

a breakfast serials story

Keep Your Eye on Amanda!

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Chapter 1 Introduces Philip and Amanda

"But I don't *want* to be a thief," said Philip, a fat and very anxious young raccoon. He was staring at a brick building across Grove Street through a light veil of powdery winter snow. It was a little past three o' clock in the morning in Boulder, Colorado.

Amanda, Philip's twin sister, rolled her eyes. "You're such a dork!" she said. Amanda was smaller and thinner than Philip, with a narrow, sharp nose and a white whiskered face. The black band across her eyes gave her the appearance of a bandit. "Live a little!" she said. "Better yet, live big. It's no fat deal to go inside. No one will know what we're doing."

"I'm not so sure," Philip said. Worried, he rubbed his front paws together. His round ears twitched. "The point is, *I'll* know. I don't think it's right to do it."

Amanda, annoyed by her brother's reluctance, said, "Listen, dude, I saw the people who lived here move out two days ago. And I didn't see anyone move in." She flicked snow from her nose.

Philip studied his twin with troubled eyes. "But you weren't watching *all* the time, were you?"

"You are so *stupid!*" Amanda said with exasperation. "Does it *look* like anyone is in there?"

"But if no one's there," Philip said, "what's the point of going in? There won't be any food."

"You know perfectly well people *always* leave food behind. It'll be awesome. Anyway, I'm bored. It'll give us something to do. And you're hungry, aren't you?"

Philip sighed. His sister was right. He *was* hungry. And the house, a two-story structure, certainly appeared deserted. Not only were all the windows dark, but no curtains were in sight. Nor was there any smoke coming from the large chimney.

Besides, it seemed as if getting inside would be very easy. In front of the main door was a small porch. Next to the porch was a pine tree, which reached the porch roof and beyond. Overlooking that roof was a partially open window. The house was almost *inviting* them to enter.

Even so, Philip felt very uneasy about the whole idea. What he really wished was that he was snug at home in their Central Park train.

"Ma said we shouldn't go into people's houses," he reminded his sister.

"Hey, dude, how old is Ma?"

"Ten, I think."

"Right, too old to know anything cool," Amanda insisted. "Besides, eating left-behind food isn't stealing. It's helping."

"How is it helping?"

"When new people move in, they won't have to throw out anything."

"But what if there isn't any food?" Philip asked.

"Hey, no food, no me, no problem."

As Philip stared at the building he thought how Amanda was always rather vague about right and wrong. Mostly if *she* wanted to do something, it was *right*. And wasn't their mother always saying, "Philip, keep your eye on Amanda. She loves excitement too much and rules too little."

"Philip," Amanda said sarcastically, "be a *wuss* if you want. I'm going." That said, she scampered across Grove Street, leaving a double row of five-toed paw prints in the new snow. Once on the far side, she called, "You coming?"

Philip looked carefully both ways along the street—saw no cars—then waddled slowly and reluctantly toward the house.

Amanda was already on the porch. She stood on her hind legs and peeked into the house through a large window. The moonlight illuminated a long room. Other than a few scattered boxes and a broom against a wall, it was empty.

"See," Amanda cooed, "*So cool*. No one's there."

Philip looked for himself. The house certainly had the appearance of being abandoned. "Amanda, isn't it wrong to—" He stopped speaking. Amanda was already halfway up the tree. Philip, with an inward groan, followed.

Once on the porch roof, Amanda climbed to the sill of the open window. A block of wood held it open. Not even bothering to see if Philip was following, she crept into the house through the window gap.

Philip hesitated. What should he do? Remembering his mother's words to keep an eye on her, Philip—though his heart was pounding—followed Amanda

inside. As he was fatter than his sister, it was a tight squeeze. Still, he managed to get through and drop onto a rug-covered floor. As he did so he suddenly heard Amanda say, "Oh, bummer! Someone *is* here."

Using his bushy tail to keep steady, a frightened Philip sat up on his hind legs. Just opposite where they were was a bed, on which a man lay asleep. He was fully dressed, but snoring. "What--what do we do now?" Philip whispered.

"Hey," Amanda insisted, "as long as he doesn't hear us, we're still cool."

"Cool?" Philip fairly squeaked with panic. "Amanda, people catch raccoons. Cage them. Skin them. Eat them! I don't think we should stay here."

"Go home if you want," Amanda said. "I'm staying." Philip, feeling positively ill, shrank down.

"See those steps over there, dude?" Amanda said. "There's going to be plenty of food below." She hurried down.

Philip peered down the stairwell. When he saw it was a spiral staircase, his stomach churned. He had to force himself to descend. As it was, the corkscrew twist of the steps made him dizzy. Twice he had to stop. By the time he reached the first floor, he was wobbly. But once there, he looked about, noting boxes as well as an empty fireplace.

"Philip!" he suddenly heard Amanda screech. "You gotta come! Quick!"

Next Week: Inside the House

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