

Don't kick Nanny's leg. And of course, James did. Kick Nanny's leg.

Bill had once said to his wife, "I wish there was an ultimate deterrent for kids."

This was back in the 1980s, so the ultimate deterrent was a nuclear weapon. If a country had one, they could just flag up the possibility of using it. Remember what happened in Japan in WWII? Well, if you keep pissing us off, that is what will happen to you.

But there was no ultimate deterrent for kids. They had tried spanking (it was the 1980s after all) but nothing seemed to stop James from doing the exact opposite of what he was told.

"James!" shouted Jo, Bill's wife. "Stop that now or there will be trouble." There wasn't, and James knew it. Not real trouble anyway. This was before the days of the most dreaded punishment of all: not being able to play with a Tablet or some other device.

It had started off so well, as Christmas usually did. Happy kids pulling items out of their Christmas stockings; the parents energised a little by their happy faces, which was useful as they had been woken up at various times throughout the night and early hours of the morning. "Is it Christmas yet?" "No, go back to bed."

But it was only 11am and the turkey was, as turkeys do, taking a long time to cook. Jo had prepared, the night before, the potatoes, parsnips, and carrots to roast with the turkey, but they had only just been put in the dish. It had already been a long day, or at least it felt like it.

Now James was winding up his brother Sam. Nanny was clearly irritated. Her daughter, Jo's mum Annette, was trying to calm the whole situation down. Bill looked like steam was going to start coming out of his ears.

Then there was the sound of the doorbell chimes. It was Susanna, a neighbour, who had become friends with Jo, and her German husband, Wolf. Jo liked Susanna, but she and Wolf had no children, and lacked the ability that some childless people exhibit, of getting along quite well with children.

"Come in, come in!" said Bill.

Wolf and Susanna made their way into the lounge, stopping to greet Nanny, and her daughter, Jo's mum, Annette.

"Can I get you something to drink?" asked Jo.

"Actually, we have brought some gluhwein!" announced Wolf.

"I'll get some glasses," said Jo. "Or do we drink gluhwein from mugs?"

"In my hometown in Germany, it is traditionally served in a mug," stated Wolf categorically.

Here we go, thought Bill. Every time they come round, they waste no time telling us what we should do.

"We brought some Lebkuchen as well," added Susanna. "Wolf's family sent them to us."

Jo forced a smile. She knew Susanna was just trying to be helpful, but with her children, they hadn't warmed to spice of any kind in food, including biscuits. Jo dutifully found a suitable plate for the Lebkuchen. She brought mugs for the gluhwein and poured some for the adults.

"What's that?"

This was Sam, Jo and Bill's younger son.

"It's called gluhwein, Sam. But it is not for children," said Bill.

"You always bring horrible stuff!" exclaimed James.

"James!" Jo shouted. "Do not be rude to Wolf and Susanna." She was about to approach James and probably give him a swift smack on his bum when the doorbell rang again.

"Merry Christmas!" shouted Bob, Bill's brother. Now it was Bill's turn to be embarrassed.

Bob was what you might call the black sheep of the family. An alcoholic, barely able to hold down a job, Bill felt sorry for him in some ways but also aggrieved that he was his brother's keeper.

"Alright, darlin'" said Bob, lunging at Jo to kiss her. Jo managed to turn her head away to escape his sloppy greeting and instead stepped toward the lounge.

"Come in, Bob," she said politely.

Cook turkey, cook, thought Jo. The sooner we get this Christmas out of the way, the better.

Bob stumbled in, whiskey already on his breath, and tried to 'greet' the other guests.

"Nanny, love! Nice to see you again, darlin'"

Nanny was not impressed, but tried not to show it.

"An' Susanna! And who is your young man?" he said with a leery wink.

"This is my husband of 6 years, Wolf"

Bob shook Wolf's hand, but also threw his arm around Wolf's shoulders in some blokey form of greeting that Wolf did not appreciate.

"Please have a seat," said Jo.

Now it was Sam's turn to make a fuss.

"Why do we always have Bob here? You are a bad man," he said.

"Sam!" shouted Bill. "Apologise to uncle Bob."

But all Sam did was run off toward the stairs with, "I hate you all" as his parting shot.

"I'll go to him," said Jo, as evenly as possible.

So now an awkward group was left: Wolf and Susanna (not exactly child-haters but not far off), Bill, whose face was red with embarrassment, Bob, whose face was red from years of alcohol abuse, Annette, who looked like she would rather be anywhere than where she was, Nanny, whose scowl was so deep it threatened to form a permanent crack in her face, and James, who had begun to dance around the room shouting "Where's my bike? Where's my bike?" as he had thought he would receive a bicycle for Christmas.

It was a sorry state of affairs.

A snivelling Sam was brought back down the stairs.

"I'm sorry everyone," he said, though it didn't sound like he meant it.

Cook turkey, cook.

Jo went to check on the food.

"Not long now," she said, as breezily as she could as she came back into the room.

"What's this, mate?" asked Bob, rudely grabbing the mug in Wolf's hand.

"It is gluhwein," replied Wolf, as best he could through gritted teeth. "It is a traditional German drink that we drink at Christmastime."

"I'll have a bit of that," said Bob, actually taking a swig from Wolf's mug.

"Here's a mug," Jo said quickly.

Cook turkey, cook.

If things weren't going from bad to worse already, now it was Nanny's turn to put on a little performance.

"Honestly Jo," she began, "with those thighs of yours you really shouldn't wear trousers. And aren't those, what are they called again, jeans? Seriously dear, you should have worn a dress... for a social occasion."

Cook, turkey, cook.

"I'll just check on the turkey. Bill, could you start setting the table, please?"

Let them have their little hate-fest all by themselves.

Whatever was happening in the lounge now, Bill and Jo didn't know, because they were having their own argument now.

"I told you, we just can't have Bob here. He's a leech, he's a bad example to the children, and you know how Nanny feels about him."

"For God's sake, he's my brother. You're always saying Christmas is about family, but you don't want to welcome my family, you just invite your mother and that witchy grandmother of yours"

Something crashed to the floor.

Bill and Jo returned to the lounge.

"I'm very sorry everyone," announced Jo, "but there was an accident with the turkey... and it's ruined."

"Yes, we're sorry, but we will have to try to find some takeaway open, maybe MacDonalds, just to get something for us and the kids."

"Sorry for the inconvenience," said muttered Jo.

"But you can't just chuck me out on the street" sputtered Bob. "It's Christmas!"

"Well, Jo, honestly, you just can't get anything right, can you," added Nanny.

"Well, if you want us to go..." began Wolf, clearly expecting some protest. There was none.

“Right,” said Annette. “Nanny, there is plenty of food at home and we are leaving now”

“But... it’s Christmas!”

“Yes, it is, but there has been a slight accident and we are going home,” said Annette, trying to speak firmly, but not so firmly that Nanny would protest.

“Well that’s it then,” said an indignant Bob. “Everybody out then.”

Bob, Wolf, Susanna, and Nanny carefully steered by Annette, made their way to the door.

“Thank you for coming anyway,” said Jo, trying not to sound too pleased.

“Yes,” added Bill. “Have a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year.”

Bill and Jo went back to the lounge and slumped into two of the armchairs.

“I never liked them anyway,” said James.

“Me neither,” said Sam.