



The Night Before The Night Before Christmas

Chapter 1

It was the night before the night before Christmas and all through the house not a creature...

Quiet at the back! We're trying to tell a story here!

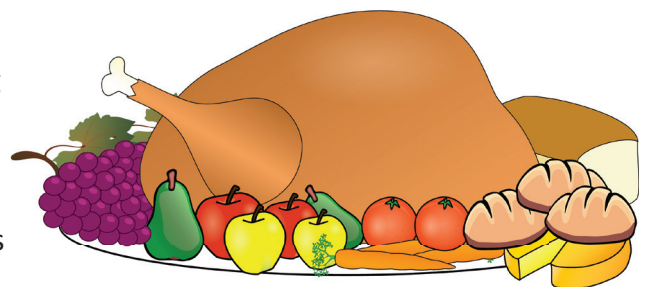
All through the house not...

Pipe down!

All through... Forget it. All through the house, everyone was making a racket. The cats were screeching, the mice were attacking the cheese and the children were plotting trouble. Particularly Sam, the 10-year-old, reckless-natured boy who lived in the tall town-house at the end of Brick Lane. His father was due to fly back into town that night and his mother was busy having what she referred to as Hysterics.

"The turkey's burnt!" she wailed down the phone to her sister Augmentia. Sam's aunt was currently on holiday in Tenerife with her new boyfriend. "We've got Gareth's parents coming down for dinner tomorrow and the turkey's burnt, the sprouts have sprouted and there are more eyes on the potatoes than at a farmer's market!"

Sam sighed. How could she expect him to get anything done with the culinary equivalent of a brass band erupting downstairs? Sam had plans, big plans. He'd been speaking to his best friend Annabelle all week about the best way to do what he needed to do and now he was close. He was going to capture one of Santa's reindeer.



"Rudolph would be best," he'd said to Annabelle when she'd first suggested the idea, "he's got a built in headlight. One of the others would be fine though, we could always use some tape to attach my dad's torch to its head." Annabelle had been very impressed. He'd been quite offended, it wasn't the first brilliant idea he'd ever had. True, his endeavours to measure the speed of light with a stolen police speed camera had failed miserably and his parachute experiment with his aunty's enormous underpants had been a

spectacular mishap. He was only grateful they'd thought to test them first with his pet hamster, rather than him or Annabelle. This time, he knew, it would be different.

Preparation would be key to the plan's success. "To fail to prepare is to prepare to fail!" their teacher often said. They'd never listened before - most of what their teacher said seemed like a lot of nonsense. But they knew there was no chance they'd catch Rudolph or Blitzen or anyone else without a solid plan. If their plan had been any more solid, Sam knew, you would have been able to use it to build houses.

Leaving his mother still shrieking into the handset ("And just what am I going to do for pudding? The strawberry fool isn't fooling anyone!"), Sam made his way to the garden shed. On the way, he through a small stone at the upstairs window of the adjoining house and by the time he'd made it to the bottom of the garden, Annabelle had left her bedroom and caught up with him. She'd brought with her a large burlap sack that filled the small wooden space with a smell of mushrooms.

"Left-overs from the market," she said with undisguised glee when she opened the top for Sam to see inside.

"Excellent!" Sam smiled back. "There's just one thing left." He grabbed a saw from his father's workbench and scrambled to the top of a rickety step-ladder until he could reach the roof. As he started to saw through the wood, a pile of sawdust started to form in the middle of a cage made from bamboo canes and string.

INFERENCE FOCUS

1. On which date does the story start?
2. What impression do you get of Sam's house?
3. What do you think is the name of Sam's father?
4. Why does Annabelle speak with **undisguised glee**?

VIPERS QUESTIONS

R

What three disasters is Sam's mother complaining about?

P

Why do you think they want to steal a reindeer?

E

Explain how you think he is planning to capture the reindeer.

P

What do you think will happen next?

V

Which word tells you that Sam is upset that Annabelle is impressed with his idea?

V

Which word tells you that Sam's house is attached to Annabelle's?



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Chapter 2

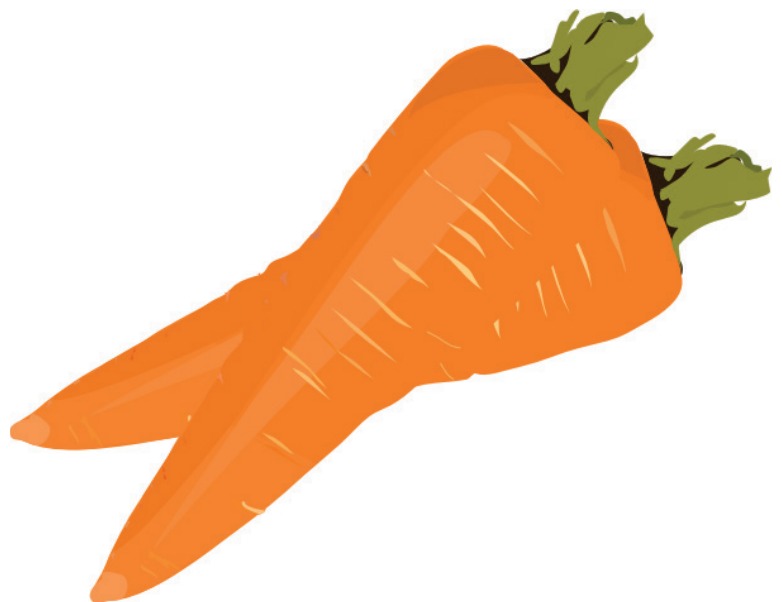
When Sam woke on Christmas Eve, he already had a smile on his face. His dreams had been filled with visions of him and Annabelle taking turns riding on the back of Rudolph. They'd soared over the town and raced between the tall buildings near to Parliament. In his dream, Queen Elizabeth had waved at him from her balcony. He'd been amazed to see she wore striped pyjamas to bed, just like him. He woke up that morning knowing all that stood between him and the wind whistling through his hair was his plan.

For the whole day, Sam fidgeted. His mother had calmed down considerably since the day before. Sam suspected this was because his father had raced straight out to the supermarket for a new turkey and fresh vegetables upon his return. During the traditional family ice-skating visit, Sam smiled and laughed. He even wore an ear-to-ear grin for their annual family photograph. This was so unusual that his mother burst into tears and order several dozen copies, much to the photographer's delight. Nothing was going to stop him from enjoying his day.

Eventually, after what felt like a thousand hours, evening came, and Sam was tucked into bed by his parents. He waited patiently until he was sure that they had gone to bed themselves before sneaking down the stairs and out into the garden. Once again, he threw a small pebble at the first-floor window next door.

"Boo!" Annabelle burst into muffled giggles behind him as he tried his hardest to calm his racing heart. "I've been waiting here for about half an hour!" she whispered. "What took you so long?"

Sam didn't bother to answer. He led them quickly down to the garden shed, and they both set about their tasks. Sam made sure that the rustic cage was as strong as it could be whilst Annabelle oiled and checked the hinges on the trapdoor that they had cut into the shed roof



the night before. Finally, they both stepped out into the cold and dragged the burlap sack up onto the shed roof via an old apple tree.

CRRRRRRK! The old roof was definitely worse for wear and it let out a warning moan. Desperate not to end up in a heap on the floor, Sam upended the sack and watched as hundreds of bright orange carrots tumbled out. They both swept them into a large pile just in front of the trapdoor.

With their trap set above their heads, the two children made themselves comfortable under an old blanket and closed their eyes. They were startled awake in the early hours of the morning when something enormous crashed through the roof. An eerie red glow filled the shed. Sam and Annabelle leapt to their feet and hugged. It had worked!

VOCABULARY FOCUS

1. Which word tells you that Sam couldn't keep still that morning?
2. Which word tells you how Sam went downstairs once his parents were asleep?
3. What does **muffled** tell you about Annabelle's laughter?
4. Why has the author chose to use the word **rustic** to describe the cage?
5. How do you know that Sam turned the sack upside down?

VIPERS QUESTIONS

- I** Who has been caught? How do you know?
- P** What do you think will happen now that they have a reindeer?
- E** Explain how you know that Sam and Annabelle feel their plan has worked.
- R** What job did Annabelle have to do?
- S** Summarise how Sam and Annabelle have come to have a reindeer trapped in their shed.



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Chapter 3

Something wasn't right. Sam hadn't known what to expect, but he'd sort of hoped that, once it had been caught, the reindeer would be happy to go along with their plan. The only thing Rudolph seemed happy to do was crash from one side of the cage to the other. Clouds of steam erupted from the reindeer's nose when it eventually stopped and stood still.

Then, it happened, slowly and in stages. First, Sam felt an enormous shudder ripple through the shed. Next, the floor tilted suddenly, and Sam and Annabelle fell against the wall. Somehow, the shed was being lifted up into the air.

"He's trying to take off!" Sam howled, trying to be heard above the terrible noise of wood and metal twisting. "He's taking the shed with him!"

Annabelle looked as white as a sheet. Sam was prepared to bet he looked as bad. Finally, as suddenly as it had started, the twisting and shuddering stopped, and the shed levelled out. Nervously, Sam edged over to the cobweb-coated window and peered out.

"Do I want to look?" Annabelle asked weakly.

"Well, either my parents have decorated our lawn with tiny Christmas lights, or we're floating miles above London."

"A simple 'no' would have been enough," she said bitterly.

There didn't seem any point in talking, so the two troublemakers sat in silence for the next few hours as the shed floated through the night sky. All the while, Rudolph snorted quietly and kept his big black eyes firmly on them. Somehow, he managed to look disappointed in them, something a reindeer shouldn't be able to do.

When the shed finally landed with a bump, it woke Sam and Annabelle. An icy wind whipped through the cracks around the door. Soft snowflakes flew into small drifts against the far wall. A thunderous knock finished the work of years of rusting, and the door fell into the shed. The silhouette of a large, round



man was outlined against the bright white snow. The look on his face suggested that whilst “jolly” was an option, right now he was settling for “seriously annoyed”.

“Do you two have any idea how far you’ve set me back? I’ll never get to Norway now, and I’ll be lucky if I see Australia before Easter!”

Sam didn’t know what to say. This was probably even worse than the naughty list. “Sorry,” he tried meekly. “We just wanted to have a ride on the back of a reindeer.”

“Then today’s your lucky night,” said Father Christmas. “We’ll find a punishment for you later, but right now, I need all hands on deck. Sam, you’ll be riding Blitzen and Annabelle, you’re on Prancer. Be careful, she kicks.” He must have seen the look of confusion on their faces and continued, “You’ll each take a sack and start delivering. The sleigh can manage with less power for one night. Sam, you take Europe and Annabelle you can do South America. We’ll meet up over Japan and reload if we needed. All clear? Off we go!”

Sam never did work out just how they ended up on the back of the reindeer or how he managed to hold on as they sped through the night. In the end, he managed to ride over London after all, and it was worth the wait. By the time they arrived back in his garden, the sun was beginning to rise, and Sam was surprised to find a pile of presents with his name on them, alongside a small piece of paper covered in a scribbled note.

“Next year, try not to cause so much trouble. Love, Father Christmas!”

RETRIEVAL FOCUS

1. What was the first sign that something was wrong?
2. How high were they?
3. Over which city did they soar?
4. What mood was Santa in when they first saw him? How do you know?
5. Where did Annabelle deliver presents?

VIPERS QUESTIONS

I What did Annabelle mean by “**A simple ‘no’ would have been enough**”?

E Explain how they managed to solve the problem in the end.

V Find a synonym for **troublemaker** that would still work in this context.

V Which word tells you that Sam looked out of the shed window?

P What do you predict Sam will do next Christmas?