

THE GREAT REINDEER DISASTER



About the author

KATE SAUNDERS is a full-time author and journalist. Her books for children have won awards and received rave reviews, and include future classics such as *Beswitched*, *Magicalamity*, *The Whizz*, *Pop Chocolate Shop*, *The Curse of the Chocolate Phoenix*, Carnegie shortlisted *The Land of Neverendings* and Costa Winner *Five Children on the Western Front*.

Kate lives in London.

About the illustrator

NEAL LAYTON was born and raised in Chichester. Whilst he was growing up he spent much of his time playing in the dirt, making homemade catapults and drawing pictures. He studied BA Graphic Design at Newcastle, and MA Illustration at Central Saint Martins. Neal now lives in Portsmouth with his family. He likes living by the seaside.



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KATE SAUNDERS
ILLUSTRATED BY
NEAL LAYTON

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FABER & FABER



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To my Granny, a great storyteller
K. S.

For Arabelle and Hunter
N. L.





ONE

A Holiday Surprise

It started as a normal family holiday. The Trubshaws were in Devon, staying in a lovely cottage that was right on the beach.

Mr David Trubshaw was short and rather fat and worked with computers. Mrs Judy Trubshaw was tall and thin with long blonde hair, and she was a part-time librarian. They had two children – Jake, aged ten, and seven-year-old Sadie. Jake thought his little sister



was incredibly bossy and always bursting into tears to get her own way, and Sadie thought her brother boasted too much about being the oldest, but otherwise they got on pretty well. And they both loved the seaside.

It was the end of July and the weather was so boiling hot that Mum spent the first day covering Jake and Sadie with gloopy sunblock. Lunch was a delicious beach picnic of tomatoes and ice cream. In the afternoon, Sadie dug a deep hole in the sand and Jake splashed in the sea. The waves were perfect – big enough to be fun, but not big enough to be dangerous. Sadie only cried once, when some sunblock accidentally got into her mouth. In the evening they had a fabulous supper of fish and chips, and went to bed.

That was the first day of the holiday.

And also the last.

* * *

In the middle of the night, when the Trubshaws were all fast asleep and the only sound was the steady swishing of the waves on the beach, something suddenly smashed into the roof of the cottage with such a gigantic **THUMP** that the whole place shook and they all woke up. Sadie started to cry. Dad turned on the light and put on his glasses.

‘David, go out and look!’ squeaked Mum, hugging Sadie. ‘Something’s fallen on the roof – see what it is!’

‘I’ll look,’ said Jake, grabbing his cricket bat in case he needed a weapon.

The noises began again – violent scrapings and scrabblings that seemed to come from inside the walls.

‘Do calm down, everybody,’ said Dad. ‘Some silly animal has got itself trapped in the chimney, that’s all.’

Sadie stopped crying and said, ‘Poor thing, it must be frightened.’

‘We should set it free,’ said Jake. ‘It must be stuck.’

They all went downstairs to the sitting room of the cottage, where there was an old-fashioned fireplace so big that the children could stand up in it. The scrabbling and scraping was louder down here, and old soot rained down into the empty grate.

‘Well,’ said Dad, ‘if that’s a mouse, it’s a very big one.’

There was a single moment of stillness and silence – and then the Trubshaw family heard something very strange indeed.



‘UGH! UGH!’ spluttered a voice in the chimney. **‘UGH . . . oh NO! Oh HELP!’**

There was a series of rapid thumps, and whoever (or whatever) was up the chimney shouted,

‘OUCH . . .

OOF . . .

BUM . . .

BUM . . .

BUM!’

and landed in a great whoosh of soot that made them all cough.

It was the most amazing thing any of them had ever seen. The creature in the fireplace was the size of a very large dog or a very small cow, but it had antlers and little hooves.

‘I think that’s a reindeer,’ said Mum faintly. ‘But what’s a reindeer doing in Devon?’

They all stared as the tubby little reindeer stepped out of the fireplace. 'Hello,' it said breathlessly. 'Sorry about that.'

'Good grief,' muttered Dad. 'This doesn't feel like a dream, but I must be dreaming – reindeer can't talk!' Jake and Sadie were the first to recover. While Mum and Dad gaped at their strange visitor like a pair of statues, they knelt down on the floor to look at it properly.

The reindeer stared at the children. The children stared at the reindeer.

'Is it safe to touch you?' asked Jake.



'Yes,' said the reindeer. 'I won't bite you or anything.'

They both reached out to stroke the light-brown fur on its back.

'My name's Sadie Trubshaw,' said Sadie. 'What's yours?'

'Percy,' said the reindeer in his growly voice. 'Percy Prancer.'

'I'm seven,' said Sadie. 'This is my brother Jake, who's ten. How old are you?'

'Oh . . . er . . .' For a few moments Percy's furry face looked shifty. 'Twenty-eight.'

'Really?' Jake was suspicious. 'Aren't you a bit small for a twenty-eight-year-old?'

'No,' said Percy. 'You obviously don't know much about reindeer.'

'How did you land on our roof?'

'I fell off the sleigh,' said Percy.

'What – you mean like Santa's sleigh?'

'Yes, of course,' said Percy. 'I'm a squadron leader in the Christmas Delivery Service. We were shooting presents on the Ireland run, and I fell off the sleigh when we hit a patch of bad weather.'

'But it's not Christmas!' cried Sadie. 'Why were you delivering Christmas presents in the middle of summer?'

'Well, it's complicated,' said Percy. 'Haven't you ever wondered how Father Christmas manages to deliver the whole world's presents in a single night?'

'He's magic,' said Sadie.

'He doesn't exist,' muttered Dad.

'David, don't be so silly,' said Mum. 'You're talking to a flying reindeer. I think it's fair to assume that Father Christmas is real.' She had got over being shocked, and she bent down to pat Percy's head. 'You're very dusty – did you hurt yourself?'

'I'm fine, thank you,' said Percy.

'Well, I need a cup of tea and a biscuit.' Mum stood up briskly. 'Would you like anything, Percy? I don't know what a reindeer eats.'

'Mince pies,' said Jake. 'He's a Christmas reindeer, don't forget.'

'And raw carrots,' said Sadie. 'Last Christmas I left a carrot beside my stocking and it was gone in the morning. Does that mean the reindeer really ate it?'



'Yes,' said Percy. 'Everyone in the Service appreciates the little treats that people leave out for the reindeer.'

'Oh, good,' said Mum. 'Would you like a cup of tea and a chocolate biscuit?'

'Yes please, Mrs Trubshaw.'

'Can you drink out of a cup, or would you rather have a bowl on the floor?'

'A bowl, please,' said Percy. 'With eight sugars.'

'What a polite little reindeer you are!' said Mum, smiling.

'Yuk - eight sugars!' said Jake.

Mum looked inside all the kitchen cupboards, but none of the bowls were big enough, so she made Percy's tea in Sadie's pink plastic bucket (she washed out the sand first) and put it down on the stone floor beside a chocolate biscuit on a plate. The polite reindeer trotted across the floor, his little hooves clicking, and stuck his head into the bucket.

‘Oh, isn’t he sweet?’ cried Sadie.

‘Can we keep him?’ asked Jake. ‘Can we take him home with us? Oh, please – I’ll stop begging for a dog!’

‘We should be helping Percy to get back to his own home,’ said Mum, ‘wherever that is.’

‘The North Pole, of course,’ said Sadie.

Percy finished his tea with a loud slurp and raised his head. ‘The North Pole’s just a docking point – I actually live on planet Yule-1.’

‘Wow, you come from another Planet!’ said Jake. ‘That makes you an alien and I’ve always wanted to meet a real alien.’

‘Do you need to call anyone?’ Mum held out her phone and looked doubtfully at Percy’s hooves. ‘I can do it for you, if you give me the number.’

‘Thanks, Mrs Trubshaw, but I don’t need to phone anybody,’ said Percy. ‘The microchip in my right antler has already been activated – all us reindeer are given microchips when we’re born, in case we get lost during a delivery. They’ll send down a transporter beam for me in a minute, so don’t be shocked if I suddenly disappear.’

‘Don’t go yet!’ said Sadie. ‘You still haven’t explained why you were delivering Christmas presents in summer.’

‘It’s such a huge job that it can only be done outside earth time,’ said Percy. ‘On planet Yule-1 every day is Christmas Eve and squadrons of flying reindeer deliver trillions of presents round the clock.’

‘Now I know this is a dream, or a trick!’ Dad said. He had got over the first shock, but was still refusing to believe his own eyes and ears. ‘Microchips . . . transporter beams? This is *nonsense!*’

‘No it’s not,’ said Sadie. ‘It’s magic.’

‘But there’s no such thing as— **OW!**’

The dark cottage was suddenly filled with a piercing white light that got stronger and stronger and made them all cover their eyes.

‘That’s my transporter beam,’ said Percy. ‘Goodbye and thank you for having me.’

Everything went pitch-dark, the cottage began to rock violently and the Trubshaws screamed with terror.

‘What’s happening?’

Mum gasped.

‘Is it an earthquake?’

She grabbed Sadie and

Dad grabbed Jake.

A small, growly voice said,

‘Whoops!’

And then the darkness
swallowed them.



TWO

The Truth About Percy

The next time the Trubshaws opened their eyes, they all gasped with shock and Sadie started to cry. Jake didn’t cry, but he was very scared.

The cottage, the beach and the sea had vanished. They were strapped into seats in a windowless space that hummed and thrummed like an enormous tumble dryer.

‘I don’t remember getting on a plane,’ said Mum.