

## *Brown Bear, Reindeer and Co.*

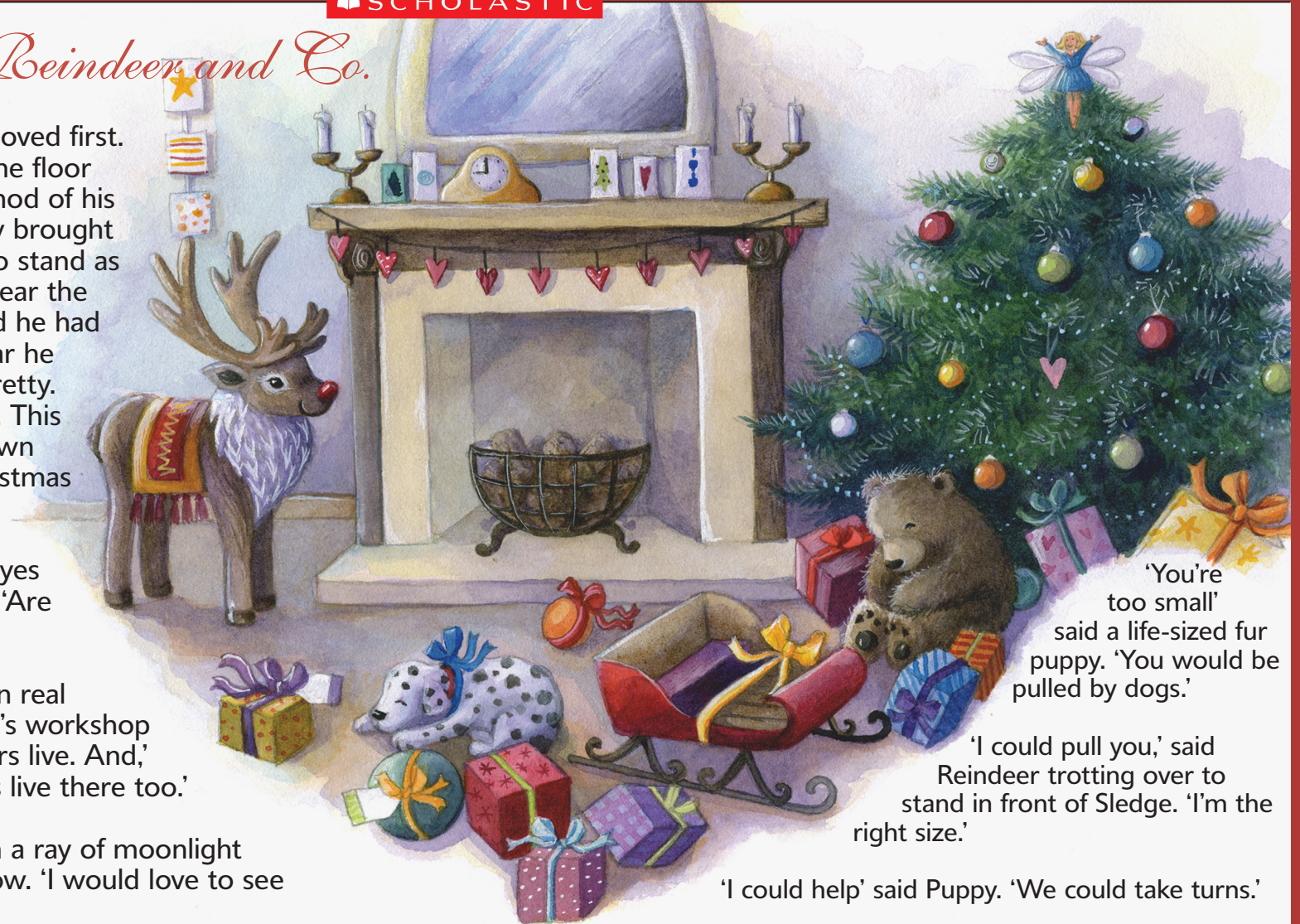
It was the reindeer who moved first. Just a gentle scraping on the floor with his front hoof, and a nod of his head. Every year the family brought him down from the attic to stand as a Christmas decorations, near the fireplace. Made from wood he had a shiny red nose. Every year he just stood there looking pretty. But this year was different. This year there was a large brown bear sitting under the Christmas tree.

Reindeer turned his dark eyes towards the bear and said 'Are you a real bear?'

'No' said Bear, but I've seen real bears. I was made in Santa's workshop in Lapland, where real bears live. And,' Bear added, 'real reindeers live there too.'

Reindeer's eyes sparkled in a ray of moonlight coming through the window. 'I would love to see real reindeers.'

'So would I,' said a wooden sledge, lying near a pile of presents. 'I dream of being pulled by a reindeer across the snowy lands of Lapland.'



'You're too small' said a life-sized fur puppy. 'You would be pulled by dogs.'

'I could pull you,' said Reindeer trotting over to stand in front of Sledge. 'I'm the right size.'

'I could help' said Puppy. 'We could take turns.'

'Will you take us bear?' asked Reindeer.

'Well it's a very secret place called Ear Fell, and I would need a map.' said Bear.

Suddenly, the fairy on top of the tree flittered down to stand before them.

'Of course you need a map,' she said. 'And a bit of common sense too.' She flicked her wand, and the wrapping paper fell from a parcel. Shaking out a bright red scarf she wrapped it round Bear's neck. 'You must keep warm,' she said. And taking a mince pie from the coffee table, she pushed it under his scarf, adding 'And take something to eat.'



She flicked her wand again, taking a pencil and paper from another parcel to draw a map. Using a skipping rope from a smaller present, she tied Reindeer to the front of Sledge. Bear and Puppy jumped on clutching the map. 'Go,' she said, 'but be back by dawn.'

'Wooooow!' said Puppy as a puff of moondust lifted them up and out into the cold, starry night.



Soon they were flying over Lapland, and the land below was covered in snow.

'There!' shouted Bear. 'That's Ear Fell - look - the mountains are like ears, listening for children to tell them what they want for Christmas.'

They had a rather bumpy landing, with the runners of the sledge just clipping the top of pine trees, before they slid across the snow to Santa's workshop. The lights were on, and a few small elves were standing near the door.

'You can't park there,' they said, 'Santa will be landing there when he comes back to re-load.'

'Okay,' said Bear. 'Is it alright if I show my friends around?'

'Sure' said the elves, 'Bring them inside - we're having a party.'

Bear untied Reindeer from Sledge, and turned towards the workshop. But Reindeer had already spotted some real reindeers. They were beautiful with tall velvety antlers. They were chomping on hay the elves had given them, and he raced over to look at them.

'These reindeers will be harnessed to Santa's sleigh when he comes back,' said an elf. 'They take turns to deliver presents to children's houses.'

'I feel proud to be a reindeer,' said Reindeer.

'Then have one of these' said the elf, placing a red ribbon dangling a medal around Reindeer's neck. It said 'I have visited Lapland'

Suddenly, Puppy pricked up his ears at the sound of happy puppies, yapping inside Santa's workshop. 'Come on!' he said 'Let's go and join the fun.'

So in they went. It was wonderful inside. Mrs Santa Claus was busily dashing round, trying to catch some other toys who were playing hide and seek with her. 'Come on you little rascals. Its time for you to go to your new homes,' she said smiling. Seeing Bear she beamed an even bigger smile. 'Hello Brown Bear.' she said 'You're soon back!



'I'm not staying,' said Bear. 'I've been given to a lovely home, and look - I've made new friends.'

'Then come and help me catch your brothers and sisters,' she said. 'Baby Bear is worried that he won't like his new home and he's hiding.'



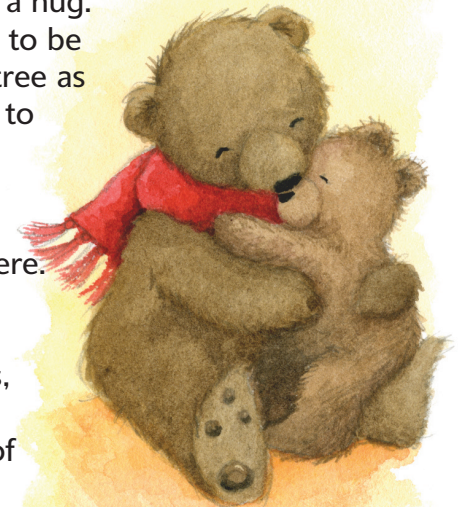
Bear soon found him, and gave him a hug. 'You'll be fine Baby. It's very exciting to be placed under a beautiful Christmas tree as a present, and they have great food to eat. Just taste this mince-pie.'

Baby Bear soon polished off the pie and started to follow Bear everywhere.

By this time, Puppy was gambolling around with the other furry puppies, and Reindeer was helping the elves to check the names on the parcels of presents.

Sledge was chatting to other sledges, some much bigger than him, but all looking forward to Christmas morning when they knew excited children would find them under the tree or by their beds. And even better, sit on them and drag them outside into the first snow of winter.

'Phew! I'm worn out!' said Puppy at last. 'I think its time we went home.'



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Soon they were back. The fairy magically wrapped up the pen, paper, and the skipping rope. Sledge lay down by the presents. Bear sat under the tree and Reindeer stood once more by the fireplace.

Next morning while Jamie and Jenny were opening presents, Mum whispered to Dad, 'That's odd. How did brown bear get that red scarf round his neck?'

'Simple,' said Dad. 'One of the children put it there.'

'Then how,' she asked, 'did the reindeer get that medal round its neck? Explain that!'

Dad couldn't. Neither could he explain where the twig of pine leaves stuck under the runner of the sledge had come from. And not even Santa ever found out who put Baby Bear under the tree.

By Brenda Williams

