


THE TALE OF THE ANIMALS' CHRISTMAS



IN
CROUCH
END

a fable for children
and their parents

by **Lance Lee**

illustrations by
Meilo So



THE TALE OF THE ANIMALS' CHRISTMAS IN CROUCH END

a fable for children and their parents

An Excerpt



Rufus Finds Tinya



Rufus began to look for a Fairy the next day, Rupert at his heels.

Usually a Fairy finds you—if you stumble on one by chance it is likely to vanish as soon as seen, as if able to feel even a look. Still, if you go about very carefully and pay attention to what you see out of the corner of an eye, you might find one, if gifted with second sight like Rufus.

First Rufus drilled into Rupert how much he needed Marvin Mole & Sons to repair his ruined, dank and dark, and smelly home. Turning Hilda into a meal would make them abandon him.

Rupert was not quite sure about his Uncle.

Too citified, he thought, but kept that to himself.

But his respect grew as the day passed.

His Uncle knew how to move through one impenetrable wall or hedge after another.

He knew how to cross busy city streets safely.

Rupert was horrified by the number of People, the number and



size of their houses, and the crowds of metal things rushing about.

His head swiveled in fear.

He was used to so much less in the country.

It was twilight before Rufus abruptly stood still at the end of a line of homes that had once been stables. He stared straight ahead but obviously, to a fellow Fox, paid attention to someone at his side.

“Hello Tinya,” Rufus said, “I want to talk to you.”

Rupert saw a blurred form by Rufus on the edge of sight. When he looked directly he saw nothing, but when he turned away he saw Tinya. She was tanned, hair a deeper gold, eyes the colour of pale violets, with fine features. Her green dress moved around her with a loose elegance as though in a breeze, not like the heavy, dark clothes of People.

Rufus told Tinya all the events that had led a Fox, Mole, Hedgehog, and Wood Pigeon to discuss the strange doings of People at Christmas time.

Tinya liked Rufus' behavior with Marvin Mole & Sons. She looked at him closer when he described saving Hilda. Sometimes an Animal, Fairy, or Person reached out to one another, something much to be admired. Tinya was like that among the Fairies. She wondered if Rufus might be like that among the Foxes.

She was curious about Rupert, too. She saw he had a touch Rufus' gift. She looked directly at him.

Rupert's spine tingled as the busy shops and crowds of People and machines in Crouch End Broadway were replaced by a meadow with a stream running down its middle with blue trees marching into the distance. A low sun hovered above the horizon in a cloudless blue sky. Some Fairies kicked a ball back and forth, others sat in idle groups chatting, and some practiced music to which others danced.

Rupert was amazed, but Rufus knew Tinya's world was just as real as Crouch End Broadway. Sometimes his second sight let him see both worlds at the same time in the same place. He found that very upsetting. He wanted just one thing to be true, not many, not even two.

Tinya and her world faded from Rupert's sight when she turned back to Rufus.



She explained the meaning of all the decorations and lights. Or almost all.

Tinya smiled. "There's something more you must find out yourself," she added as she faded from sight.

Rufus was so amazed by her words that he stared at nothing, frozen in place, his thoughts in a whirl.

"Uncle?" Rupert asked, breaking the spell.

"Come," was all Rufus said, and hurried home to summon

Marvin, Hilda, and Belinda. They were amazed too by Tinya's explanation of Christmas.

"Father Christmas?" Hilda repeated for the tenth time: "in a flying sled?"

"No," Rufus said, "it's pulled by flying Reindeer."

"Never heard of flying Reindeer!" said Marvin for the tenth time, too.

Rupert nodded in agreement.

"She said Santa lives in the north?" Belinda asked, as puzzled.

"With gifts for all the children in the world?" added Rupert.

There might be something in this Christmas after all, he thought.

Marvin was exasperated. "How can any sled carry so much!" he said.

"It's magic," Rufus said.

"Ahhh..." breathed Belinda and Hilda.

"Stuff and nonsense," said Marvin.

"How can he go into houses without chimneys?" asked Mary. She had joined them after checking on the younger children.

"What does it matter?" insisted Marvin. "He's too fat to get down even the biggest, if what the Fairy says is true."

"And what about the crosses, the Child in Bethlehem, the Animals in the manger, the Wise Men, and the Star they followed?" added Mary.

They were very puzzled.

“Well,” said Hilda, after no one answered Mary, “I like the idea of celebrating together.”

“Of a fine feast,” added Mary.

“Of decorations,” added a new voice.

Phil and Polly Magpie were half visible above Belinda because of their white feathers, half invisible because of their black. Everyone thought they were thieves, but they just loved to decorate their home with bright things.



“Would there be nuts?” Silas Squirrel was a faint red on another branch.

“Who said there would be anything?” asked Rufus. “Or do you think we should put aside our differences and have our own Christmas?”

He meant that as a joke, but no one laughed.

“Maybe” whispered Hilda, “it is the kind of idea that only makes sense if we do it.”

“Doing is always better than thinking,” chimed Marvin.

“Right!” croaked Franklin Frog as he jumped into their midst.

Rufus looked at his country bumpkin nephew he had pulled off Hilda only yesterday. How strange it would be to have dinner



with her as his guest! Then he remembered how Tinya made him understand there was something, something more...to find out... That decided him.

“We’ll do it,” he said firmly.

“Do what!” came a hiss.

They jumped.

Goya the tiger-striped Tabby stepped into their presence. He was so big he could even hunt a small Fox like Rupert. Only Rufus gave him pause. Rufus faced him now, guarding the others who huddled together. His explanation of Christmas and their plan to celebrate their own gave Goya an even greater pause. Rufus waited, then added:

“So, there will be no hunting this Christmas season until the lights and decorations come down,” he said, breaking their silence. “And—we will hold our own Christmas with a great feast for all on Christmas Day.”

No one objected to Rufus’ generous version of their agreement.

All eyes turned to Goya.

“Very well,” agreed Goya after another long pause, his curiosity about all of this as great as Rufus’: “I agree.”

They exchanged glances with a collective sigh of relief.

“Right,” Marvin nodded with his great, gleaming smile.

*A series of events in an unusually wet year lead
Marvin Mole and family
Belinda, a wood pigeon
Hilda Hedgehog
The Magpies
Silas Squirrel and family
Franklin Frog and his family
and the large, fierce, tiger-striped tabby, Goya, among others!*

all led by Rufus Fox

*to celebrate their own Christmas, all usual rivalries put aside.
Rufus has second sight and is helped by the Fairy, Tinya
who challenges Rufus to find on his own the real secret of Christmas
which he does after all goes off splendidly Christmas Eve and Christmas Day.
See if you agree when you read his story!*

 **BOOKS**

ISBN 979-8-218-18163-5



9 798218 181635