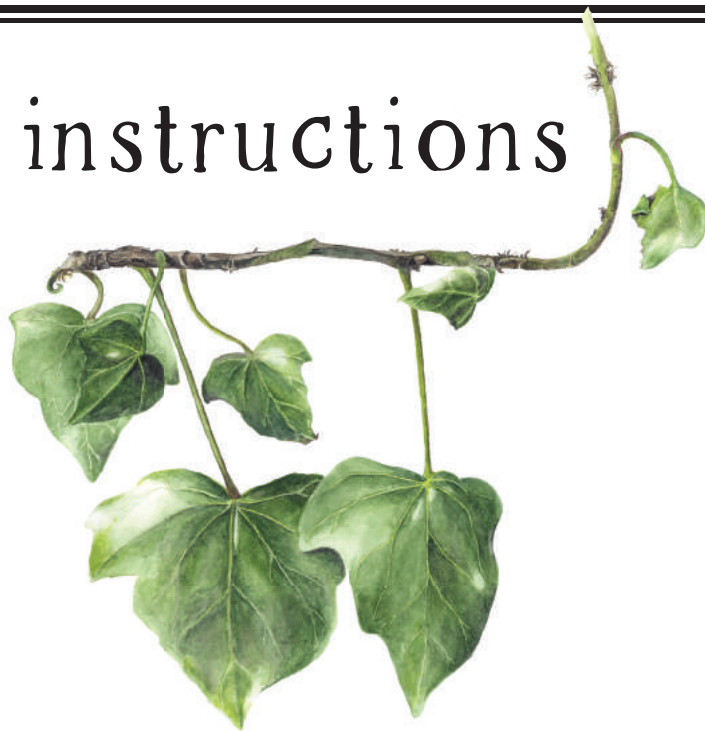
I’ve also made my menu into a printable template for you, so you can write your own menu onto the blank page to share with loved ones when you deliver the food (a “proper menu” makes it feel more special and festive); and another blank template for you to jot down any cooking/reheating instructions that go along with your feast. Simply print off the two following pages of this newsletter to use the menu.



# Christmas Menu



# Cooking instructions



A series of horizontal dotted lines for writing, spanning the width of the page.





## PREPARE A FEAST TO TRAVEL

You'll need to think about how you can prepare your meal to travel to your loved ones' homes, ready for them to enjoy hot and fresh on the day. This might mean switching up your menu a little bit. Following is how I adapted the Christmas menu I shared on page 26 so it could travel to two other homes a day early, and be finished off there.

\* Fully cook meats like pork and beef, then instruct your friends to warm them in the oven, covered in foil so they won't dry out

\* Pre-cook the filling for the veggie Wellington, wrap it in raw pastry, then leave instructions to bake it until the the pastry is golden

\* Partially bake the potatoes and parsnips, stopping at about half an hour before they are done so they can be finished at the same time as the reheating of the meat and/or the baking of the Wellington

\* Pre-marinate the carrots so your guests only need to tip them - marinate and all - into a skillet to sauté and serve

### MULLED WINE RECIPE

1. Into a saucepan, pour a bottle of red wine
2. Add the zest of one lemon and one orange, as well as 120 grams of brown sugar
3. Mix in spices: a stick of cinnamon, two cloves, two star anise, a pinch of ground nutmeg, and a pinch of ground ginger
4. Gently heat the saucepan and let it simmer for five minutes
5. Strain the mixture and serve it while still hot. Garnish with a slice of orange, a stick of cinnamon, and a star anise



\* Trim the green beans ready for a simple quick steam

\* Pudding is easy: just leave instructions to boil or steam (and just stick with store-bought custard to make travelling easier)

\* Box up a pavlova base, cream ready to whip, and pre-cut fruit for your loved ones to assemble

\* Pre-make mulled wine and fruit punch, and ready them for travel in bottles or large mason jars

Be sure to leave your own instructions and include them with the meal you create, if you plan to share it. If you'd like to, use the printable on the previous page.



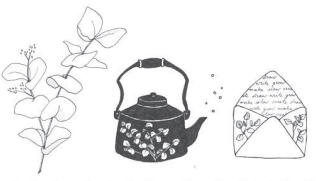
## 12 DAYS OF MERRY MAIL-ART

*An envelope template  
for each of the 12 days  
of Christmas*

On the following pages, I've shared 12 mail-art templates for you to colour in and post, all with a festive theme. These are taken and adapted from old newsletters and colouring books, and given a festive twist. Some are subtle, like homely scenes with splashes of Christmassy botanicals or friendly woodland creatures from the pine forest, while others go all-out with trees, baubles, gifts and feasts. Hopefully there's something in there for everyone you write to.

### TO MAKE THE ENVELOPES:

1. Print the following pages, cut out and fold up the envelopes as directed, then colour them in
2. There's a blank space within the design of each envelope, for you to write the address, and the stamps will go in the top-right corner of each envelope
3. Each makes a standard sized envelope, ready for your letters



NAOMI LOVES



(1) fold and glue



(2) fold and glue

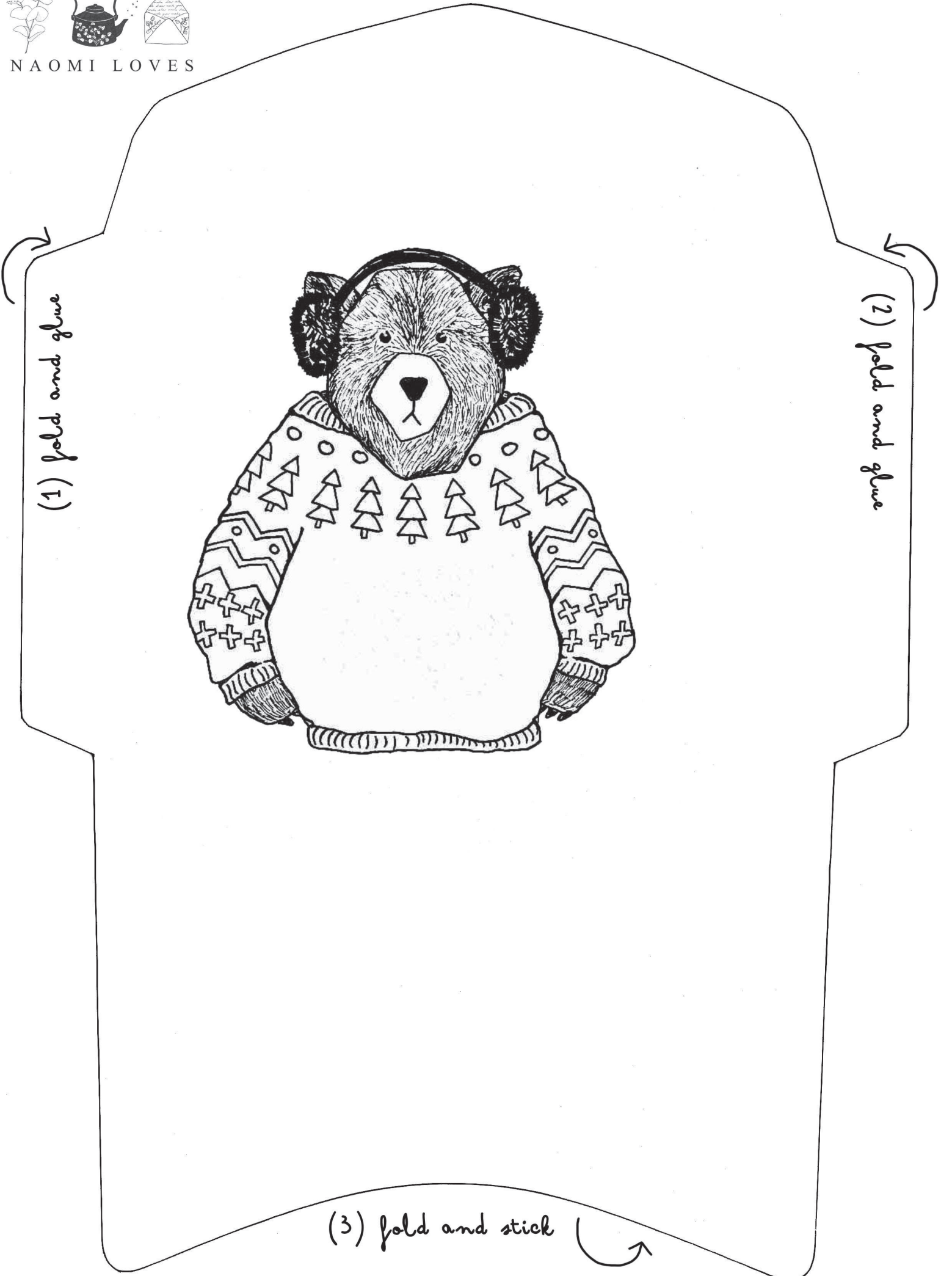
(3) fold and stick







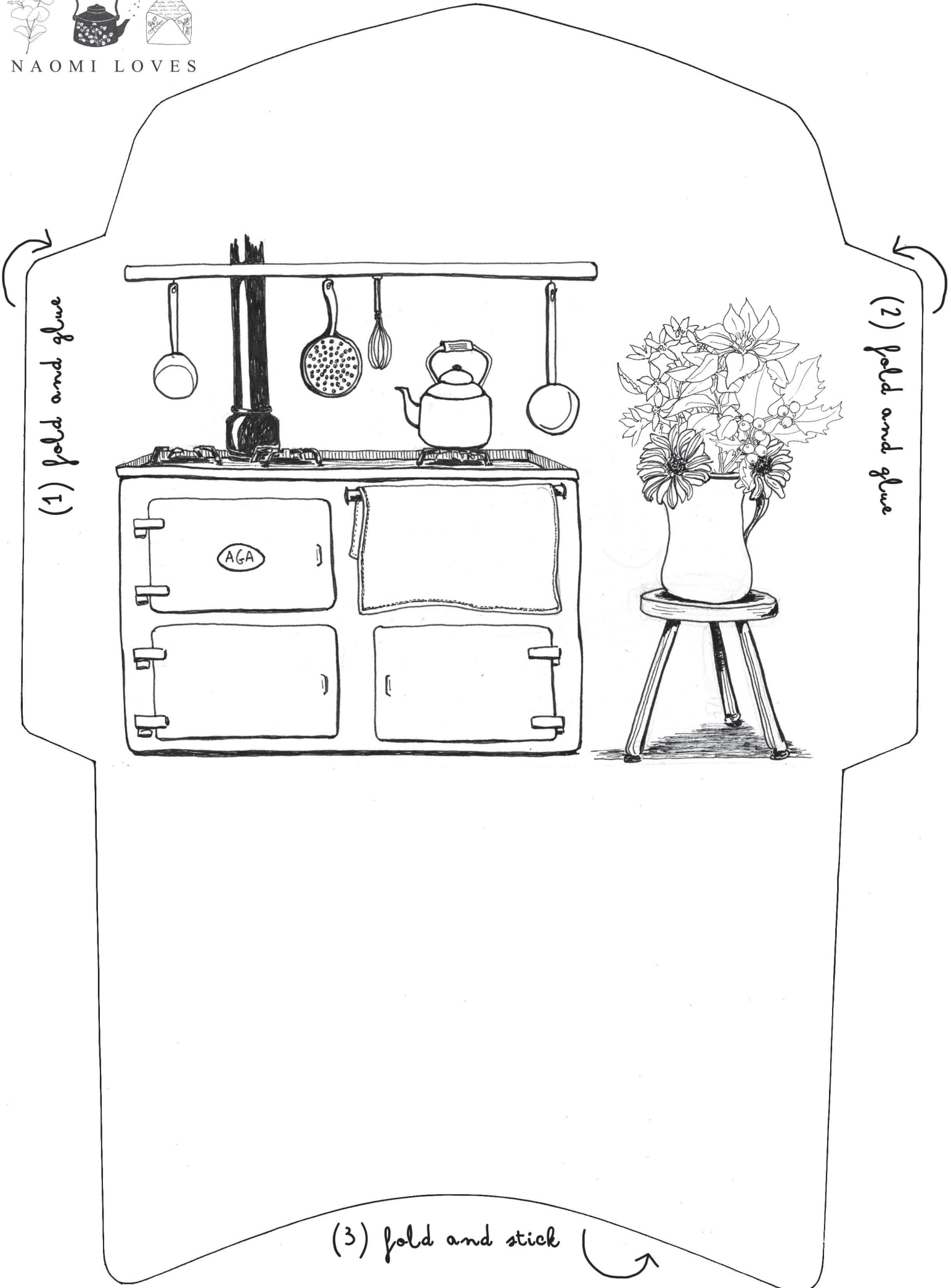
NAOMI LOVES



(1) fold and glue

(2) fold and glue

(3) fold and stick



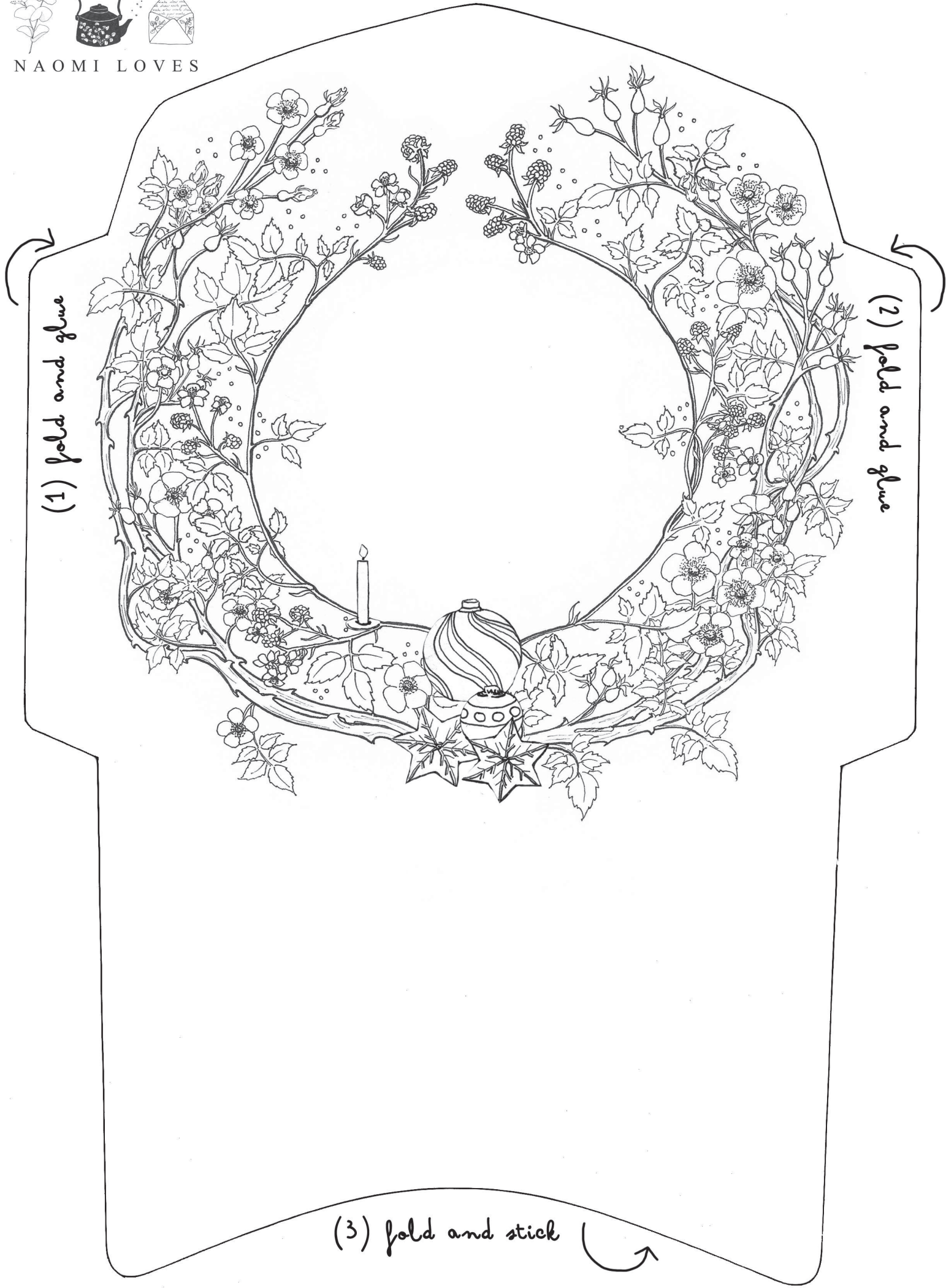
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(3) fold and stick



NAOMI LOVES



(1) fold and glue

(2) fold and glue

(3) fold and stick



NAOMI LOVES



(1) fold and glue

(2) fold and glue



(3) fold and stick



NAOMI LOVES

(1) fold and glue



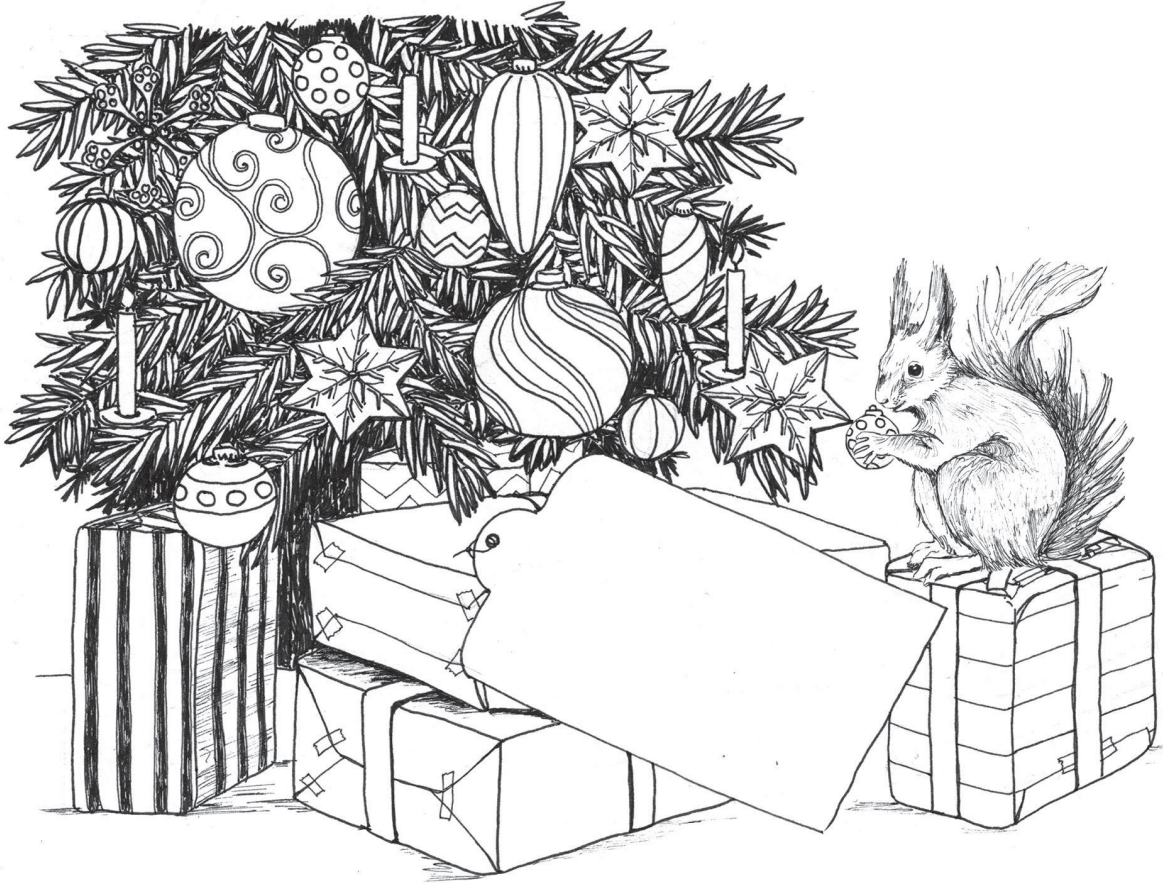
(2) fold and glue

(3) fold and stick



NAOMI LOVES

(1) fold and glue

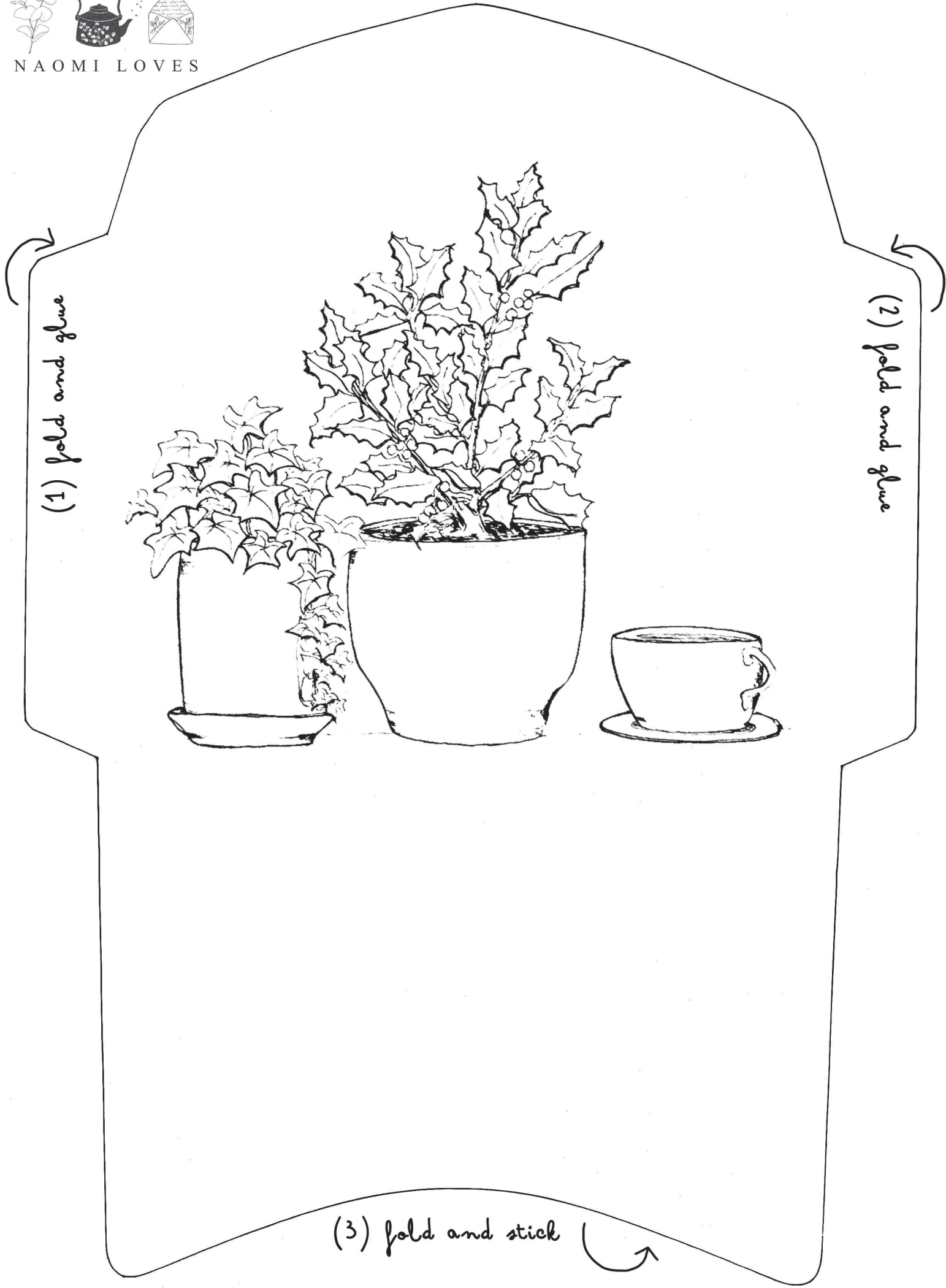


(2) fold and glue

(3) fold and stick



NAOMI LOVES



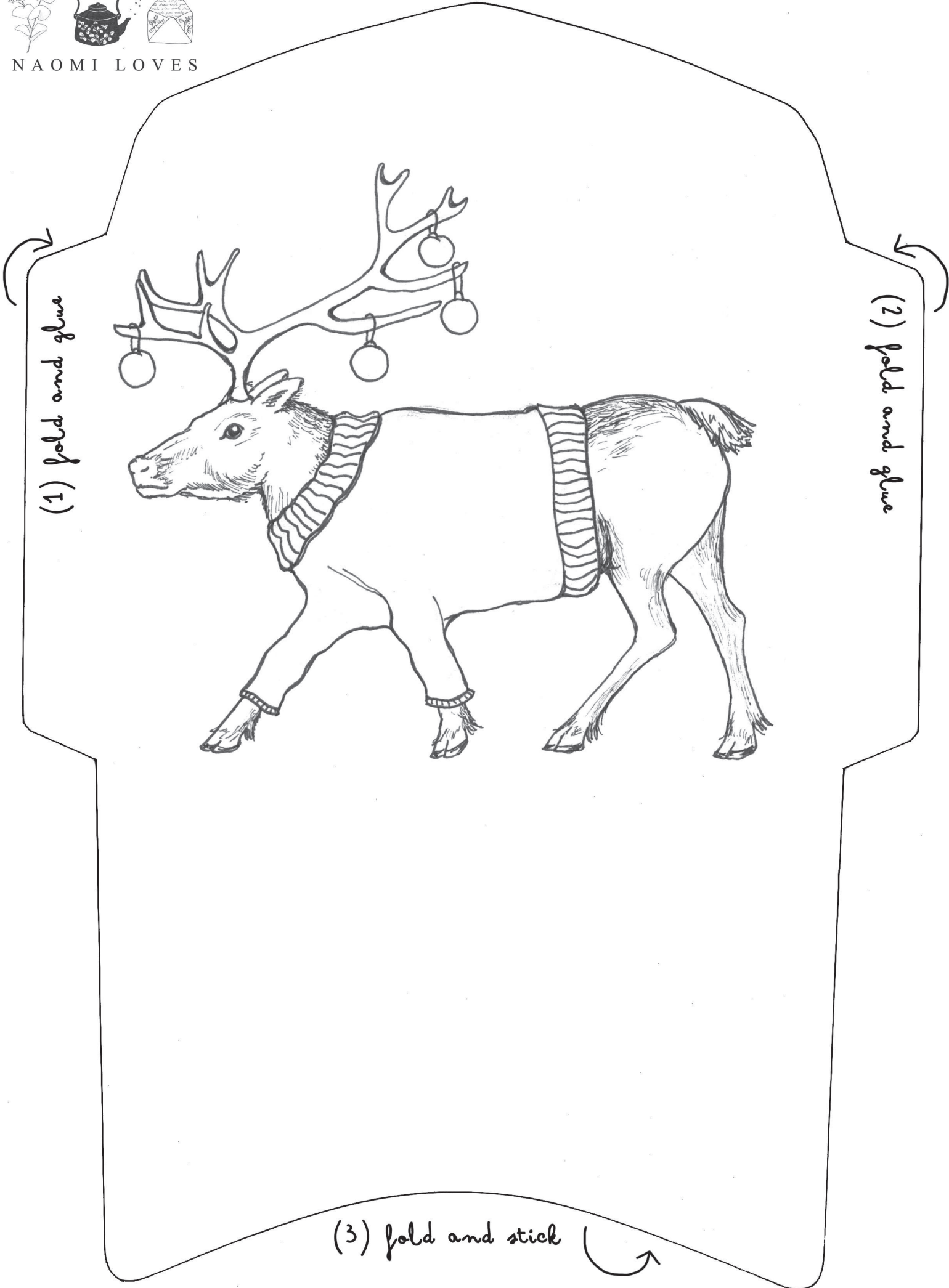
(1) fold and glue

(2) fold and glue

(3) fold and stick



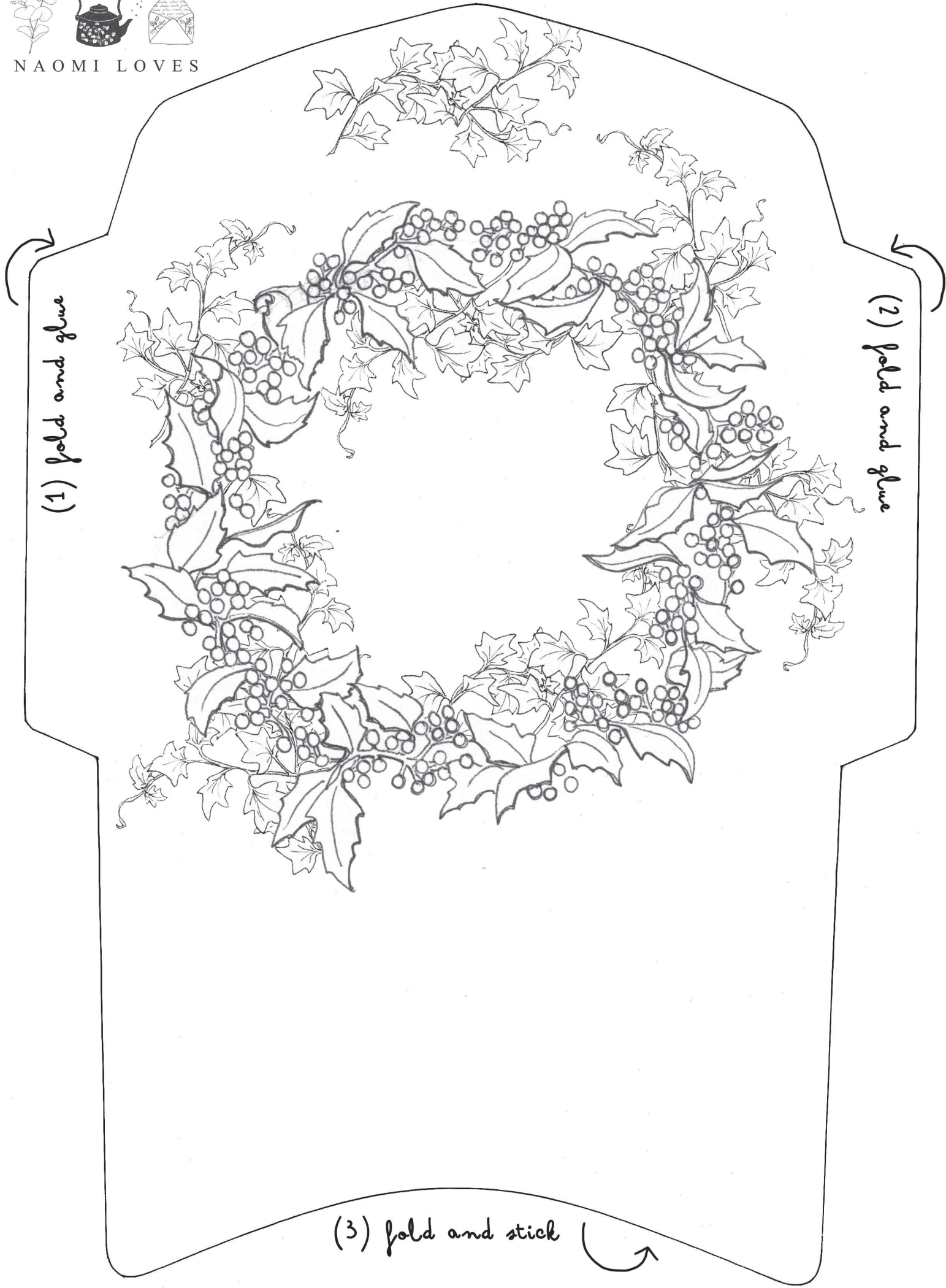
NAOMI LOVES







NAOMI LOVES



(1) fold and glue

(2) fold and glue

(3) fold and stick



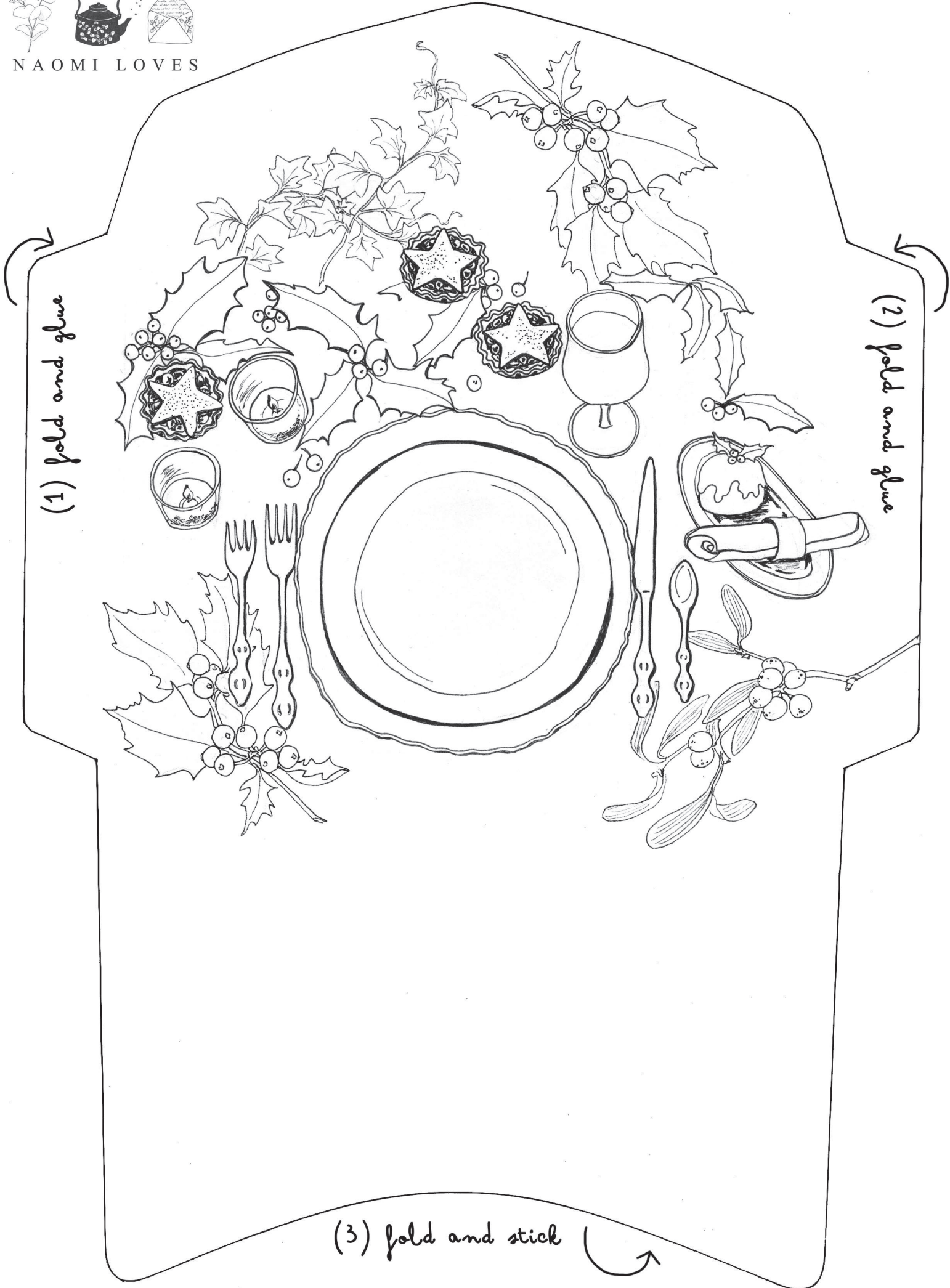
NAOMI LOVES



(1) fold and glue

(2) fold and glue

(3) fold and stick



# THE THOUGHTFUL GIFT GUIDE

*It's hard to go past a thoughtfully handmade gift, but if you are short on time, inspiration or skills... or if you have the means and would simply like to lend a hand to independent makers and small businesses who have been struggling more than ever during this difficult year... these pages showcase a small collection of unique Christmas gift ideas that are creative, ethical, and directly support the people who made them. All prices are in Australian dollars, unless otherwise indicated.*



Wheel thrown, minimalist teacup by Wonki and J Ceramics (\$30)  
wonkiandjceramics.com



The Everyday Bakes recipe book and limited edition tea-towel bundle by Kath Vincent (\$52)  
kulinariadventuresofkath.com



Issue 1 of Galah, a new independent magazine celebrating creativity in rural Australia (\$25)  
galahpress.com



"Farmers Market" botanical tea-towel set of 2 in Belgian cotton/linen, on white or oatmeal (\$56)  
naomiloves.com/shop



Handcrafted watercolours in a bamboo palette from Redwood Willow (\$US135)  
redwoodwillow.com



"Dyeing with Tea" e-book by Alicia Hall (£14.99)



Macrame boobs wall-hanging by Isabella Strambio (\$34.29)  
etsy.com > "TWOMEshop"



Hand-poured 100% soy wax candle, naturally scented with essential oils for a 60-hour burn time, in reusable ceramic vessel (\$38)  
[remedialmassagebrunswick.com](http://remedialmassagebrunswick.com)



Ethically-printed letter-sets for all your snail-mail needs, from Dear Frankie Stationery (\$14)  
[dearfrankiestationery.com](http://dearfrankiestationery.com)



Recycled wool blanket from the Tartan Blanket Co (\$93)  
[tartanblanketco.com](http://tartanblanketco.com)

*“Always give without remembering and always receive without forgetting”  
 - Brian Tracy*



Manilla rope twist plant hanger by Hygge Knots (\$85)  
[hyggeknots.square.site](http://hyggeknots.square.site)



Membership in the five-week online letter-writing and mail-art course, “The Most Beautiful Letter You’ve Ever Written” (\$89)  
[naomiloves.com/shop](http://naomiloves.com/shop)



The “Lolita” maxi dress in 100% Belgian linen, sand beige colour, from Honest Studios (\$240)  
[honeststudios.com.au](http://honeststudios.com.au)

<< Rent a cherry tree from The Cherry Boys in the Yarra Valley: all the cherries on the tree belong to your friend, and they can visit throughout the year to picnic under the blooms (\$145)  
[thecherryboys.com.au](http://thecherryboys.com.au)



Handmade eco-resin pendant necklace encasing locally-foraged wattle blossoms (\$65)  
[littlehurricane.co.com](http://littlehurricane.co.com)



Child's pinafore dress with May Gibbs "adventure story" illustration; reversible with second fabric design inside (\$45)  
[stdavidstudio3065.com](http://stdavidstudio3065.com)



Vegan eco food wraps (family pack containing 2 x large and 1 x extra large) (\$35)  
[kikikovic.com](http://kikikovic.com)



Lunch-break tote-bag made from 95% post-consumer recycled material, by BlueQ at Finki (\$22)  
[finki.com.au](http://finki.com.au)



"A Year at the Market" - 12 month subscription to the Farmers Market Field Guides + extra gifts (\$10.95/month)  
[naomiloves.com/shop](http://naomiloves.com/shop)



A place in the "Science of Baking" e-course with Anneka Manning of BakeClub (\$350)  
[bakeclub.com.au](http://bakeclub.com.au)

*May you never  
 be too grown  
 up to search  
 the skies on  
 Christmas Eve*



Squishy, edible Christmas cards by The Mallow Makers (£31.65)  
[themallowmakers.com](http://themallowmakers.com)



Az limited edition fine-art prints on cotton rag by Katherine Scott (\$125)  
[oliveapplemoss.com](http://oliveapplemoss.com)



Heirloom vegetable seeds from the Little Veggie Patch Co (\$5)  
[littleveggiepatchco.com.au](http://littleveggiepatchco.com.au)



Printable colouring book containing 60 original illustrations on envelope templates and letter-writing paper, from Naomi Loves (\$23.95)  
[naomiloves.com/shop](http://naomiloves.com/shop)



Quirky, hand-baked and hand-iced "houseplant" vanilla biscuits, in a bespoke tin (\$45)  
[theconfectionist.com.au](http://theconfectionist.com.au)



Large, stackable, stainless-steel tumbler, hand-painted by a traditional artist (from an older generation) in Kashmir, India, from Picnic Folk (\$16)  
[picnicfolk.com](http://picnicfolk.com)

*"As consumers, we have so much power to change the world by just being careful in what we buy"*  
*-Emma Watson*



Organic, raw chocolate, hand crafted in small batches and sweetened with raw Australian honey. (\$10.95)  
[devacacao.com.au](http://devacacao.com.au)



Sustainably made bamboo serving bowl with a chopping board lid and salad servers, for picnics and camping (\$46)  
[emilieoconnorhomestore.com](http://emilieoconnorhomestore.com)



A 3-bottle gift pack of organic, vegan, sustainably produced and packaged wine (your choice of varieties) from Minimum (\$90)  
[minimumwines.com](http://minimumwines.com)



Bread bag from social enterprise Sister Works, supporting female refugees and asylum seekers in Melbourne (\$29)



NAOMI LOVES  
*naamiloves.com*