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Reihe Hanser

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Reindeer Rarely Come Alone
Our Year with Santa Claus
144 Pages

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4c-illustrations by Katrin Engelking
144 pages

Sample Translation by Rachel Hildebrandt

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December

My name is Lotte, and Santa Claus lived with my family for a whole year. It was a huge secret, and we couldn't tell anybody about it. Not even our two Grandmas and Grandpas, or our best friends. It all started on Christmas morning. We were eating breakfast, when suddenly the doorbell rang.

"Who could that be?" Papa wondered.

Mama hesitated, then rolled her eyes: "Magnus."

Magnus is my little brother Lars' best friend, and you always know it's him because the doorbell sticks whenever he pushes it. Never for anyone else, just for him.

Lars insisted later on that he knew right away it couldn't be Magnus, because he was visiting his Great-Grandma over Christmas. But he went to the door anyway, and as soon as he opened it, the ringing stopped abruptly. Just like with Magnus. It was completely quiet for a moment, but then a deep voice said:

"The doorbell sticks."

Just like Magnus always says, but it couldn't be him. He has a squeaky voice, and if you ever want to annoy him, all you have to do is say that he sounds like a girl.

"Is anyone else at home with you?" the deep voice asked. And when Lars didn't answer: "This is the Wetekamp house, right?"

"Uh... yes," Lars said. Or to be more precise, he squeaked like Magnus. Lars never squeaks.

The next thing we heard was a rumbling sound, as if a rhino were stomping down the hall. When something fell over with a clatter, we knew it had to be the old, painted milk can we use as an umbrella stand. We still had no idea who the rhino in our hall was, not until the visitor filled the doorway to the dining room. It was Santa Claus.

"I know I'm a little early," he remarked in his very deep voice.

"Don't you mean a little late?" Papa asked.

That's when we heard Santa laugh for the very first time.

"HO-HO-HO-HO-HO!"

His big red coat, his big white beard, his big red pointed cap with its white pompom - everything about him laughed, and down below, he stamped his big boots until the dishes on the table rattled.

"HO-HO-HO-HO-HO!" he bellowed.

Papa looked at Mama, and Mama looked at Papa, but neither said anything. I didn't either. And Lars was

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missing anyway. Or no: He was suddenly looking over Santa's shoulder. He had to have climbed up onto something because Santa was so very tall that he filled the whole doorway, his head almost brushing the top of the frame. Lars was waving excitedly and calling something, but Santa was still bellowing so loudly that nobody could hear anything. It was just that it looked like Lars was calling for help, so of course, Mama wanted to get to him.

However, this was the very moment that Santa wanted to join us at the table, and right there, halfway between the table and the door, he and Mama ran into each other. Whenever we remind Mama about what happened, she always says it felt like she ran into a giant hopper ball, and then we have to laugh hysterically. But when it happened, nobody laughed. Mama literally bounced off of the giant Christmas hopper ball, before stumbling backward over her own chair. Fortunately, Papa was sitting right behind it, and she landed on his lap. The only bad part was that she was swinging her arms around to try to keep her balance, and afterward, Papa had a swollen lower lip.

On the other hand, Santa didn't get bounced back at all. He just kept going and sat down in Lars' chair. And then Lars started howling, though not because Santa had taken his chair, but because he was hurt. My guess had been right: In order to see over Santa's shoulder, Lars actually had climbed up onto something, in this case, on the shoe stool in the hall. But he had needed a bit more height to see into the dining room, so he had pushed himself up a little on Santa. When Santa took off for the table, Lars lost his balance. At first, he swung his arms around like Mama, but unfortunately, there was no Papa for him to land on, which was why he eventually jumped forward as the stool tumbled backward. He was really lucky that he didn't bounce off of Santa, too. My brother is such a little squirt, so who knows what could have happened to him? After hitting the floor, he stumbled forward and cracked his lower lip on the edge of the table. That was why he started bawling, although I'm sure he was probably also in shock.

Just like Mama, although in her shock, she didn't start crying but laughing. She sat on Papa's lap and laughed until tears ran down her cheeks. At that point, I couldn't help myself. I began laughing so hard that I started crying, too.

"Nife. Glad you're habbing fo much fun," Papa grumbled around his thick lip.

Mama wrapped her arms around his neck, and all I could see were her shaking shoulders. I actually wanted to hold my breath and stop laughing, since I'd just noticed that I still had a large piece of chocolate croissant in my mouth. But that didn't work. It would have worked if Lars hadn't picked that very moment to holler out, "Mama, my toof!", as he held up a bloody piece of tooth.

"My toof!" I burst out, and that was it. The piece of chocolate croissant sprayed out in a cloud of little crumbs, landing half on Santa's coat and half on Lars.

Lars started wiping himself off right away, but Santa didn't seem to care about the brown spots on his coat. He was just in the process of filling his front with croissant crumbs himself, acting as if none of the excitement had anything to do with him.

But Lars was really mad.

"You are... you are... you are all fo mean!" he squeaked once more in his Magnus voice. He then hurled the bloody piece of tooth on the floor and stalked off. When he is really mad, all he wants to do is go up to his room and avoid everybody.

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From in the dining room, we were only able to hear, not see, whatever it was that Lars first stumbled over and then fell on top of out in the hall. We heard a clatter, then a rattle and a muffled yell, followed by a thunder of footsteps heading upstairs that ended in a slamming door.

BANG!

And so it began. That was what happened when Santa Claus showed up at our house on Christmas morning. Papa sat there at the table with a swollen upper lip, Mama and I wiped our eyes, and Lars sulked up in his room with two thick lips. We didn't know about the second lip at the time, though.

We also didn't know that Santa wanted to move in with us. He was just in the process of helping himself to a third or fourth chocolate croissant, when he said to Papa:

"If you don't feel up for more breakfast because of your lip, you could move your car out of the garage."

"The car? Why?" Papa wanted to know.

Mama twitched for a moment, but then she pulled herself together. She was staring at the door, as if she were about to take off to go check on poor Lars.

"We need room for the sleigh," Santa replied, eyeing a croissant as if considering from which angle to take the first bite. But then, he suddenly glanced over at Papa and Mama, and asked: "You did read the letter, didn't you?"

No, Mama and Papa hadn't. How could they? They hadn't gotten a letter.

January

The letter came from the Christmas Office, and it announced that we, the Wetekamp family, had the honor - no, "the heavenly honor" - of providing lodging for Santa Claus for one year. He needed a suitably large room, a garage for his sleigh, and a garden for the reindeer. We had all those things, as had already been determined. The letter ended with "Heavenly regards, Your Christmas Office," and had been signed by an angel named Hans-Dieter. Underneath his signature were the words:

P.S. Santa's stay must be kept in strictest secret. Please do not discuss this with anyone, not with your close relatives or with your friends.

P.P.S. A rejection of this notification is impossible. No queries allowed.

We wouldn't have known where to send a query anyway, since there was no return address on the envelope. Only "Christmas Office - Heaven." Besides, the letter didn't reach us until after New Year's. By that point, Santa had already been living with us for weeks. He explained everything to Mama and Papa on Christmas morning, as soon as the chocolate croissants ran out, and complained about the angels who had probably dropped the letter off too late at the heavenly post office. All they did was sit out on their clouds, day in and day out, screwing up whatever could possibly be screwed up. In any case, it had been ordered, since goodness knew when, that he would spend the year living with a family somewhere, since Clausville, way up in Finland, really was an impossible place to live. The tourists flocked up there, even in the summer, and pestered him constantly - horrible!

Mama and Papa listened to everything without saying a word, simply exchanging a startled look now and then. What could they have said anyway? The matter had been decided up in Heaven, which meant that there

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was nothing that anyone on Käuzchenweg could have done about it. That is where we live, at Number 7 Käuzchenweg.