



Page 1 of 24

Vincent Van Mouse had painted six chimneys, four puddles and the little bakery door. He paused over a roof that he knew by heart. His own house had just enough room for a crooked chimney and a mouse.



Page 2 of 24

The picture was for the library’s Christmas window. Tonight, when the snow made the streets go blue, everyone would come to see it. Vincent imagined them finding their houses. He wondered who would spot his first.



Page 3 of 24

Panda-Cake brought a tin of biscuits for the audience. “There’s a bit of red on your nose,” he told him. Vincent rubbed his cheek. “Other side.” He rubbed his chin. Panda-Cake handed him a clean rag, which he forgot to use.



Page 4 of 24

Together they lifted the long painting. “I’ll hold this end,” said Panda-Cake. “You hold yours.” Vincent trotted backwards towards the window. The picture sagged in the middle, like a washing line.



Page 5 of 24

Professor Hooten opened the hall door to bring in the chairs. Cold air rushed past him. The small paper stars on the shelf trembled. Then the great sheet of painted paper gave a shiver of its own.



Page 6 of 24

“Hold it there!” cried Vincent. He gripped his end with both paws. Panda-Cake held his. The gust pushed the middle up and over the corner of the window latch.



Page 7 of 24

Rrrrip. A rip ran down the Christmas street, stopping just above the bottom edge. Half of Vincent’s chimney folded back. He could see Panda-Cake through the hole where his house ought to have been.



Page 8 of 24

Hooten shut the door. “That was a big gust,” he said softly. Vincent put the painting on the table. He tried to press the chimney flat. His paw was shaking, so Panda-Cake set the rag beside him and waited.



Page 9 of 24

They tried to mend the rip from behind. The two sides almost met. But the paint had stuck to the latch and come away, leaving a white stripe down the wall of Vincent’s house. He tucked his brush inside his apron.



Page 10 of 24

Outside, one child stood on tiptoe to peer through the glass. Another was brushing snow off the window ledge with a mitten. Vincent could see them. He slid down in his chair so they couldn’t see him.



Page 11 of 24

Panda-Cake took a cardboard star from the shelf. “We could put a star over the white bit.” The desk lamp was already on. When he picked up the star, its shadow swept over the wall.



Page 12 of 24

“Hold it there,” said Vincent. This time he said it very quietly. He watched the star grow when Panda-Cake moved it towards the lamp. When he moved back, it shrank. He climbed out of his chair.



Page 13 of 24

Vincent snipped round the torn flap and lifted it. On the wall, the scrap became a steep little roof. He tipped it sideways, and there was his crooked chimney. “There you are,” he said.



“Hooten, may we borrow a sheet?” asked Vincent. “And could the chairs face this way?” He pointed away from the window, towards the warm end of the hall, where two low bookcases stood with a gap between them.



Page 15 of 24

Hooten clipped a plain sheet to two tall poles behind the bookcases and set the lamp on a table behind it. Panda-Cake walked round to the front. Vincent lifted his roof. A house popped up on the sheet. “I can see it from here!” he called.



Vincent took his little scissors. From the snowy strip below the rip, he snipped a new row of roofs. Panda-Cake cut a cardboard squirrel with a parcel under its arm.



Page 17 of 24

The squirrel looked very fine from the front, until Panda-Cake tried to make it walk. Its parcel bumped a roof. Its tail went up a chimney. “That’s the wrong way home,” said Vincent, laughing for the first time since the rip.



Page 18 of 24

They tried again. This time the squirrel stood farther from the lamp, beside the sheet. Small enough! It trotted down the street between the roofs. Vincent practised making the star rise. Panda-Cake practised three little taps.



Page 19 of 24

Hooten went out to the waiting children. “The Christmas picture is ready,” he said. “Come inside and find a chair.” Behind the sheet, Vincent heard boots tapping and two last chairs scraping along the floor.



Page 20 of 24

Panda-Cake tapped his spoon on the biscuit tin. Ting. Ting. Ting. The hall went quiet. Vincent raised the little street. On the sheet, rooftops grew out of a pool of gold.



Page 21 of 24

A squirrel travelled from house to house. At the last door, she set down her parcel and knocked. Then up came the star. A small voice in the front row whispered, “That’s Vincent’s chimney.”



Page 22 of 24

Vincent almost forgot to move the star. He had thought his chimney was ruined. Here it was, as crooked as ever, big enough for the whole room to see. He held the star steady while the audience clapped.



Afterwards the children took turns with the puppets. One made the squirrel as big as a house. One put the star in the squirrel’s paws. Panda-Cake opened the biscuit tin. Vincent looked down and found another red spot on his apron.



Page 24 of 24

He turned off the lamp and carried the crooked little house to the window. Outside, the snow had stopped. The silhouette sat on the sill beside the last biscuit. Vincent licked a crumb off his paw. “Good night, little house.”