

Chapter One

The Best Christmas Ever

“Are they here?!” Abigail squealed. She was sure she’d heard tires in the snow-covered driveway.

She ran to the window with Henry right on her heels.

“Auntie Louise? Uncle Thomas? Vanleen?” he asked, peering into their sparkly white yard.

SIGH. No one was there yet.

Their Auntie Louise, Uncle Thomas, and cousin Evangeline were coming to stay with

them for a whole week—right up until the day after Christmas. Mom and Dad had said they wouldn't arrive until very late, since it was such a long drive... but Abigail couldn't wait!

"Come on, Henry," she said, running back to her room to keep getting ready for all the fun.

"My room!" he exclaimed gleefully, racing her and tripping in the oversized sweater he insisted on wearing. He bumped into a small table, knocking over their Advent calendar.

Abigail picked it up, smiling at the word "Joy" in one corner of it.

"My room," she reminded him. "You're just my guest until the day after Christmas, when they leave!"

The only thing she wasn't totally



excited about was that their relatives were all going to sleep in Henry's room. Now he thought *her* room was *his* room, since they had to share. And now that he was turning three, he'd gotten better at talking, arguing, and making big messes.

"Henry! I said no more of your toys in my room!" she exclaimed, tripping over two monster trucks and twelve little reindeer toys in the doorway.

"My room too," he reminded her, rolling his trucks over to her bed to drive around on her blue snowflake blanket.

Abigail shook her head. She didn't have time to fight. There was a lot to do before everyone arrived!

"Here," she said, handing Henry a bag of old magazines. Mom had told her she could use them in one of their Christmas cousin contest games. "Can you rip these up really small and stick them in this box?"

“Rip paper?!” Henry asked, eyes wide.

“Yes, but do it on the floor,” she told him, smiling now. It was fun to give Henry a job he’d love! And it was even actually helpful, unlike the silly jobs she usually made up to keep him out of the way when he pestered her.

RIP, RIP, RIP.

With Henry happily helping, Abigail tried to decide which list to look at. She loved all the lists she got to make for Christmas. And not just lists either! Games, and cards, and gifts she made all by herself! It was the season for *creating!*

She looked at one of her favorite lists, written neatly in red and green chalk on the wall of her Adventure Central.

But... **RIP, RIP.**
WHEEEE! Henry was



tossing the ripped-up pieces of paper into the air like snow, instead of putting them in the box. Abigail added one more thing to her mental list of things she was excited for: *Henry and his messes go back to his room!*

Smoothing her hand over the big poster board on her desk, she added some shiny stickers near the words at the top. Were there enough? Maybe she needed to add some glitter somewhere.

Hmm... no. She'd put her glitter up on a special shelf in her closet so Henry couldn't find it. All the stuff she really, really loved the most had gone there when he moved into her room for the week. That way he wouldn't mess with it. Her card games, her whistle, her Bible, her favorite photos, and lots more! If Henry saw her reach up there for glitter, he'd know her secret hiding spot.

Well, she'd just add more color to the scoreboard instead. It needed to be the BEST

poster she'd ever made because this was going to be the BEST Christmas ever!

There were so many reasons!

She'd get to see her cousin Evangeline and have a super amazing, fun cousin contest!

She'd get to hang out with Uncle Thomas and Auntie Louise, and they were always so happy and nice and silly!

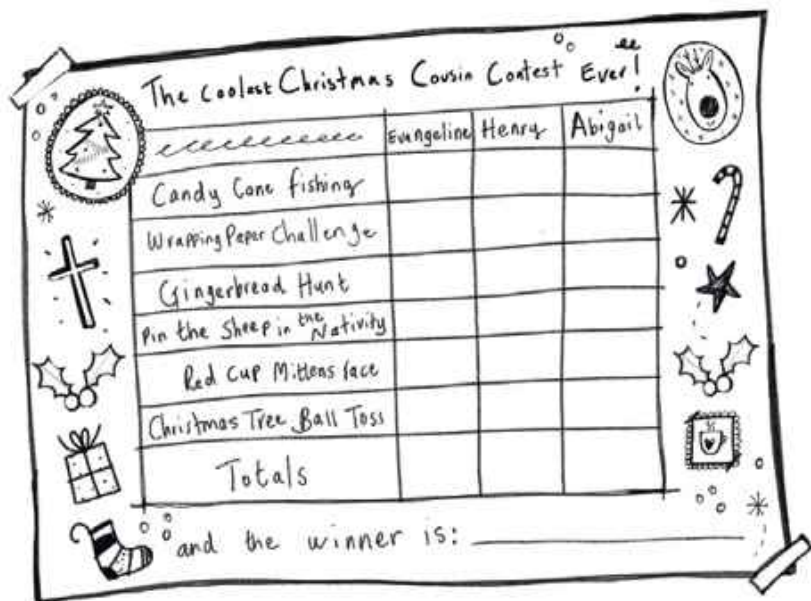
She was sure she'd get the special treasure game she'd asked for. She'd thought about it every day and couldn't wait to play it!

And...

I can't keep making lists in my head! Abigail laughed to herself. *I haven't even finished our scoreboard poster yet!*

Pulling out her fanciest markers, she started to fill in the names of the games for the contest.

SQUEAK, SQUEAK! The sound of the marker brought Henry over, covered in paper like he'd been snowed on.



“Me now?” Henry asked, reaching for her marker and almost making her mess up.

“Henry!” she exclaimed. “You can’t even write yet!”

“Let’s play,” he said, drumming his fingers on her desk like he was making music on a piano.

“We will play,” she explained as patiently as she could. “That’s what I’m doing. I’m getting this ready so we can play lots of games in our Christmas cousin contest.”

“Games? My games?” Henry asked, his eyes big and excited as he drummed even faster.

“Games for you, me, and Evangeline,” Abigail answered, feeling excited too. It was almost like he was doing a drum roll, and she could just feel the “ta-da!” coming. “We’re going to play...”

She paused dramatically like her best friend Flora always did. Flora was good at making things sound important and exciting.

SLAM.

A car door closed in the driveway, just loud enough for Abigail and Henry to hear it.

“I’ll tell you later!” she exclaimed, racing Henry toward the front window in the living room to check for their guests, even though it was probably only Dad getting home from work. “But you’ll love it! So will Evangeline! I made up the most fun festive games! It’s going to be the best Christmas ever!”