



Learn English Through Stories

K Series

K9

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'It's still wonky,' I said. 'And you've forgotten the big star on the top.'

Dad was putting up the Christmas tree and wasn't doing a very good job. Charlie wasn't helping either: he took the shiny baubles from the box, put them down his trousers and danced around to the Christmas music until they rolled out by his shoes.

'Where's that star gone, then?' asked Dad. 'We had it last year.'

I looked at Charlie. Charlie looked at me with the funny face he uses when he's spilt his drink, broken something, or done a poo.

'That reminds me,' Dad said, with a serious look. 'Did you know your grandad was a thief?'

'A thief?' I said. 'Really? Which grandad? Did he go to prison?'

Mum, who was making some gingerbread biscuits for the tree, looked up.

'Don't fall for it, Harry.'

'I'm talking about your mum's dad,' whispered Dad, 'Grandad Lou. He stole the stars from the sky, and he put them in your Mummy's eyes.'

Mum groaned, loudly.

'How can you steal the stars? What does that even mean?' I said to Dad.

He sighed. 'Never mind. My wit is wasted on this family. Now bring me that grubby fairy with the missing leg, maybe we'll shove her on top instead... ah, Charlie! You've got the star. I might have known.'

My little brother pulled the star out from under his jumper and at last the tree was done.

I fetched my letter to Santa which I had nearly finished, and put it under the tree. It's tricky, isn't it, deciding what you want. Here's what it said:

Dear Father Chris mas

I have been an extremely good girl. Please give me a bike, some new pens, a bag and (Then I'd left a big space. Really big, about as big as my pencil case, so I could fill in some extra stuff later, when I thought of it.)

Lots of love

Harriet xxxxxx

Charlie saw me and ran into the lounge to fetch his letter too, shouting 'Farmer Christmas! Farmer Christmas!' He's so silly.

Because he can't write, Mum had given him a magazine and some glue. He'd ripped out pictures of the things he wanted for Christmas and stuck them to a piece of paper. Here's what he chose:

- A bottle of perfume
- A ship
- A snowy mountain
- A lady's bottom wearing some funny pants
- A mobile phone, just like Dad's.

Can you imagine Santa trying to get down the chimney with a lady's bottom in his sack?

'Right,' said Mum. 'These biscuits are done. Let's go to the fair.'

Do you have fairs at your school? They're brilliant, aren't they? You get to go into loads of classrooms, even the Year 6 ones. I once went into the staffroom, too. You can decorate biscuits, win jars of sweets and even run in the corridors.

It was busy. I mean really, really busy. The noise in the hall was a bit scary at first. If we made that much noise in assembly it would make Mr Bartlett — that's our head teacher — so mad his head would pop. There were grown-ups everywhere, sitting on children's chairs and talking, and children running around between them.

It was nearly lunchtime. We zig-zagged our way to the hatch where I normally get my baked potato-if-I-have-a-blue-band, or pasta-if-I-have-a-yellow-band. But I never wear a green band because I don't like vegetables except broccoli and sometimes peas.

This time though, they were selling massive sausage rolls. Why don't we get those for school dinner? It's not fair. Anyway, Mum bought one for everyone and we made our way to an empty table that Dad had found, saying 'excuse me excuse me excuse me' all the way.

The sausage rolls were scrumdiddlyumptious (I learned that word in carpet time last week). As I was munching mine, I noticed that Charlie, standing at the end of the table, was nibbling all the pastry off the outside-just like I do with the chocolate on KitKats. He saw me watching him.

'Is for later,' he said quietly.

Sure enough, when he had finished he took the huge, wobbly pink bar of sausage meat - still with little bits of white pastry stuck to it - and put it down the back of his trousers!

'I got no pockets' he explained.

But just as he was finishing his sentence, Dad came up behind him.

'Let's get you sat down properly, little one' he said before lifting him by the armpits.

'No Daddeeeeeee!' I shouted, but it was too late. Flumph! He plopped Charlie down onto one of the chairs.

Tears started rolling down Charlie's cheeks.

'What on earth is the matter?' said Mum crossly.

Charlie reached down his trousers and pulled out a handful of squished pink sausage meat.

Mum let out a little yelp, the kind of noise that my cousin's dog makes if you tread on his paw by accident. Everyone on the other tables turned to see what was going on.

A bit later, after I'd explained and Mum had taken Charlie to the toilet to scrape the lunch off his bottom, we went exploring.

'Can I go on my own?' I asked.

'Yes, but you'll need to take Charlie with you' said Mum. 'Make sure he doesn't leave the hall or get into trouble.'

Well. I don't know if you've ever tried to look after a 3-year-old but it's boring. And impossible. They run off, they squeeze into tiny gaps, they stop you talking to your friend Delilah. That's what Charlie did. So I thought, well I'll just tell Delilah what I'm getting for Christmas, then I'll find Mum and tell her that Charlie is lost.

I was just showing Delilah my new rainbow bracelet when I heard someone shouting. Then another voice, then a woman screaming, a proper that shouldn't happen scream.

I looked across to where all the noise was coming from, near the Christmas tree in the corner. At first I couldn't see what was happening: lots of people were pointing at the wall. But then I spotted... well, can you imagine who it was?

Yep, Charlie. But he wasn't where you'd expect. You see the walls of our hall have bars on them that the older children use for climbing during PE. And

Charlie is a good climber - a very good climber. In fact he'd got right to the top, higher than I've ever seen, up near the ceiling.

And it gets worse: he was only holding on with one chubby hand. The other? That was reaching out towards the star on the top of the Christmas tree.



And what was everyone else doing? That's a good question. All these grown-ups, the people who are always telling me what to do, were standing there, looking and pointing. Several of them had their mouths open, and I could even see what they were eating. Yuck.

But it didn't last long because quick as a flash, the Year 3 teacher Mrs Buckle raced up the bars to reach him. It was amazing because Mrs Buckle is quite plump (I hope that's the right word to use because she's lovely). I've never even seen her walk quickly but here she was, climbing the bars like a chubby monkey wearing a flowery dress. Awesome.

She was just in time because Charlie couldn't hold on any longer. He kind-of-fell, kind-of-slid down on top of her; she grabbed him with one arm and pressed him into her chest. And Mrs Buckle has a very big chest. He almost disappeared.

Finally, two dads climbed up beside her to try and help. But Mrs Buckle climbed down all on her own.

Suddenly everyone was cheering, shouting and clapping, and someone even did a big whistle. Mum hugged Charlie and I squeezed through to join them.

'Are you OK?' asked Mum, but Charlie was crying too much to reply.

Now I'm pretty sure that if I climbed the bars, Mum would be really, really cross. But as you should know by now, normal rules don't apply to Charlie. Instead, Mum picked him up and gave him lots of cuddles. It's crazy, I tell you.

WAIT A MINUTE.

You maybe need to stop reading. Because to tell the rest of this story about Charlie, I need to explain all about Father Christmas. And I mean everything. So if you are six or something like that, you need your Mum or Dad to say it's OK for you to finish the story.

Have you checked it's OK? Good. That means you're old enough to know the secret - maybe you already do. But I have to be careful because my Mum always stops me when I talk about this at home, saying I must not 'spoil the surprise' for Charlie.

So here we go. Here's an easy question. Do you think that the blow-up Santa that shops have in the window is real? Of course not, it's just a toy. Charlie thinks it is, but that's because he's three.

Here's a harder question. If you wore a Father Christmas outfit, would that make you Father Christmas? No, of course not! That's just dressing up. You knew that, didn't you?

And now the last question, I promise. When you see Santa on the telly, or in the shopping centre or the supermarket, is it always the real Father Christmas? If you think it is, you should stop reading NOW!

But if you know it isn't always the real Father Christmas then you're really clever like me. You're probably eight, or even more. And you're definitely a girl. Or maybe a very clever boy.

Because clever children like us know that even if it's just a make-believe Father Christmas you have to pretend it's the real one. That way you'll still get a good present - but of course it won't be on your list, because only the real Father Christmas has that.

So that's what I was doing as we went into see him. The teachers had turned Miss White's office into a grotto with spray snow on the windows and fairy lights round the door. And guarding that door was Mrs Wood, the Year 5 teacher; she was dressed up like an elf, although I've never seen an elf drinking tea and eating biscuits before.

It was our turn. Mrs Wood took me and Charlie by the hand and led us into the office. There was Father Christmas, waiting for us. He looked real. He even sounded real. But I spotted a few clues.

CLUE 1: he was wearing glasses, but not just any glasses: these had Red or Dead written on the side, just like the ones that Ellie's dad wears: I'd noticed it

because that's a funny thing to have on your glasses. Although maybe not for Father Christmas. Perhaps Father Christmas goes to the same shop as Ellie's dad.

Clue two: his bag, tucked behind his chair. Not his sack of presents: that was next to the door, behind the tea-drinking elf. This was his private bag and it was bright yellow with green writing, just like the one that Ellie's dad carries to the train station in the morning. Hmm.

Charlie was telling Santa that he wanted a ship and some perfume for Christmas. While they talked I noticed Clue 3: Santa's bag was open and full of his stuff. I could see a lunchbox with some sandwiches in it, a mobile phone, and something else, too: a car magazine. Clue 4.



Would the real Santa be interested in cars? No! You can't drive a normal car on snow. If it was a magazine about reindeers, or presents, then maybe. But it wasn't. There was no way this was the real Santa.

But I pretended not to see, and then Charlie and I swapped chairs. Santa asked me if I'd been a good girl. I said yes, of course. He asked me if I was looking forward to Christmas. I said yes, of course. And he asked me what I wanted to get and I told him a bike.

And then it was over. Charlie, who was crawling around on the floor, jumped up and ran to Mrs Wood, who gave us both a present. Mine was way too small to be a bike.