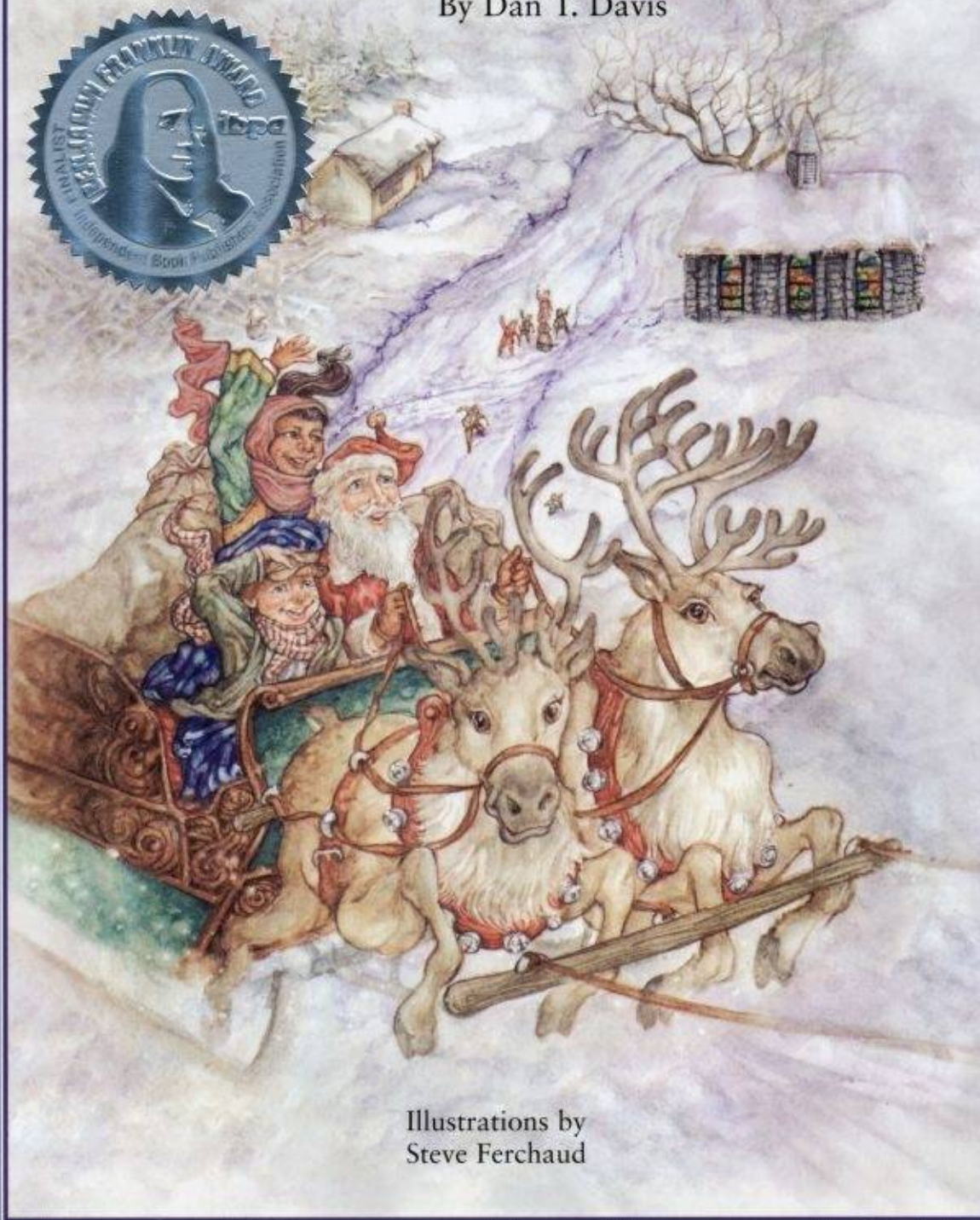


A Carpenter's Legacy

A Christmas Story

By Dan T. Davis



Illustrations by
Steve Ferchaud

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Second Star Creations

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SUMMARY: In interwoven stories from 1921 and 1984, the lesson that life can become what you choose to believe is imparted to children in a hospital over Christmas by Grandfather Ian, a doctor who, along with his friend Prita, was part of a toy making group of orphans in Norway who called themselves Santa's Elves and were taught by a kindly carpenter named Mr. Kloss.

Audience: Ages 9-15.

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*Dedicated to
that which binds us all...*



To my darling twins,

You've heard how your namesakes
— my grandparents —
lived with Santa as his elves.

Grandfather Ian told so many tales;
— more than I could ever write —
these stories spoke to me the most.

Since you are old enough,
I included my own story
of a Christ's day eve in the hospital
where I believe miracles occurred.

Read this book two different ways.
First, for little sis, at bedtime,
— hospital concerns are not nighttime tales; —
read only the chapters.
They are complete stories I heard as a child.

The intertwined story of three generations
is a legacy I pass on to you.
— Just as Grandfather Ian enriched my life, —
I want to dance with you
Between make-believe and believe.

I'll love you forever — Mom



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"I'm an elf, I'm an elf, I'm an elf," I chanted softly to myself in the hospital's hallway.

Dressed all in green, my pointy hat festooned with bells, I pranced by my mother who had a finger to her lips, issuing an insistent, "Ginny, shh... !"

Were my bells ringing too loudly? She had tears in her eyes, but I was excited. "Mommy, don't cry. Grandfather Ian is Santa tonight, and I get to be his elf for the very first time!"

We glanced into the hospital room. Grandfather Ian sat silently; he was dressed all in red, from his head to his feet. He stroked his beard as he stared at the room's empty bed, ignoring the small tree in the corner with a few small presents underneath. A wooden nativity on the dresser, next to cheery greeting cards, begged for his notice but did not succeed.

"Ginny, go in. Your grandfather needs to get ready."

I nodded, rushed in, did a quick twirl, and gave Grandfather Ian a big hug. "Hi, Santa! Do you like my elf costume?"

He smiled but didn't answer. His name badge was in his right hand. His fingers flipped it from blank to Dr. Ian Campbell back to blank once again.

I shook my finger at him and scolded, "You're supposed to say, 'Ho ho ho!'"

Grandfather Ian turned toward the room's entrance. Mommy was holding her hand in a fist at her mouth but quickly dropped it upon meeting his gaze. She entered, immediately leaned against the wall, and closed her eyes.

"Sorry, Ginny, I was thinking about things from long ago." Grandfather Ian gently stroked my hair. "Ho ho ho! How's that? And, yes, a beautiful elf you are. You would have been great building toys with Santa Kloss."

"I know! But you and Nani really were two of Santa's elves! Before we give out presents, tell me again!"

Mentioning grandmother made Grandfather Ian's eyes pace her hospital room. "Now?" he finally answered. "You've heard the stories so many times, and I'll tell some in the Children's Ward."

"I'm never tired of them. Please? One of the special ones that you don't tell often?"

"Okay, how about when Santa moved to the North Pole? Or maybe the flying reindeer?"

"Not those! I'm your elf tonight! Tell me how you and Nani became Ian and Prita – Santa's best elves ever! Tell me your story!"

"You're right. The Santa stories are fun, but the elf stories are special. So, sure, how should I begin this time?"



~ 1 ~
Arrival



Have you ever wondered about Santa's elves? Did you ever want to be an elf? Santa lived in Norway when I was a boy; we made toys every year so other children could be happy. Being an elf was wonderful, but there were tradeoffs: first, you had to be an orphan; second, you had to get to Norway.

I remember our ship rocking back and forth. I thought the motion would help us sleep, but the cold often awakened us. I held Prita close, both for warmth and to chase away our fears.

Our steamship's room was the size of a closet. We were hoping for something better than the orphanage we'd been in. Prita was nine; I was eleven; headed for a country we'd never seen.

The ship was old and dirty. The crew didn't care about us and didn't want us there. But they had taken money from the orphanage – then thrust us below deck.

“Ian, are we there yet?” asked Prita.

“Soon, Prita,” I'd respond, having no idea when we'd arrive.

No one brought us any food, so I snuck out, grabbed a small loaf of bread and hid it under my shirt. I ran toward our room. I heard an angry “Get back where you belong!” so I slammed the door shut behind me.

Raising the bread in victory, I offered it to Prita. She overturned a small wash bucket for a place to sit and placed a board onto the floor. Prita carefully tore the bread, setting each half on the wood. She admired her work. “It’s our elegant dining table!”

Make-believe kept us going. We imagined what we wished could be true.

I set the table with fine china and delicate cups. I held Prita’s chair; she curtsied as she sat. Rearranging the bread to be in front of her, I intoned in my deepest, most helpful British accented voice, “Tonight, my lady, we have fresh baked bread with the finest of butter and jams.”

“But, my good sir, aren’t you having any of this fine bread?”



"I have excellent caviar and fresh salmon." I patted my stomach. "I'm already full! Please, the bread is for you. I know you like strawberry jam on it."

Prita quietly wolfed down the bread. Her eyes issued an apology when she realized I'd not eaten any before returning.

"Thank you, my Prince. And now can we dance? I love how Cinderella dances at the ball."

I bowed. "Of course, my lady." My stomach growled. We were two dirty urchins, wearing clothes that should have been burned, dancing in a steamship's closet, and wondering if the clock would strike midnight.

In the wee hours of one morning, Prita whispered, "Let's pretend we're back home."

"At the orphanage? You didn't want to stay – I said I wouldn't leave without you!"

"Not there! With your mother and my Mata before that awful sickness..."

"Okay. Remember your sixth birthday after your move from India? When you got the elephant cake, and we both wanted to eat the trunk? Our parents all laughed!"

Prita touched my cheek. "That was before our fathers left for the war. It wasn't as happy after that with only our mothers."

The ship docked for the third time. During the first two stops, we'd been told to stay in our room. This time, a surly man opened our door. "Go on, boy, we've done our part. You're here. Get out! And take your little wog girl with you!"

As he pulled us out, I urgently grasped my pocket, making sure my father's harmonica was there. Prita and I had nothing else.

The gangplank complained with creaks and groans as we crossed it, reminding me I had no idea what to do next.

Prita enjoyed the bright sun. "It's beautiful again, Ian!" Then concerned, "Do you see Santa Kloss?"

"I hope he's here; you remember the letter from my uncle and aunt."

The orphanage had received the note meant for my mother. We both had it memorized – "Given the sickness, and you being alone, please come home. With all the money we've sent, bring as many children as need to come. Santa would love to have them here."

We stood on the wharf and waited, then waited some more. While Prita kicked discarded mussel shells into the water, I stared at each passerby. No one paid us any mind.

I needed to believe in something better. "Shouldn't we find our hotel?" I offered. "Deluxe accommodations for my lady, of course."

We wandered the wharf's market, wishing we could taste the food we smelled. After some time, Prita began limping.

I'd seen people staring, mostly at Prita, since dark girls were rare in Norway. Moving, we'd been ignored; sitting, I knew we'd be two dirty orphans who didn't belong.

Still, I displayed my harmonica and motioned for Prita to sit. "Your foot is tired, my lady, but we've found the concert. What shall I play?"

Prita's face brightened. "Play the happy song!"

Father taught me to play before he went to the war. I guess he taught me well because people paused and a few coins decorated the cobbles near our feet.

In between songs, I smiled at the passersby. Soon we'd eat. Prita retrieved the larger coins, leaving the smaller ones to suggest people should give us more.





A young woman jumped off a wagon and rushed toward us. "You're Ian. You must be. We've been watching for your boat."

The man in the wagon called, "Ian. You look just like your Uncle Åsmund. Come. Santa Kloss is expecting you."

Pocketing my harmonica, Prita and I quickly gathered our coins.

Only then did I reply, "You aren't Santa Kloss. Who are you?"

"My name is Ruby, and that's my husband, Rolf. We live with Santa and help him make toys. He sent us to pick you up – to bring you home."

Ruby's eyes scanned the street. "Where's your mother?"

My tongue went dry within my mouth. Before I could answer, Prita interrupted, obviously confused. "Ian, doesn't anyone here speak English? It's all just gobble gobble gobble to me! What are they saying?"

"They say they'll take us to Santa. You know they mostly speak Norwegian here."

"Yes, I know," Prita sighed, then frowned. "I guess Hindi won't help me either."

"I'll teach you," I whispered.

"You'd better!" she agreed, despite the fear I saw in her eyes.

I turned to Ruby, standing as tall as I could. "It's just me and Prita. I'll only go if Prita can go."

"Well, of course," laughed Ruby, kneeling before Prita. "You can be Santa's youngest elf. Do you want to make toys?"

Prita threw her hands up in frustration.

"Ruby, Prita doesn't understand you."

Ruby's brow furrowed. In English, she stated, "I love you."

Upon my nod, Prita embraced Ruby. Ruby hugged Prita with affection, then smiled at me as she declared, "We have a long way to go."

Our long journey from Britain to Norway was finished, but we'd moved from a steamship to a wagon; another journey was necessary in order to meet Santa.



Grandfather Ian's knee jerked, so I jumped from his lap. "Don't you think it's time to get the hospital presents ready, Ginny?"

Mommy checked her watch. "Father, you're right, visiting hours start soon. I left the toys in the hallway."

I interrupted. "One more story! You aren't even elves yet!"

My mother put on her "Ginny grow up" look. "When the family is here on Christ's day, you'll hear more stories, just like at Thanksgiving. And don't be surprised in the Children's Ward. It's your first year. The stories might be different."

Mommy's "grow up" look stayed on her face as she turned to Grandfather Ian. "Father, have you ever told one of your stories the same way twice? This time, you didn't mention that you expected to live with Uncle Åsmund and Aunt Freja."

"True," Grandfather Ian admitted. "They sent the note, but just as Prita and I had lost our mothers... you and I know that Rolf and Ruby had the same bad news about my Uncle and Aunt."

They became quiet. Suddenly, I realized there were stories I had never heard. Grandfather Ian continued. "Anyway, I prefer telling how Prita and I lived with Santa. I like remembering it that way."

Grandfather Ian smiled, then said with a twinkle in his eye, "Maybe changing the stories is what keeps them interesting? Okay, Ginny, one more story, then it's time to deliver gifts to the children."





~ 2 ~
Santa



Have you ever moved and been the new kid? It's always hard. You don't belong. People look at you strangely. You struggle to make them realize you are just like them. It's always the same – even when you are going to live with Santa.

The wagon jostled toward Santa's village. The meadows had flowers in bloom. During stops, Prita picked daisies and presented them to me, but I was impatient. When would we arrive? I played my harmonica some; Prita and I'd make-believe we were on an exotic adventure in India with our British fathers – then we'd again wish for our journey to be over.

Rolf helped by making up a language game.

First, it would be Ruby's turn. "Er vi framme snart?" she'd say.

Then I'd repeat in English: "Are we there yet?"

Sometimes, Prita jumped in with Hindi. "हम वहां पहुँचें क्या."

Rolf echoed, "Arwee thair yit? Hum wahan pahunche kya?"

"How's that?" he'd ask in English.

"Ja! Yes! Hanji!" clapped Prita. Then, she'd say in Norwegian: "Very good!"

We bounced over another rock. Rolf commented, "Whew. Learning a new language is rough. Almost as rough as these roads. They're designed for sleigh rails, not wheels."

After four days passed, Santa's village finally appeared as we turned off the high road. The sun shone and birds sang as we entered the valley, crossed a bridge, then approached a man sitting in the park reading out loud.

Children were hanging on his bench, sitting in his lap, and kneeling at his feet. I expected him to be in red and white, but he wore a burgundy jacket with dark brown pants. Still, his distinctive beard and laugh made it clear who he was. Smiling at the four of us, Santa gestured for us to join them.

I heard Santa repeating, "There's no place like home. There's no place like home." He was reading about a land called Oz.

As I stared, Santa placed his hand upon mine. "You're Ian, aren't you?" I nodded. Prita stood next to me.

I asked, "Do you really go down chimneys?"

"Oh, ho ho! I prefer the front door," he answered. One of the children piped up, "But he does drive reindeer!"

"Just one time, only that first year," Santa countered. He kindly brushed Prita's cheek. "Who are you, my little beauty?"

Prita's puzzled look made me explain, "She speaks English and Hindi, Mr. Kloss. She doesn't understand you."

"I see. So I'll learn English and Hindi," declared Santa. "It wouldn't be right... not to be able to speak to a child."

The other children had been patiently waiting, so Santa returned to Oz. We reboarded the wagon, but we could have walked the rest of the way. In moments, we stood in front of a fairly new barn next to Santa and Mrs. Kloss's house.



Inside the barn, Prita disappeared with Ruby. Rolf pointed to a ladder. "Upstairs," he instructed. The loft was full of beds. "Boys sleep in this section, girls in another. Our room is downstairs on the main floor if you need us."

Rolf continued, "This is your bed. The trunk is for your clothes and belongings."

"Belongings?" I smirked. I played a bit on my harmonica, then grandly moved my hand over what I was wearing. "My harmonica is all I own."

"We can make you clothes," Rolf countered. "And you are great on that harmonica. You'll want to join our music group."

Back downstairs, in the common area where all the toys were built, Prita saw me, waved, then ran to me. "I like it here. Mrs. Kloss taught me their names. Santa is Papa and she is Mama. Mama even gave me a cookie."

"Cookie!" Prita said in Norwegian. Then she laughed. It was the first time I'd seen her smile without make-believe in a very long time.

Spring quickly became summer. We learned to make toys. Papa was a carpenter, so some elves made wooden toys. I helped at the blacksmith's making metal toys. Prita joined Mama's group – sewing and finishing.

Still, Prita and I didn't feel we were really elves. Prita was teased constantly by two girls, Alfild and Alva, about her dark complexion. We were both teased about our make-believe, especially when we pretended our parents would join us someday. The elves, all orphans, would chide us for such impossible thoughts.

Even when we had fun, we still didn't fit in. Summer's arrival meant that it was finally warm enough to swim. Everyone went to the waterfalls that fed the village's river to get wet and play.

The girls gathered around Prita. Alfild asked, "Won't you melt if you get in water? Don't dark people live in hot parts of the world because they're dry and have to stay away from waterfalls?"

"Like the witch in Oz!" laughed Alva. "She was dark, too."

Rolf stopped me from interfering. "Wait. Papa will fix it."

"I like water," Prita protested. She'd listened carefully to Alfild's words, so she also declared, "I like... waterfalls!"

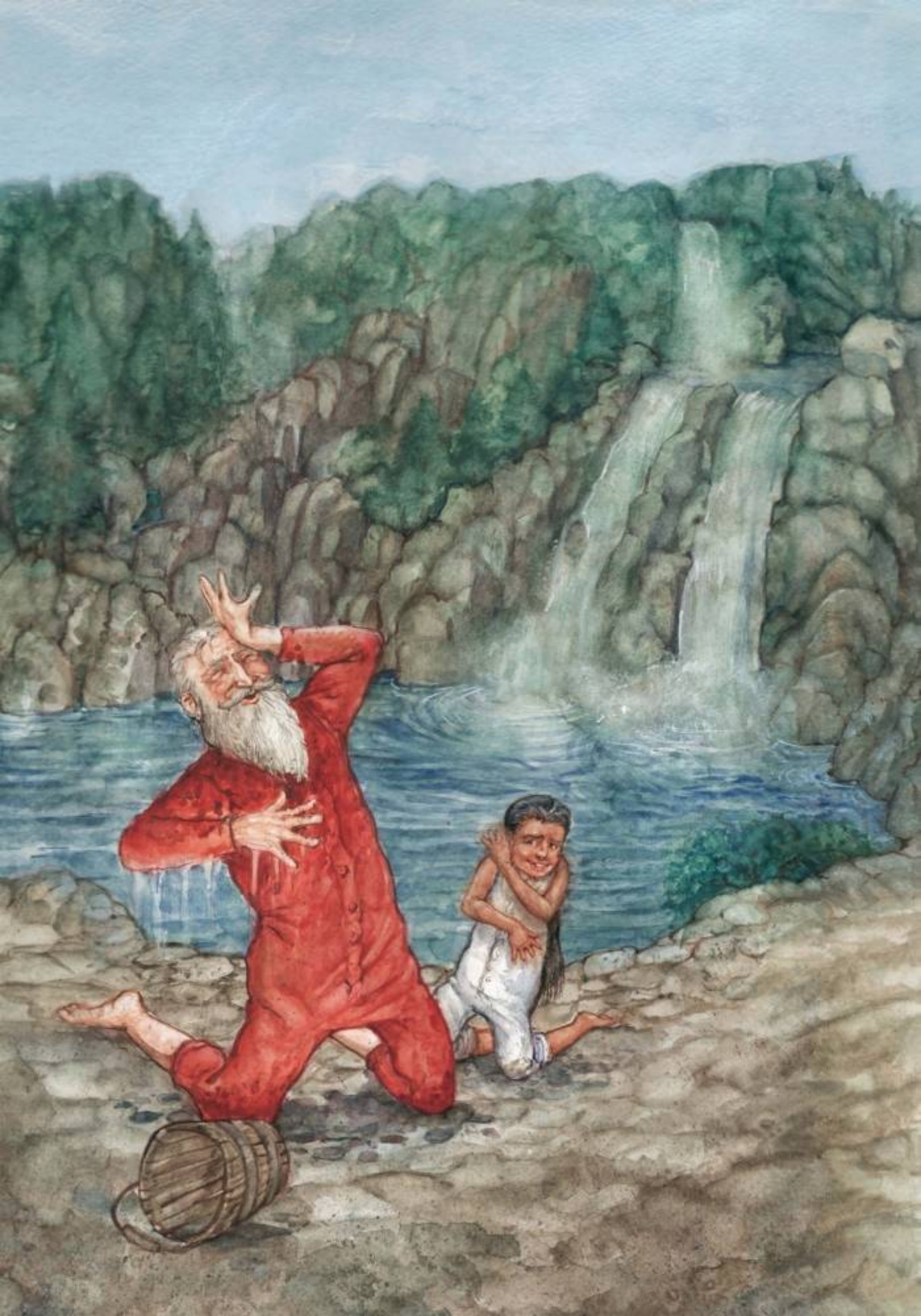
Papa grabbed a small bucket and filled it with icy cold water from the waterfall. He shushed the other elves and suddenly dumped it on Prita and himself. Prita screamed. Everyone started laughing.

With a wink toward Prita, Papa yelled, "I'm melting! I'm melting!" and sank to the ground.

Prita caught on, repeating, "I'm melting. I'm melting!" sinking as well.

Rolf nudged me, "Now we can swim."

The teasing would continue, but that day I truly believed we were Santa's newest elves.





Grandfather Ian rang the bells on my green pointy cap. "So, Ginny, now you, Prita, and I are elves."

Mother jumped at the change in his voice. "I've heard that story a hundred times, but..." She shook her head. "You should go. They're expecting you. Two floors up."

Grandfather Ian laughed, rose from his seat, and gently stroked my mother's hair. "Two floors up. I know. How many years have I done this? How many times were you my dear little elf?"

His voice lowered. "I wish Prita could join Ginny and me this year – like the three of us did so many times."

Mommy held his hand to her cheek. "Love you. Don't worry; I'll wait for her return. If we need you to interpret the test results..."

"Thank you," Grandfather Ian whispered. Mommy gave him a pillow. I heard him declare, "Papa was never this fat!" Still, he tucked the pillow under his coat, then gathered the sack of toys over his shoulder. "Let's go, Ginny! It's time for Santa and his merry elf to deliver presents."

I stood at attention and gave a salute. "Ginny the Elf, reporting for duty, Santa!"

We walked two floors up. Grandfather Ian tapped the intercom at the nurse's station. "Ho ho ho!" echoed throughout the ward. I heard clapping. I jingled my bells in response.

The head nurse approached. "Everyone's ready, Dr. Ian."

She placed her hands on her cheeks. "A new elf! How cute!"

My face turned red to complement my green costume. Grandfather Ian patted my shoulder but went quickly to work. "I have the parents' presents and some of my own. I see many of the parents are here. Wonderful! Let's review the children one more time. It wouldn't be right for Santa not to know their names."

"Any Hanukkah?" asked the nurse.

"One," he answered. "It's seventh night. The parents are okay with Santa giving a present."

There weren't many children – most had been sent home. I had already asked, "Wouldn't a different day have more children?"

His reply had been, simply, "Christ's day eve is when they need Santa the most."

Grandfather Ian touched my shoulder. "Ready?"

Upon my enthusiastic nod, a large smile appeared on his face.

"Ho ho ho!" Santa laughed, carrying his bag of toys into the open sitting area between the individual rooms. Ginny the Elf followed him in. I waved red and green streamers in the air as I tossed my head back and forth. We needed my jingle bells!

Santa counted the children as he entered. “Six, seven, eight,” His gaze went to the rooms as he called back to the nurse, “One more. If her mother is willing, let’s wheel Shawn out.”

Grandfather Ian had already told me the children’s names. Four were Pascual, Caroline, Rachel, and Jason, but as I entered, it was the other five who drew my attention. Timara had an artificial leg. Christy and Michael were both covered in bandages. Shawn took up much of the area because she was the girl on oxygen who had her bed wheeled into the room. Then there was Thomas. He wasn’t much younger than I was. His slumped shoulders, crossed arms, and downcast eyes made the whole room seem sadder.

Everyone chanted, “Santa, Santa!”

Pascual, with awe evident in his voice, timidly asked, “Are you the real Santa?”

Grandfather Ian’s calm response showed he’d been Santa for many years. He stroked his beard, examined his red suit, then laughed. “Ho ho ho! No, I’m not the real Santa. But I know Papa because I was one of Santa’s elves long ago. Tonight, I’m Santa’s helper.”

Grandfather Ian settled into a chair. He eyed all the children, gave a mischievous wink, then started whispering, quiet and mysterious. “It’s hard to be in the hospital tonight. But did you know there was a Christ’s day when Santa had no toys to give? He felt terrible! Would you like to hear how that happened?”

Nods came from most of the children – and all of the parents.





~ 3 ~
The Barn



Everybody knows Santa Kloss delivers toys to children on Christ's day. But there was one year when Santa had no toys to give.

Every fall, Santa's elves hammered, sewed, welded and painted. We filled the barn with toys we'd built. Santa would always have toys!

Seven days before Christ's day, we had finished all the toys to be delivered that year. We honored our success by having a special service at the church across the street from Papa's house.

During the sermon, Ruby had a bad stomach ache and went outside. Her nose crinkled – she smelled smoke! She shouted, “Fire! The barn's on fire! The toys are burning!”

Our small church emptied. It was Mama that immediately took charge. “Get the animals out before the fire gets too strong!” she instructed the older elves.

Mama continued, “We need a bucket brigade!” Within minutes, Rolf and the men of the village broke through the ice at the river. Water would soon arrive.

Many of the village women and children and most of us younger elves watched from the front of the church.

“Can we use snow? It’s closer!” shouted someone.

“The cow and pig are out, Mama!” yelled Jørgen, the oldest elf.

Everyone knew what a fire meant. Save what you could. Papa and the strongest men wielded axes and wedges as they tore holes in the beautiful breezeway between the barn and Papa and Mama’s house. The work of years was demolished, preventing a path for the fire to travel.

In front of the church, Prita grabbed my arm. “Ian, we have to help!” I took her hand; four of us younger elves ran toward the barn.

Prita and a girl elf began shooing cackling chickens to safety.

“What can I do?” I shouted to Rolf. “How can I help?”

As part of the water brigade, Rolf was running – sprinters were passing water buckets from one to another. Rolf’s eyes darted from me to the church; I could see he felt that Prita and I should have stayed there.

“Play your harmonica. Play for all of us.” Rolf ran, handed his bucket to an older elf, then started back toward the river.

Music was soothing! Still, I was upset, nervous, and breathing too fast to play. So I turned to my newly imagined symphony orchestra. "We need beautiful Christ's day music," I instructed.

I calmly tap tap tapped my conductor's stick as the pianist brushed snow off his piano.

Maybe "Angels We Have Heard on High" would help?

I knew that one well.

My hand reached into that familiar pocket, but I felt nothing inside. Fear crept into the very heart of my being. I didn't need my harmonica at church. It was safe in the barn on the table near my bed. Or what was left of the barn.

I dropped to my knees. I grabbed snow and uselessly threw it toward the barn. Then I just sat in the snow and cried.





As the dusk of our Norwegian winter's early night descended upon the village, it was clear that nothing but a brick chimney would be left of the barn.

Hot, glowing embers created shadows on each and every face. I kept repeating, "All those toys... all those presents... everything... gone."

Prita came up behind me and put her arms around my neck. "No one was hurt, Ian. The cow and pig are at the miller's barn, and the chickens are making funny noises in Papa and Mama's house. It's good that Papa doesn't have horses."

I grasped Prita's hand from my seat in the snow. Papa and Mama stood next to us.

The shadows flickered on Papa's charcoal-stained face. His hair was covered with soot, his beard peppered with ash.

For the first time, I realized Papa was old. Tired and shaken, his large frame had shouldered the long burden of tearing out a wooden walkway. It was clear he was well over fifty, maybe even sixty.

Papa sighed, "Yes, yes, Mama. We can always rebuild."

I shivered. "It's all gone, Papa. My father's harmonica is burned up. I was starting to be happy, but now everything is all gone."

Papa astounded me with his response. "It's never all gone, Ian. We did our best. To me, that's success, not failure."

Mama sat beside me in the snow; she cradled me in her arms. "Ian – I've heard the stories – people say Papa and I are living happily ever after. But you live happily ever after only if you are happy now."

Mama put her fingers to my mouth, forcing my lips into a smile. "Next year, we'll build a new barn and make more toys."

"But what are we going to give to boys and girls this year?"

Strangely, my question brought a smile to Papa's face. "At the moment, all we could give would be lumps of coal. But God has always shown me what to do. I doubt He will let me down now."

Papa put his hand on my shoulder. "Rolf told me there would be music. What were you going to play?"

I mumbled, "Umm... Angels we have heard on high...", still unconvinced that we could decide what was happy or sad when life so often made things go wrong.

Papa started laughing. "Oh, ho ho!" He grabbed my arm, pulling me toward the nearby hillside. He plopped onto the ground, wildly waving his arms and legs back and forth.

He admired his snow angel. "Angels we have heard on high. Yes, yes."

Prita rushed toward Papa and shouted, "Angels!"

"Pariyan!" she repeated, in Hindi.

Prita lay near Papa and began waving her arms and legs as well. She shouted to me in a mixture of languages, "Ian! We know this is true! Angels do watch over us!"

Prita's sincere look convinced me. She was a dark girl dealing with her first year of heavy snow. Moving to Norway had been hard on her, but I realized she knew the truth.

I joined Prita on the other side of Papa's angel. Soon, his large snow angel was flanked by two smaller ones.

As the full moon gazed down upon us, I took Prita's hand. Mama held Papa's as we marveled at the three angels.

The snow glistened. I gazed at the moon and stars and realized that the dying embers of the barn paled in comparison to the glory of the moonlit sky.



Snow began falling, large flakes melting on our still hot faces.

Angels beckoned. Rolf and Ruby laughed as they added angels together. Mama kissed me and Prita, saying, "My angel will always watch over you." Other elves found places in the snow.

Many of the villagers joined in. Before I knew it, a multitude of angels sparkled on the hillside near the burned barn.

Prita was right. Angels were indeed watching over all of us.





Grandfather Ian jumped to his feet. He held the pillow underneath his coat and released a large “Ho ho ho! Santa may not have had toys then, but he will have toys tonight.”

He handed me small angel ornaments. “Prita, give one to each child, one to each parent.”

I didn’t correct him. He missed Nani’s help. I just examined the angels. “Is this why there were more than three snow angels this time?”

“Maybe I never finished the story?” chided Grandfather Ian.

As Ginny the Elf handed out angels, Santa greeted each child.

“Timara, I expected you’d be home tonight.”

“I wanted to be, but I can’t walk yet,” she sighed. For a moment, I saw Grandfather Ian give Timara my Mommy’s “grow up” look, but then he just smiled and patted her shoulder.

“Christy, Michael, I checked – your parents will be fine, and so will you.” Their faces beamed at his reassurance.

“Thomas, your tests will be in soon. Let’s hope for the best.”

“Christ’s day is no good if you have cancer.” Thomas shrugged, but I sensed his fear. “I’m dying.”

“I’d say you’re living,” Santa replied. “Let’s leave it at that.”

Thomas continued, “Do all your stories have happy endings? I don’t believe in angels watching over me. And none of you were sick like we are.”

Santa responded, “All stories have happy endings if you remember to stay happy.

“As for angels, your angels are right behind you.”

Startled, Thomas quickly turned around. His father put his hand on Thomas’s shoulder while his mother wiped away tears.

Grandfather Ian gently touched them all, both children and parents – I thought that was nice. A hug, a handshake, or a pat on the back. Santa provided a connection between parents and their children.

After Grandfather Ian whispered to Shawn’s mother, he beckoned me toward Shawn’s bed – I gave him two angels.

He set one near Shawn. As he started to turn away, he saw her carefully wave her hand and smile through her oxygen mask.

Santa checked her readings, then gently brushed Shawn’s cheek as he tenderly adjusted her mask.

I was certain I knew the next story. I whispered to Grandfather Ian, “It’s okay... Nani’s friend doesn’t have to be named Ginny this time.”

Santa patted my hand, whispering back, “You’re growing up.”

Grandfather Ian turned to everyone, “Even without toys, Santa convinced me that Christ’s day would always be a day to remember.”



~ 4 ~
Second Best



Have you ever been without a home? After the barn burned down, I remember wondering where we would sleep. All we elves had left were the clothes on our backs. It felt like when Prita and I lived at the orphanage.

“Rolf, put two comforters over there,” instructed Mama. “You and Ruby can sleep in that corner. We don’t have enough blankets, but we can wear our coats. The youngest can sleep on the floor near the stove.”

“Is there enough room for everyone?” I wondered. Prita and I were searching for anything that could be slept on or used for a pillow.

“Papa is taking the oldest to other homes. The blacksmith is taking five himself, even with two families already living there.”

While Prita was upstairs, I opened a makeshift door in the kitchen that housed a small closet under the stairwell.

Ruby stopped me. “Wait.” She called Mama and distracted me by describing how she used to sleep under those stairs.

Mama entered, smiled, and said calmly, "No, dear. Don't look in there. Go see if Prita found pillows."

Prita and I slept next to each other that night. We were warm and comfortable close to the fire, so it didn't bother me when I heard Alva whisper, "The dark girl needs the heat."

The next morning, Papa and Mama amazed me by insisting we continue practicing for our Christ's day party.

"We have a party every year," declared Mama. "We might not have a tree, candles, or gifts; but we are still here. The barn didn't burn us down!"

"I was going to play my harmonica, but it's gone," I pouted.

Papa grasped my shoulder. "I'll find you a harmonica to play. Someone in the village must have one."

"It won't be the same," I lamented. "It's not my father's."

"Hmm... well, go see Prita. Mama sent her to the church to practice her dance." Papa's eyes searched Mama's as I left.

Elves mingled throughout the church, all practicing their parts. I guess I was the last to realize “the show must go on.” Rolf had lost his fiddle, so I thought he’d also be wondering what to do.

Rolf and Ruby were singing Christ’s day carols. Two elves accompanied their tenor and alto. Once they finished, Rolf insisted, “You can do something else. Don’t let not having a harmonica stop you.”

“But that’s what I do best,” I protested.

“Then do something you do second best,” Rolf suggested.



I put my hands into my empty pockets. I wandered toward where I had seen Prita practicing her dance. A girl elf was kneeling next to Prita, helping her up from the floor. Prita was hurt! I rushed over to them.

Being a dark girl, Prita didn't have many friends. There was one elf, though, who really liked her. Her name was very hard to pronounce, so let's call her Shawn. She was fascinated with Prita, her culture, and her language. I think Shawn spoke more Hindi than I did.

"She's fine, Ian." Shawn assured me.

"I'm fine, Ian," agreed Prita. "I fall here always."

Prita shifted to English to say, "It's where I stand on one foot as I twirl, and that's when I always fall. Everyone will laugh!"

Shawn interrupted, also speaking English, "You can still try."

The four days before the Christ's day party passed quickly. I kept thinking, "No barn, no toys, no harmonica," but Papa and Mama said to keep going. Prita and I would exchange doubtful glances, but we'd simply nod and do our parts. I decided my second best was to help Prita do her best, so I was with her during every practice session.

Christ's day eve arrived. Five of us elves were walking toward the church. Prita whispered loudly, "Ian, it's time to dance, but I'm going to fall!"

Shawn interceded, "You won't fall, and you dance beautifully."

I wanted to encourage but also complained, "I wish I could play my harmonica for you, Prita – or even had the right instruments for your dance. At least Ruby will play the piano for you."

Prita tried another tack. "I'm supposed to have a pretty colored ghagra dress to dance the Ghoomar. If I did, they'd forget what I look like."

Shawn examined Prita's simple, clean clothes. "You both like make-believe! Prita, pretend you're wearing a ghagras. You'll dance like Cinderella! Ian, pretend you have a harmonica."

Still, Prita and I sulked. As we approached the church, I realized it wasn't just Papa, Mama, Rolf, Ruby, and the other elves coming to our Christ's day party. It was the entire village!





~ 5 ~
Best



We sat near the front.

I expected performances since there weren't gifts this year. I was completely wrong. The village began giving us presents, rather than Santa giving presents to others.

First came the miller's son. His arms were full of goose down comforters, pillows, and linen. His wife had draped shoes to dangle from his neck.

"Pillows!" exclaimed Mama, "We need pillows!" Mama then chuckled, "Brand new shoes! Papa, who has the holiest shoes?"

Everyone had gifts for Papa and Mama. In addition to blankets, clothes, tools, nuts and dried fruit, we received kisses, best wishes, and even more clothes.

Each elf had something again. Mama and Papa held nothing back as they fulfilled each elf's needs. Soon, all the elves except Jørgen, Prita, and me had been given some wonderful present by Papa or Mama from the villagers.

"Jørgen." Mama called tenderly. "You don't need pillows, shoes, or delicious dried fruit. It's time for you to go out and be a carpenter on your own. Just like the boys who have been elves before you."

Papa hugged Jørgen and patted him on the back. "Your gift is just money to get you started. At least that wasn't in the barn."

Jørgen returned to his seat. We were the newest, so I guess it was okay we were last.

“Prita, dear, come here,” Mama called. Prita stood but glanced toward me, hoping for a signal. Shawn gestured for Prita to go forward, smiling both at her and me as she did.

Mama caressed Prita with her words. “Most everything burned in the barn, so hiding your gift with the kitchen supplies was a blessing.”

Papa lifted Prita onto his lap. “Ready for your present?”

Prita’s emphatic response was a loud, “No.”

The church went silent. As Papa and Mama searched each other’s eyes, I saw multitudes of thoughts passing between them. Shawn turned to me with a “What’s going on?” look.

Prita gazed downward. She explained, “I’m not a Christian. I’m a dark girl. I don’t get presents.”

“Hmm...” Papa nodded thoughtfully, then simply stroked Prita’s hair. His brow furrowed as he mouthed words to himself. Then carefully in English, he recited, “I believe God gave a present to everyone on Christ’s day. How can I choose who should have a present or not?”

Prita, surprised, clapped with glee, "That's good!" so Mama held out the gift. Prita gasped, "It's a ghagras!"

"We found a picture book in the city," Papa explained.

Prita held up the dress to Shawn. They ran into the back room so Prita could change.

Then, Papa called, "Ian."

Papa held something tightly, twisting it with his fingers as if it itched in his hands.

I thought, "Now I'll get someone's harmonica." I wasn't thrilled.

"This is for you," said Papa. "I repainted it the correct color. You could say I found it after the fire."

Yes, it was a harmonica. I took it reluctantly and inspected it. But Papa said he found it after the fire. It did look the same – at least as much as if it had been found, repaired, and repainted.

I asked, "So, did you, really..."

"Find it after the fire? That's your decision."

Everyone was watching. I twisted the harmonica back and forth through my fingers. I blew a few notes.

Then...

Prita came out. The entire church released a collective gasp. So many times, she had been teased about being dark – but Mama had made a rainbow dress – and as the multitude of colors spotlighted the smiling face of this beautiful little girl, it was indeed the end of a rainstorm.

I raised my harmonica. “Papa found it!”

Prita smiled broadly. She curtsied to me and began her dance.

My harmonica accompanied Prita as she twirled and swayed. Everyone, including me, was entranced by Prita’s movement and my own music. I played my best. She danced her best.

I’d worried that we needed Indian music – how could a piano and harmonica be right for this? But Shawn’s words echoed my own thoughts as I heard her affirm, “It’s all so pretty.”

I lost myself in the music and Prita’s twirling – finally, she was Cinderella.

Then came the point where she had to dance on one foot.

Her foot had never been strong. Now came the time when she would continue doing her best, showing that being a dark girl didn’t matter – and she would finally be accepted fully as one of Papa’s elves.

So... so, she pirouetted, stumbled, and almost fell flat on her face. Prita’s hands covered her eyes; she was horribly embarrassed. But no one laughed. Instead, Shawn started what became a smattering of applause. Prita rose, curtsied, continued dancing, and her rainbow colors again washed over us all.



Afterwards, Prita humbly addressed the audience, saying, "Thank you. I wish I was a better dancer."

My harmonica was in my pocket, so my hands were free and empty. As we took our seats, I whispered, "I have flowers for you, my lady, for your wonderful dance. They're daisies. Fresh daisies! Pretty impressive for the middle of winter, huh?"

I cupped my hands and extended daisies to Prita.

"Thank you, my good sir," Prita raised the daisies to her face and inhaled deeply. "They smell wonderful!"

Somehow, from then on, even when things would go wrong, we were able to live happily ever after.





Grandfather Ian had pulled his chair near Shawn during the story. He stroked his beard and examined his red suit. "So, if you do your best, you can decide you've succeeded, no matter what happens."

I could tell it was time for the gifts, so I opened the large bag as Santa asked, "Is it Christ's day yet?"

"Almost!" shouted most of the children in unison.

I started handing each parent's presents to Santa. He delivered them to each child under their parent's approving gaze.

"Let's see." Santa smiled. "I have a snow globe for Pascual... a fuzzy kitten for Caroline... a dog 'bark, bark' for Rachel... and a karate chop man for Jason."

Reaching Christy and Michael, Santa carefully gave them both a tender hug. He motioned for me to give him two of the gifts he had brought.

Michael smiled, but Christy cried, "A car wreck is like the barn burning down and no toys being left. When do things get better?"

"Yes, cars wreck, barns burn, bad things happen," Santa tenderly wiped Christy's eyes. "But you just keep going; then things slowly get better."

Santa handed Thomas three nice-looking books, then turned toward Timara and beckoned, "Come get your present."

Timara started to stand but quickly sat. “I’d like to, but I can’t walk.”

“That’s your decision,” Grandfather Ian replied. “But your parents and physical therapist tell me different.”

“Sometimes, when you can’t succeed by yourself, others help you succeed. Santa did end up having toys to deliver that year, because he had help. Do you want to hear that part?”

Timara nodded. Grandfather Ian continued, “Tonight, I’m one of Santa’s helpers. There are many Santas now. You know that, right? Don’t you see them everywhere this time of year?”

Shawn’s mother motioned to Santa. I’d given Grandfather Ian a stuffed bear. Shawn’s mother smiled. “It’s nice that Prita’s friend was named Shawn.”

She watched the little girl in the bed. “Shawn wonders how Santa kept going without toys to give to children, and if there are many Santas, where did they all come from?”



~ 6 ~
Santas



There is only one Santa Kloss – and he now lives at the North Pole. But no one can visit the entire world in one night – not even him! So Santa has to have help. And who better to help him than his elves?

Our Christ's day party continued. Other elves performed – songs, dances, poems and prayers.

I remember the church doors suddenly opening. Two Santas entered! Surprised, I turned toward Papa. He was still seated, clapping along with a song.

“HO HO HO!” shouted the newcomer Santas.

They were young men doing their best to look like Papa, wearing red coats, beards, and imitating Papa's wonderful laugh.

The performances stopped, of course, so Papa turned around.

“Daniel! Viktor!” Papa exclaimed.

Both Daniel and Viktor had large bags, bulging with toys. They placed them in front of Papa.

Daniel began, "I never stopped making toys, Papa. Your first elf gives toys every year, just like you do. But as soon as we heard about the barn burning, we headed this way. Did you think that Santa Kloss and his elves losing all their toys would go unnoticed?"

Just then, I thought I heard the jingling of sleigh bells.

"We're carpenters, but on Christ's day, we're you, Papa," continued Viktor. "Hasn't Ruby told you that there are Santa Klosses all across Europe? She answers letters asking how to be a Santa. There are more Santas every year."

"That's wonderful!" Papa hugged both Daniel and Viktor. "But if there are that many people giving gifts each year, you certainly didn't have to bring me your toys."

"Oh, Papa," Ruby shook her finger at him. "You are the real Santa Kloss."

I heard sleigh bells again. This time the loud jingling caught everyone's attention.

The blacksmith peeked into the church. "We were going to wait until spring so you'd have time to work with them, but..."

He backed out and the doors closed. Santas Daniel and Viktor ceremoniously reopened both of the church doors.



There, at the entrance, so close that their noses were almost inside, were reindeer!

The blacksmith loosely held their reins, leading them forward. A beautiful new sleigh appeared. "It's my turn to surprise you, old friend. Now you won't have to borrow my horses every year. We've been training these beauties for a season."

Papa and Mama were applauded as they approached the reindeer and sleigh. The reindeer were mesmerizing. If there had been room, I think all the elves and villagers would have crowded the church entrance. Many did.

Papa brushed one of the reindeer's flanks. "They're gentle as kittens!"

A third sack of toys was in the back of the sleigh. The blacksmith extended his hand to help his adult daughter down. A little girl jumped from the sleigh into her mother's arms, then shyly hid behind her mother's dress.

Papa examined the toys. I heard him exclaim, "What is this?"

He lifted out the most beautiful dollhouse I had ever seen. "This is the first gift I ever delivered," Papa declared, while carefully handing it to the blacksmith.

“It was the year the reindeer came. I used reindeer on the sleigh instead of horses. It was God’s sign as to what I should do every Christ’s day. That was twenty years ago...” Papa’s voice broke and trailed off into his thoughts.

The blacksmith’s daughter interrupted his reverie. “Papa, I played with that dollhouse for years. But you didn’t have any toys, and I thought it was time for it to go to another.”

The blacksmith’s daughter’s skirts fluttered; the little girl peeked from behind her mother’s skirts. Papa motioned to her. “Wouldn’t you like this dollhouse? Your Mama liked it. She says she played with it for years.”

The little girl shyly hid but then peeked out again. She nodded her head before disappearing once more.



Papa's eyes took in everyone as he acknowledged, "You've all contributed to this wonderful set of toys and presents. I will deliver them to children who need them."

"But as for this dollhouse..." Papa turned to the blacksmith's daughter. "Gifts of love are given from parents to children. The dollhouse is not from me – it's from you to your daughter."

"But Santa Kloss gives the presents and toys!" she protested.

"I see." Papa nodded and smiled. "After all these years, you still don't know who asked for your dollhouse to be built? It wasn't me. It was your father. I may have built and delivered it, but it was he who wanted you to have it."

"So maybe you think the dollhouse is 'from Santa,' but it was truly from your parents."

The blacksmith's daughter blushed, then smiled as she approached her father, still very carefully holding the dollhouse in his hands.

She lovingly kissed him on the cheek. Turning back to Papa, she asked, "I'll give the dollhouse to my daughter on Christ's day, but please, may I put 'from Santa' on it?"

"Of course, of course!" Papa grinned. "I'd be honored if you wanted to do that. I can't give presents to the entire world, so if parents say a gift of love on Christ's day is from me, that's fine. Any help I get in delivering presents is appreciated!"



Grandfather Ian sat with a satisfied look on his face, declaring, “Even when a barn burns down, even when you can only do your second best – if you decide to be happy – you can be, even if what you wanted is not what happens.”

“So Santa had toys because others helped him?” asked Timara.

“Yes, he did. And isn’t it time for your present?” Santa asked, motioning again for her to approach.

Timara’s father touched her on the shoulder, then pointed toward Grandfather Ian. “Dr. Ian has been your doctor your whole life. Shouldn’t you thank him?”

Timara slowly, fearfully, carefully, rose to her feet. Santa encouraged, “Don’t worry about falling – just do your best.”

Grandfather Ian turned to everyone. “I think she needs applause just like Prita needed it.”

As Timara took the first step, her parents clapped. She smiled and took another. By the time she reached Grandfather Ian, everyone but Thomas was clapping.

Santa lifted Timara onto his lap; he handed her an ornate, illustrated copy of *A Christmas Carol* by Charles Dickens. I chuckled, realizing her parents had a sense of humor.

Santa smiled, then frowned as Shawn’s mother called to him. “Her temperature is up, and her heart rate is elevated.”

Suddenly, everything changed. Grandfather Ian jumped from his chair and was instantly at Shawn's bedside. I watched a strange sight – Santa checking readings, feeling Shawn's forehead, then beckoning to the nurses.

“Let's get Shawn to her room,” Santa insisted. He rushed away from our cheerful evening. The wheels on Shawn's bed clacked on the floor tile as the nurses assisted IVs and equipment to accompany her.

Though it lasted only a moment, I'll never forget wondering – was Grandfather Ian really Santa? Only someone like Santa would give so much attention to a child.

Still, there were eight other children, and me too, waiting for him. But they and their parents knew what being in the hospital was like, so we waited patiently for Santa to return.

Grandfather Ian returned to reassure all of us. “Shawn will be fine. The nurses are with her. She just had a spell. Nothing to worry about.”

Thomas declared, “See? Not every story has a happy ending.”

“It's what you decide to remember,” Grandfather Ian replied quietly to Thomas.

Santa placed his fingers onto his forehead; then gently touched Thomas on his shoulder. “I have one more story, just for you.”



~ 7 ~
Reindeer



Isn't it hard to do all the things your parents ask of you? Would you have ever thought that Santa has that same problem? Everyone thinks Santa delivers presents to every child in the world in one night. It must be hard to deliver toys to everyone, don't you think? There are a lot of children in the world.

The sleigh was packed full – three big bags of toys. I wondered if the reindeer could even pull it. Papa was worried, “Five hospitals? And so far away! Daniel, Viktor, are you sure?”

Rolf appeared behind me. He kneeled and whispered, “Well, everything's ready. Aren't you going to get in? You know the new elf always goes with Papa.”

“I still get to go?” I asked excitedly. I started toward the sleigh, then turned to Prita, who had been standing quietly throughout the activity. She gave me a little wave and held up her daisies.

“Can Prita go, too?” I asked Rolf.

“Well, there's only room for one in the sleigh with Papa.”

I sighed. “I don't want to go without Prita.”

Ruby interrupted. "You are both pretty small; you might be able to squeeze in together just this once."

After Mama ensured we were ready to go, the blacksmith lifted us into the sleigh. Papa inspected the harnesses. As Prita and I tried to figure out how we'd both sit, I saw Papa staring at the two lead reindeer.

I think I was the only one who heard him whisper, "You can't be the same ones. That was over twenty years ago."

The reindeer nodded their heads as Papa shook his.

Papa climbed into the driver's seat of the sleigh. Given all the excitement, Papa seemed very quiet.

He leaned down to give Mama a kiss. That got everyone cheering. He turned toward us. "Are you ready? It's a long journey!"

Prita and I nodded happily, squeezed together in the seat next to Papa. I sat, Prita stood, but we both snuggled within the blankets Mama had tucked around us.

Then...

The reindeer began moving without Papa's signal. With the villagers milling around us, there was little room to get going.

The two lead reindeer didn't start toward anyone; they just lifted their front legs into the air. And then their back legs. The other reindeer followed suit and, before we could gasp, we were flying in the air.

Papa's eyes were wide, but he exclaimed, "Oh, ho, ho! It won't take as long to get there as I thought." He waved to the villagers below and shouted, "Merry Christ's day to you all!" as we flew away.





Grandfather Ian moved his hands through the air, as if to show the reindeer flying.

Thomas immediately declared, "I thought you were telling us what really happened to you with the real Santa. Reindeer can't fly. That's the make-believe stories."

Grandfather Ian kneeled and hugged Thomas. "Exactly" was Santa's reply, allowing Thomas's confused look to linger.

Santa whispered, loud enough that we could all hear, "Make yourself believe you will get better and go home; it often comes true. I always believe everyone will go home and be happy."

Thomas mumbled, "I want to believe. I guess I'll try."

The head nurse interrupted. "Santa, here are the test results you've been waiting for."

Grandfather Ian accepted the manila folders and quickly opened the first one. He put his fist to his mouth, just as Mommy had, then pulled it away. Everyone was watching. He opened the second folder. In a few moments he had a huge grin on his face.

Santa waved the folder at Thomas. "Complete remission. Not a sign of the cancer." Grandfather Ian released a sigh of relief.

Everyone was quiet, waiting for him to continue. Santa turned to the children, standing as tall as he could. "Miracles happen. Reindeer can fly. Do you believe?"

A whisper. "I believe you, Santa."

Another whisper. "I believe you, Santa."

Each parent echoed their belief as they placed hands upon their child. Santa gave everyone one last hug as well as a special embrace to Christy and Michael. "Your parents will be here soon," he promised.

Timara deliberately waited until last. During her hug, she whispered into Grandfather Ian's ear. Santa chuckled and replied, "Of course, that would be nice."

Santa handed her a crutch. Timara held it loosely and walked to the center of the room. Imitating Grandfather Ian's British accent, she proclaimed, "God bless us, everyone!"

Santa's hearty "Ho ho ho!" echoed throughout the common area, the ward, and many places beyond.

Everyone returned to their rooms. Now bored, I wanted to go. Grandfather Ian sat near Shawn's bed. I drummed my fingers on the windowsill as the sun slowly set. I heard Shawn whisper through her mask, "I love you, Santa."

Grandfather Ian whispered back, "I love you, too." I guess I was jealous, so I climbed onto Grandfather Ian's lap. He hugged me and placed his hand upon Shawn's bed.

"We believe in miracles," said Shawn's mother. "We believe in happily ever after."

"So do I," Grandfather Ian forced a brave smile. "Prita and I had a wonderful life together. We lived happily ever after."



~ 8 ~
Happily
Ever After



Prita and I were elves for many years. New boys and girls came as elves to ride with Papa on Christ's day.

Prita and I made many toys. As time passed, I began telling stories and playing my harmonica for the newer elves.

On Prita's twentieth birthday, at a time when the world was going through Depression, I asked her to marry me.

I gave her daisies. I knew she'd like that. We were married on Christ's day.

Papa and Mama gave us a beautiful wooden nativity. It was more intricately carved than anything I had ever seen.

"Children, always remember why we give toys on Christ's day. It's about the birth of a Miracle – and the love of God."



When spring flowers decorated our Norwegian village, Papa, Mama, Prita, and I traveled to the city in the wagon. Papa commented, “You’ve made big decisions. You’re married and you’ve decided to go to America. I hear they need pediatricians. But, remember you are always welcome back – you can build toys and help children every year.”

Prita wavered. “We’ll miss you both so much, but Ian wants to help children become healthy.”

I embraced Papa’s and Mama’s hands. “You taught us that giving gifts to children is one of God’s great purposes. I believe God’s purpose for me is to make them well.”

Our beautiful nativity carefully sat on the pack between us. I knew Papa’s purpose. I thought I knew my own. As I beheld my Cinderella, I realized I still did not totally understand hers. “Prita, I know why Papa delivers gifts. But you’ve never really said why you’ve worked so hard and made so many toys.”

Prita kissed me, read my thoughts, and smiled. “Why, Ian, it’s the same reason. Mama and Papa taught us that each and every child is a miracle. On Christ’s day, we help Papa celebrate a Miracle – he brings all of those children presents.”

What more was there to say? But then, Prita pulled me close, quietly whispering, “And now I can help you make them well.”

Papa, Mama, Prita, and I exchanged hugs, kisses, and promises to keep in touch; then we boarded a ship to America.

That very night, Prita and I dined on salmon and caviar, with fresh baked bread and the finest of butter and jams.

Then we danced... well past midnight.



Grandfather Ian and I walked two floors down.

Mommy heard us and came into the hallway. I rushed up to her. "It was great! We told so many stories!"

Grandfather Ian handed my mother the first manila folder, saying, "At least there won't be any pain."

"About what we expected," my mother answered, "She's been asking for you."

I knew what they were saying, but I buried myself in my own thoughts. "Mommy, Grandfather Ian said Nani fell during her dance – I've never heard him tell it that way before."

Mommy replied, "He doesn't like to remember it that way."

Grandfather Ian turned to me. "You know what to give your Nani when we go in, right?"

I nodded, rushed in, and jingled the bells on my green cap. "Nani, I'm an elf!"

"You're a beautiful elf," agreed Nani, sitting in her bed. She kissed me on the cheek.

“We have a Christ’s day present for you. Grandfather Ian said you’d like it.”

I cupped my hands around nothing but air. Nani immediately smiled. “Daisies! My favorite! You couldn’t have given me a better present.”

I laughed. “Make-believe is funny. Did Grandfather Ian ever give you real daisies?”

Nani smiled, cupping her hands around mine. She took the daisies and placed them upon her food tray.

“Ginny, these daisies are real. And they never wilt or die. They’re as beautiful as the ones Ian gave me the night of the dance.”

Nani’s eyes closed for a few moments, then she opened them and patted my hand. She pointed to one of the presents under the little tree. “We need to deliver that one now.”

“Yes, indeed,” agreed Grandfather Ian. He handed it to me, on Nani’s behalf.

I tore into the present with delight. “Oh, oh, oh,” was all I said as I ran excitedly into the bathroom.

Within minutes, I reappeared, dressed in a beautiful rainbow colored dress. “I’m at the Christ’s day party! I’m Cinderella! And I can dance for Santa!”

I started twirling happily in front of Prita and Ian, my wonderful grandparents. Nani said, “Your mother wore it when she was your age. Now it’s yours.”

“Thank you, thank you!” I kissed Nani, then Grandfather Ian, and then turned to my mother. “Did you dance, too?”

“I did,” Mommy replied. “But it’s late and we need to go home. Go change back into your elf costume, Ginny. You can dance in the ghagras tomorrow.”

Grandfather Ian handed us our coats. “I’ll be here with Prita.” He pulled a chair up to her bed, taking Nani’s hand in his. Nani had fallen asleep again but awoke at his touch.

“Of course you’ll stay with mother.” Mommy kissed Nani on the cheek, “We’ll be back in the morning.”

“That’s nice, dear. I’m tired, but your father and I may go to a dance. Where’s Ginny? I need to say good night.”

I reappeared. Even with Nani’s high spirits, my own mood had gone from the delight of the rainbow colors to the solemn of my dark blue jacket.

I gave Grandfather Ian a kiss. "G'night, Grandfather Ian."

Walking to the other side of Nani's bed, I took her hand.

"I love you, Nani."

"I'll love you forever, Ginny."

"Goodbye, Nani."

Our drive home was quiet. Not a word was spoken.

We entered the house. Snoring noises in the living room told us Daddy's trip to pick everyone up at the airport had been successful and we should go quietly upstairs.

As pajamas replaced my elf costume, Santa's newest elf went back to being just Ginny.



My eyes kept darting to the darkness outside. I should have climbed into bed, but I ran to the window and thrust it open. A strong burst of icy air swept into the room.

I called to my mother with a big smile on my face. "You know what I think, Mommy? I think Santa is going to visit Nani and Grandfather Ian tonight! He'll let them ride in his sleigh! And Nani will go with Santa to the North Pole so she can make toys with the elves again!"

My smile contrasted with my mother's tears. "Ginny, some of it is just make-believe... you shouldn't be..."

Putting my finger to her lips, I insisted, "No, Mommy. No. This is the way I want to remember it. I even left the rainbow dress in case she needed it."

"But it's too little for her now..." she started, but I just hugged her as tears came from us both.

Hand-in-hand, we stood at the window, an icy wind still whistling throughout the room. Mommy began to close it but instead stared into the moonlit sky. She pulled me close. We leaned upon the sill and began picking out stars together.

“So, which one of the lights is Santa, do you think?” she asked as we gazed toward the hospital.

“He’ll come tonight, Mommy. He has to,” I assured, but doubt crept in. “Mommy... is Santa Kloss really still with us? He must be very, very old.”

My mother slowly closed the window and tucked me into bed. She wiped away more tears but replied with conviction and belief, “Yes, Virginia. As long as parents love their children, Santa will always be with us.”



~ 9 ~
Departure



Prita and I have a wonderful anniversary. It's Christ's day. I never forget it. It was a bit before dawn on that special day. I sipped coffee in my chair, wondering when the sun would rise.

As I watched Prita with love and affection, still sleeping in her bed, I wondered, "How many years have we been together?"

I held her hand in mine. "Three years with our parents. Eleven years with Papa, Mama, Rolf, Ruby. Then the move to America. Becoming a doctor. Setting up our household." I added the many years within my mind.

Suddenly, I was taken aback as a finger tap tap tapped at our window.

It was Papa! He was in his sleigh, and his reindeer, of course, were leading the way.

"Oh, ho ho!" Papa laughed. He gave me a wink. "Merry Christ's day! You two moved to America; Mama and I moved to the North Pole. Ruby and Rolf have their hands full – we're getting more and more elves now that we've moved North. I thought maybe you'd consider coming back to help me? You could take care of the new elves and help us make more toys."

My lovely bride had awakened and was looking at us happily from her bed. “Good morning!” Prita exclaimed.

Prita jumped out of bed and stood next to us at the window. “Of course, Papa! Ian, isn’t this exciting? It’s time again to make toys for children – what better thing could we do? And you can be a doctor, tell stories and play music for the elves!”

“Oh, ho ho! Only room for one more in the sleigh, remember? Prita, ladies first. Ian, I’ll be back for you soon.”

Prita quickly donned her beautiful rainbow dress while Papa and I talked. Then she climbed through the window and into the sleigh.

“I love you, Ian!” shouted Prita, throwing me a kiss. “I’ll see you soon!”

“Oh, ho ho!” laughed Papa yet again.

The reindeer and sleigh flew into the air and headed toward the North Star.

I waved until I could no longer see them.

“Yes, my lady,” I whispered. “Very soon.”

I turned from the window. My eyes fell upon our Christ's day tree as well as the beautiful nativity that had been given to us by Papa and Mama.

I dragged my chair from the now empty bed and sat in front of our nativity. As I reached into that familiar pocket, Papa's harmonica emerged. I admired how good it looked after all this time.

The harmonica itched in my hands. "What would Papa have wanted me to play?" I thought. "What would Prita want me to play?"

Of course. I knew.

I played the happy song – and I played my best.



*Daddy, how does Santa
go down the chimney?
"He touches his finger to his nose."*

*Mommy, how does Santa
do it all in one night?
"The reindeer fly very, very fast."*

*Grandma, should I leave cookies for Santa?
"Certainly – he would love them."*

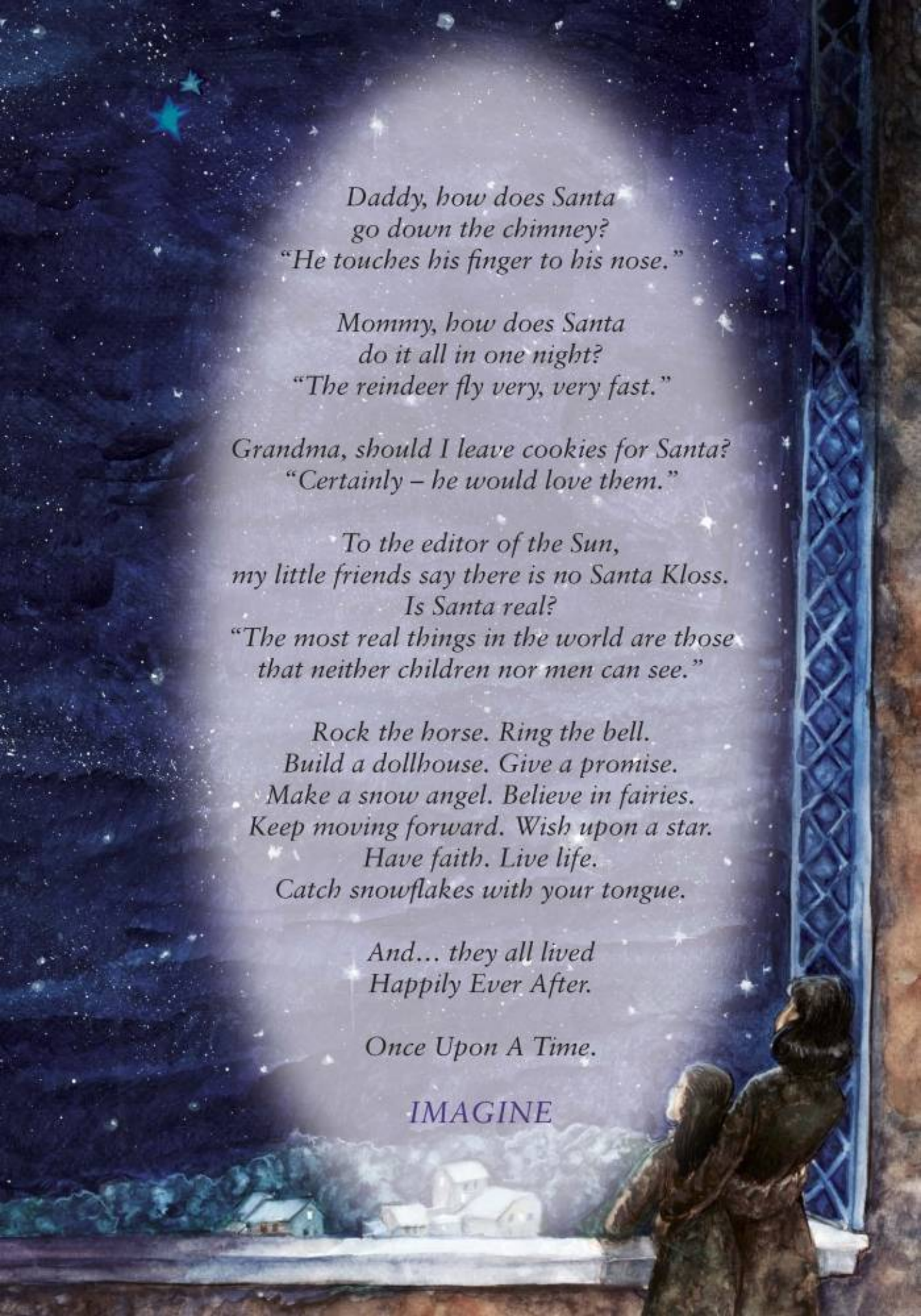
*To the editor of the Sun,
my little friends say there is no Santa Kloss.
Is Santa real?
"The most real things in the world are those
that neither children nor men can see."*

*Rock the horse. Ring the bell.
Build a dollhouse. Give a promise.
Make a snow angel. Believe in fairies.
Keep moving forward. Wish upon a star.
Have faith. Live life.
Catch snowflakes with your tongue.*

*And... they all lived
Happily Ever After.*

Once Upon A Time.

IMAGINE





About the Author

What do you dream of doing? Flying to the moon? Making lots of money? Being a famous actor or singer? Creating a wonderful family? Boldly going where no one has gone before?

Dan T. Davis dreams of doing many of those things, but knows that he will experience some of them only through stories. Still, he has enjoyed working with computers, writing books, and traveling to many lands. He enjoys scuba diving, sushi, and sunsets.

Dan dreams of always being able to learn, create, or seek things he's never seen before. He tries to live happily ever after.

A Carpenter's Legacy is the third of a trio of stories set in the best world Dan believes exists: the world of the imagination.

Acknowledgements

I thank my wife Jan for always being there, and who is my anchor in this life. Thanks to all my friends and family for supporting me in fulfilling a dream. I appreciate you all.

During the writing of this book, my father journeyed to a faraway land where he still loves his family, defends his country, and teaches others. My lovely sheltie Akiko, my constant companion for thirteen years, now plays at the Rainbow Bridge. I love them both very much and plan to see them again someday. That's the way I want to remember it.



About the Illustrator

Steve Ferchaud was born December 22, 1959; he has been drawing ever since. His parents say he never went through a “scribbling” stage. Steve grew up in Northern California. He still lives there; he insists he is still growing up. His muses are the best: the masters of the Renaissance, Norman Rockwell, Arthur Rackham, N. C. Wyeth, and Howard Pyle. He also finds inspiration from Frank Frazetta, Bernie Wrightson, James Christensen, and the illustrators of Mad Magazine.

Steve cut his illustrating teeth with his college newspaper, winning several awards. Since then he has illustrated magazines, newspapers, posters, billboards, and book covers. He draws caricatures at special events. To date, he has illustrated over twenty children’s books.

Steve is inspired by everything around him. He describes himself as a hermit who likes people. His next goal: write/illustrate his own books.

Acknowledgements

I owe a great debt to so many; I cannot make a list. Talent may be an engine, but those who have encouraged, influenced, and inspired me have been my fuel. I will always be grateful to them. I thank all the illustrators who have come before me. They will always be my teachers.

Most of all, I thank my parents, Charles and Ellen. They encouraged me to practice, to never give up, to never get discouraged, to laugh at myself now and then, and to always be nice. They didn’t teach me how to draw, but they taught me how to be a good human being.



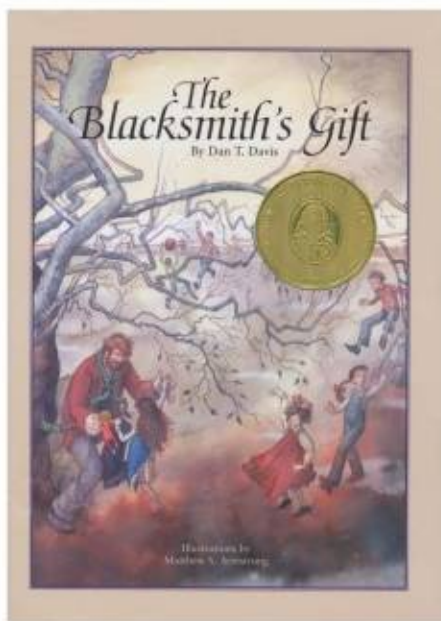
PAPA

MAMA



KILLER'S SON BRINGING
GIFT





The Blacksmith's Gift is the award winning tale about why Santa decided to give presents to children every year.

2005 Benjamin Franklin Award
Independent Book Publishers Association
Best independently published
juvenile/young adult fiction of the year.

He lifted out the most beautiful dollhouse I had ever seen. "This is the first gift I ever delivered," Papa declared, while carefully handing it to the blacksmith.

The Blacksmith's Gift is a real classic of a story, a joy from start to finish. Dan's writing lures the reader in and Matthew's illustrations are truly dazzling. For anyone who thought the art of good old fashioned storytelling was dead and gone, this book offers ample proof that it is alive and well."

– Mark Crilley, creator of the comic and children book series *Akiko*.

An Orphan's Promise warms the heart and delights the eyes. Dan masterfully weaves yet another classic Christmas story while Christina's delicate watercolors convey a sense of wonder and magic. A very enchanting book.

– Matthew S. Armstrong, Illustrator,
The Return to Narnia: The Rescue of Prince Caspian

Ruby stopped me. "Wait." She called Mama and distracted me by describing how she used to sleep under the stairs.

An Orphan's Promise is the story of Ruby Hjort, an orphan, who discovers that Santa, elves, and reindeer are not enough to solve all of one's problems. Instead, it is love, hope, and promises that can change everything.



Lynn Johnston, creator of the comic strip *For Better or For Worse* :

Beautiful books! Well written, and the illustrations are so in tune with your text! I enjoy reading to and working with children – and look forward to grand kids some day. Your books will be on their reading list.

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Go to your local bookstore or book website and ask for these titles.

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The Blacksmith's Gift

ISBN-13: 978-0-9725977-4-6

An Orphan's Promise

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Can reindeer really fly?



It's 1920, and we see two orphans
find a home with Santa's family,
becoming his newest elves.

Could this be Happily Ever After?

Yet, when all the toys burn,
a precious possession is lost,
and even your best is not good enough...

How do you regain hope?

Can miracles Really happen?

Can reindeer Really fly?

What do You believe?



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