



LUCY'S SECRET  
REINDEER

Anne Booth

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## Writing to Santa

School had finished, the Christmas tree was up, and the fairy lights were twinkling. Dad was busy hanging tinsel, paper chains, and Christmas cards in crisscrossing cheerful lines across the room. He had the radio on loudly and

was singing along to the Christmas songs. Dad loved the Christmas holidays.

Mum was in the kitchen, making Sunday lunch. Lucy's big brother Oscar was lying on the sofa, playing video games, and Lucy was sitting at the table, writing her letter to Santa.

'There isn't any point in writing to Santa,' said eleven-year-old Oscar, who had got bored with his game and was looking over her shoulder. 'You're eight, not a baby.'

Lucy was just about to get very cross and do something very unChristmassy to her brother when, luckily, Mum stuck her head around the door.

‘Oscar, can you help me set the table?’ she asked. ‘And Lucy, can you go and tell Gran that lunch is ready?’

Lucy was glad to go and get Gran, and quickly put on her wellies and coat. As she closed the door behind her she could hear Oscar complaining loudly about being made to do all the work while Lucy wrote stupid letters.

Lucy crossed the lane and went down the little garden path to Gran’s side door.

‘Hello, Gran!’ Lucy called, as she pushed the door open and stepped into the kitchen.

At one end of the large room was a big kitchen range and a dresser with



pretty patterned plates and cups on. There was also a sink and a cosy armchair with patchwork cushions. But the other end of the room was like a little animal hospital. There was a row of cages for injured or sick animals, and there were shelves stacked high with all sorts of animal food, biscuits, and mealworms. Lucy knew the cat food was for the little hedgehogs Gran found in the winter which were too small to survive the cold and hibernation. On the big wooden kitchen table in the middle of the room was a set of weighing scales, but instead of weighing flour or sugar Gran was weighing a hedgehog.

‘Hello, Lucy, darling,’ Gran said. ‘Is lunch ready? Just let me write down Brian’s weight. I think he’s heavy enough to be put out to hibernate soon. He’s over 600 grams— isn’t that great?’

As Gran popped Brian back in with the other little hedgehogs she was feeding up, Lucy checked on the rest of the animals. A little red-breasted robin with an injured wing was hopping around a big cage, and a rabbit with a bandaged paw was asleep in another. As soon as the wild birds and animals got better Gran would set them free, although the very little hedgehogs would stay in the warm with her until spring.



Gran washed her hands and put on her coat to walk over to Lucy's house. They closed the door and left the birds and animals sleeping safe and sound.



Lucy could hear the sound of plates and cutlery being laid out on the dining table when she and Gran arrived. Dad took Gran's coat while she admired the decorations, and then they all went through to the dining room and sat down. Mum had lit some candles and it felt as if Christmas was getting very

near. Oscar stopped being grumpy and told Gran all about the football team he wanted to get into and the karate classes he had started. Now that he was in Year Six, it seemed to Lucy as if he didn't want to come after school and help with Gran's animals any more.

'Mum, please can I have a stamp for my letter to Santa?' Lucy asked, after they'd finished their pudding. 'I need to post it today so it gets there in time.'

'Only losers write to Santa,' muttered Oscar.

'Oscar!' exclaimed Mum, shocked.

'Don't be mean, Oscar,' Dad said, looking very hard at him.

‘What a strange word to use,’ Gran said, thoughtfully. ‘Why do you think Lucy is a loser, Oscar?’

‘Writing to Santa’s a babyish thing to do,’ Oscar said, sulkily. ‘And anyway, it doesn’t work. Lucy asked for a horse and she got a rocking horse. Even last year, she didn’t get the puppy she asked for.’

‘Maybe Santa didn’t think Lucy was old enough for a puppy last year,’ Dad said.

‘I’m sure he did his best with the presents,’ Mum said. ‘Lucy got a very nice pyjama-case dog. You love Scruffy, don’t you, Lucy?’

‘I do love Scruffy, and I’ll write to Santa and tell him,’ Lucy said. ‘I’ll ask him if he needs any help with anything, too.’

‘What a lovely idea, Lucy,’ Mum said.

‘I’ll do the washing up, Emma,’ Dad said. ‘And I’ll cook the rest of the meals this week—and help with Christmas dinner! It’s nice to be home from work and able to help out for a change,’ he added, getting up from the table.

‘That would be the best Christmas present of all,’ Mum said, and Dad made her smile by holding some mistletoe over her head to get a kiss from her.

‘Yuk!’ said Oscar and Lucy at the same time, and everyone laughed.

‘There’s a stamp in the drawer, Lucy,’ Dad said. ‘Maybe Gran can go out with you to post your letter to Santa. Oscar, you can bring the dirty dishes into the kitchen with me.’ Oscar opened his mouth to argue . . .

‘I mean it,’ Dad said, firmly, and Oscar started collecting the plates.