

## The Real Story of Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer



“Hello Lenn. Can I call you Lenn?”

I turned around and standing in front of me was a reindeer, but not just any reindeer. It was Rudolph. I would have known that even if Merri had not told me who it was. Rudolph’s nose was shimmering bright red, but on closer look, it wasn’t a nose at all. It was a gemstone. I had also noticed something odd about his voice. Of course, a talking reindeer is odd, but I dismissed that as one more example of the Pole’s unique, never explained, magical properties. No, what was odd was the register Rudolph talked in. It was a decidedly female voice.

Sensing my puzzlement, Rudolph giggled. “You thought I was a guy, didn’t you?”

Sheepishly I offered an excuse, “The books, the song, that television special, I—”

“Don’t fret. I’m used to it, but I am all girl. My real name is Ruby, like my nose stone.” She moved her head to show it off as she explained, “It’s a ruby too. Do you like it?”

“Yes, I do. But the other reindeer?”

“Oh them,” she laughed, “boy reindeer lose their antlers in early December. Even with Pole magic, it would be impossible for them to have the proper look on Christmas Eve. The girls and I pull the big guy’s sleigh. The boys do, however, get to pull Joulupukki’s sleigh, but it’s not glamorous,” she said smiling, “The boys can’t even get off the ground. There’s no flying involved. I think it annoys them that the one thing they are famous for they don’t do. We girls give the public what they want.”

“All these misconceptions. Doesn’t being mislabeled bother you?” I asked.

“The big guy addressed that early on. He was emphatic. ‘Santa is not a person. Santa is an image.’ Besides, in my opinion, ‘Ruby the Gem-Nosed Reindeer’ doesn’t really sing right.”

At this point Merri Claus jumped in. “There is another, more important, misconception out there. The song got it all wrong.”

“The song? Rudolph? What?”

Merri began singing, “They never let poor Rudolph, join in—”

Rudolph continued, laughing, “—any reindeer games.”

“Ruby wasn’t an outcast. She was the reindeer boss. Those eight were bickering all the time, mostly over petty stuff. It was affecting their performance. I brought Ruby in to straighten out the team.”

“It was rough at first. They called me a ‘Merri bright noser.’”

“Ruby,” Merri bragged, “established the reindeer games as a way to rebuild team comradery. That’s how the song got it backwards. The reindeer didn’t prevent Rudolph from playing. They *refused* to play. We MADE THEM join in the reindeer games. The games were a good idea too.”

“Thank you, Merri.”

“Over the years, the Reindeer Games has become so successful that now they are an annual event everyone participates in or cheers on. It’s great fun.”

“The original games included sleigh speed runs, short roof landings, long jumps, and high jumps. When the games became popular, we opened them up to all and added a bunch of other activities including a cookie toss, a Santa cocoa plunge, a gingerbread house decorating contest, toy assembly races, an ice carving Christmas tree contest, and —”

“—the toy wrapping races. Don’t forget the toy wrapping races.”

“—yes, and the games have become an annual event with everyone either participating or cheering. All divisions complete. Last year the Wintergreen Clubhouse food staff won. That was a huge surprise as Sanitation has won several years in a row.”

“But enough about that,” Ruby chimed in. “I’ve been asked to take you to NaNe Central.”

“With that, I’ll leave you two. I have snow hills full of work to do.”