

Harold the Elf

by

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A Note from the Author

Many years ago, I heard a story, a local legend, an old woman who would visit hospitalized children in Salt Lake City around Christmas time.

Now, there is nothing unusual about this, except that every time she came, the children actually felt better.

There was a feeling of hope and happiness after her departure and many children would often whisper to themselves, a simple phrase:

“I Believe”

Well, I was curious about the story behind this story, and I set out to find this woman and hear her story.

It was difficult to track her down. I checked out all the hospitals, while everyone had heard of her, no one knew who she was.

But I persisted, because there is always a story behind a legend. And she was definitely a legend.

By sheer luck, one day, I got a phone call from a friend of a friend, of a friend, of a friend, of a friend, who said simply “I know the woman you are looking for. She is my great-grandmother.”

At last, a lead.

“Can I meet her?” I asked.

And the girl said this “Yes. But I am afraid you won’t get much of an answer. She is very old, and she is very sick. She talks to an imaginary boy named Harold. But, you can try. If she is coherent, she will love you, and she will make you believe in things that you might think are impossible.”

So, I set out to meet this woman who had brought such hope to children for so many years.

I met her great-granddaughter at the hospital where the woman was. After introducing herself as Noelle she led me into a room where the woman was, and then quietly left.

She was so old, that her skin was practically transparent. I could see her veins through her papery skin. I was a bit nervous, and unsure until I looked into her eyes to see them alight with laughter, and quite alive.

“Harold, we will finish this in a moment,” she said in a very aged voice, “there is someone here to see me. And who are you my dear?”

“I’m Jenny.” I introduced myself.

“I am Emma Balfour Randall, and my friend over there in the corner is Harold.” She said smiling.

I looked over in the corner where she had pointed, but saw nothing. I merely nodded my head.

“I came to hear your story,” I said.

She smiled and replied politely “I know you did.”

She began her story.

By the end, when she asked me one simple question, my only reply was ‘Yes.’

So in loving memory of Emma Balfour Randall, I tell you her tale.

Once upon a time, there was a little girl named Emma, and a little boy named Joey. They were brother and sister and they lived together in a cozy house with their mom and dad.

Joey was ten years old and Emma was eight. One day while their mommy was unpacking the Christmas decorations, as it was that time of year again, Emma walked into the room and sat on the couch as her mommy carefully unwrapped the glass Santa that guarded the cookies and milk every year on Christmas Eve.

Emma stared at the Santa and then asked her mom a question.

“Mommy,” she said, staring at the Santa, “is Santa really real?”

Her mom set the Santa aside for a moment and went to sit with Emma, pulling her onto her lap to hold her.

“What makes you ask that?” Her mom said.

“Well, Bobby told me at school that there was no Santa Claus, and that he is just a fairytale that you made up to make me be good. Then I asked my teacher and she told me that I should just ask you who Santa is.”

Emma waited patiently while her mother laughed softly.

“Do you believe in Santa Claus, Emma?” Her mother asked softly.

“No.” Emma said sadly.

As Emma said those words, her mother sighed, and shook her head remembering the day she herself had stopped believing.

At the same time far up in the north pole a frozen wind blew across a little house nestled in the winter white, rattling windows so hard that one of them cracked.

Inside an old couple was sitting by the fireplace painting the faces of the little dolls that would be delivered on his special night. Kris, as his wife often called him, looked to the cracked window and shook his head sadly.

“That’s another one, Emma Balfour, take her off the list,” he said. His wife got up and unlocked the cabinet where they kept the list and took it out. With a flick of her

wrist she sent the list rolling across the wooden floorboards. All seventeen feet of it. She got out her magnifying glass and went in search of Emma Balfour. As she looked down the list, she noticed more names crossed out than not. She sighed.

“At this rate, in a few years, Christmas Eve will just be like any other night. So many names, so many children have lost their faith.”

“I know, I know.” Kris said running his finger down the cracked windowpane. “I’ve been thinking, maybe I should just retire, you know, get out of the cold, go somewhere warm and sunny. What do you think?”

“Retire?” She said, “but what about the children who still believe? What about them? Would you really crush their hopes like that?”

Kris, not so jolly at the moment, looked sadly at his wife. “They’ll stop believing soon enough, they always do. Sooner or later, they grow up.”

“That’s not true, Kris. Look at Mrs. Johnson, how old is she now, 84? She still writes to you every year. Then writes to you again with her grandchildren, and even again with her great-grandchildren. She believes in you! Then there is Mr. Hanson. He’s 96 now, he has no family, hardly any friends, and no reason to believe, but he does! As long as one person believes, then there will be hope. Now stop feeling sorry for yourself Kris Kringle! You have a lot of work to complete! And many more children who still have faith in you, and you don’t want to disappoint them now, do you?”

Back to his jolly old self, Kris laughed, his eyes twinkling like sapphires. “No, ma’am. I certainly do not want to disappoint them!”

Kris sat down again in his comfortable chair and picked up a train to inspect. Mrs. Kringle continued down the list until she came to Emma’s name. At the last moment she decided not to take the name off the list. Something told her that Emma would change her mind.

She didn’t see the little elf that had been hiding around the corner, listening to the disheartening conversation. As he padded down the hallway, he set a plan into motion that would change the course of Christmas forever in the mind of one little girl named Emma Balfour.

While Kris and his wife were busy stitching, painting, and sewing, the eavesdropping elf was collecting his few things for a forbidden journey to Emma's home.

He knew that if he were found out, he would be forbidden to ever return to this secret hideaway in the Northern tip of the North Pole. But that was okay with him, because he really didn't fit in here with the other elves for he was taller than most, about the size of a ten year old boy. Also, he didn't have the necessary points on his toes or his ears. Funny enough, Harold the elf, looked surprisingly human. Which in his mind made it the perfect disguise for this very secret mission.

After packing his bag, Harold padded on silent feet through the halls of the Elfin Lodge. He walked with long even strides, not the shuffle hop of the other elves, as they danced their way to work each day. He was a bit clumsy for an elf, you see, because elves have a way of walking that is not quite walking and not quite dancing, but rather a little shuffle with a skip at the end, that is so smooth they almost float. It is only the little skip at the end of each step that identifies them as elves. Each elf has it's own unique shuffle hop, so they are identifiable even from a distance. Harold knew each elf merely by listening to the way that they skipped across the air barely touching the ground.

As he made his way outside, he would occasionally duck inside an empty room to avoid the elves he knew would notice that he had his outing bag packed.

Harold stepped out into the surprisingly warm air of the Northern tip of the North Pole, and took a deep breath. There is something very strange with the atmosphere in this secret pocket in the North Pole. You see, it looks as cold as the coldest day in winter where the icicles are so frozen that you cannot even break them off, yet it feels like an early day in spring right before the flowers bloom.

The perfect spring breeze kept the occupants of the valley from freezing to death each year. But each year, as one more child stopped believing, the frozen wind would rush through the valley, freezing all in it's path, and is slowly destroying the magic of this hidden valley of Santa and his elves.

However, Harold had heard that should an adventurer come this far north all he feels is the bitter winds biting his cheeks, harder and harder the closer he comes to the valley. Should this outsider arrive in the valley, he would see nothing but snow and ice, for the valley was blanketed from the human eye by a magical force created by the belief of children worldwide. However, with each passing year, the valley became

more and more visible to the human eyes, and more and more open to the cruelty of the bitter wind, which had been trying desperately for centuries to destroy the happiness that this valley brought to the world.

As Harold stood there, he took one last look around, memorizing every last detail of his home. The gentle breeze swept the hair from his face, and placed a whispering kiss upon his brow, before blowing gently behind him and pushing him forward.

Perhaps it was only in his mind, but Harold was sure he heard the whispered, “Fare Well,” as the breeze blew him onward, and then the air around him went completely still. Harold turned around to get a final glimpse of home but he had stepped beyond the boundary of magic, and the valley was nothing but a field of snow.

He turned towards his destiny and began his journey guided by the spring breeze and protected from the bitter wind by the little magic he had left. He had enough Elfin magic to protect him for a few short days, but the farther away he got from the valley, the less magic he had. Time was running short. Christmas Eve was only eight days away.

In the very short time that it had taken Harold to walk to the edge of the valley and beyond the magic boundary, three more children had stopped believing. Two more windows cracked and a shingle blew off the house, as the bitter wind blistered across the valley howling her rage against the magic that has kept her out for so long. “Soon,” the bitter wind cried as she tried to force herself against the Kringle house. Mrs. Kringle scratched out the names and glanced outside to see if any of the elves had been caught in the blast. They had lost several elves to the bitter wind over the last few years, but luckily this time everyone was safe inside.

But safe for how long? She wondered to herself.

“I don’t know how long.” Kris said, knowing her thoughts, “as long as there are children who believe, we will be safe.”

Harold felt like he had been walking for days. With each mile that he walked, the colder the wind became. His magic was wearing thin. Occasionally, a ribbon of wind would snake around his body, chilling him to the core. But he continued walking, paying no heed to the bitter wind’s taunting.

He kept saying to himself over and over with each step he took “I believe. I believe.” And for a few more steps those words warded off the chill that wanted to steal his breath. After many days of walking, (only nine hours in Elfin time), Harold finally collapsed from the cold. He couldn’t ever remember being so cold, and the bitter wind blew around him laughing her hysterical laugh. “Soon” she cried in her evil joy. “Soooooooooon!”

As Harold lay there he chanted softly to himself, “I believe. I believe.” The bitter wind howled her rage and blew off to torment other victims. Harold lay there a moment longer to recover his breath, then stood up and dusted the snow off his legs and arms.

With determination, Harold marched onward, chanting “I believe. I believe.” At times the bitter wind would get so angry that he would have to yell at the top of his lungs, using all his energy to be heard above her screeching anger. But he kept on against the wind.

While Harold was fighting a lonely battle against the screeching wind, the other elves were getting ready for their night’s slumber, tucking themselves in, and snuggling under their blankets. There was only one bed empty that night. Millie, Harold’s mother, noticed as she came in to tuck him in. Startled, she began a search for her missing son.

She didn’t want to send an alert out on a missing elf just yet, so she quietly shuffle-hopped her way through the Elfin Lodge, then down to the reindeer paddock where Harold and a few of his friends would play with the young deer, and occasionally spend the night. She checked the workshop where Harold would often watch his father build the toys that were distributed on Christmas Eve, but Harold was nowhere to be found.

After searching high and low, she finally went to the Elfin Lodge and walked up the great flight, of stairs to the top where the big bell hung on the rafters. This bell was rung officially only once a year, as Santa and his team of reindeer headed off into the night to bring joy and happiness to the children of the world. Should the bell be rung at any other time, it rings out sad news that one of the elves has disappeared. Millie stood in front of the bell holding the hammer in her hands, and then with all her strength she struck the bell three times to send out the alarm that an elf was missing. At the same time as Millie was standing in front of the bell, Kris was reaching into his mailbag and pulled out a letter written by an Elfin hand. Curious he opened the letter

to read of Harold's plan. He had just finished reading the letter when he heard the three strikes of the Eve Bell.

Within a few minutes the Elfin Lodge was filled with the hundreds of elves that lived in the valley. Some came still in their pajamas, while others came fully dressed. The elves filed in by the hundreds! Shuffle hop shuffle, shuffle hop hop, echoed throughout the Great Elfin Lodge.

Amidst the shuffle hops of the elves, came the resounding thunk, thunk, thunk of big heavy boots. Then the click, click, click of a woman's small feet. Kris and Mrs. Kringle entered the hall. Kris held a letter crumpled in his hand. It was addressed to him and had been dropped in his mailbag just a short time ago. It was written in the strange scratches of the Elfin writing that actually looked like there were toothpicks scattered across the paper.

"I just got this in my mailbag," Kris' booming voice bounced off the walls. "I suspect that the missing elf is Harold," he stated. "I have a letter here from him. It reads:"

Dear Santa,

I am going to the house of Emma Balfour because in my heart I know that she believes. She just needs to be reminded of it. Do not worry about me, for I will be fine. I never really fit in here anyway.

I feel as though I was born for this very moment. This is why my ears aren't pointed and my toes aren't either. It's why I could never shuffle-hop, and rather stride like a man.

Please give my love to my mother, and the other elves. I will miss you all.

Jingling Bells,

Harold.

P.S. I believe.

Millie sat down hard on the top stair of the great flight of stairs.

“He is lost to me now, isn’t he?” She said softly. “Will he ever be able to find his way home?”

“Many years ago Millie, I would have said yes. There was more magic then, than we could have ever used in a year, but now, with the bitter wind fighting her way through our boundary, I am sorry to say that there will not be enough magic to sustain his journey home. Unless a miracle occurs, he will be bound to the human world until he dies.”

“But...”she whispered in horror, “elves don’t die.”

Kris shook his head in sorrow, and merely climbed the steps to sit beside her and hold her hand, consoling her as best he could.

Millie cried for a moment and then said simply, “I believe in miracles, Santa. I believe.”

The great hall of the Elfin Lodge was filled with the echoing voices of the elves as they cried out “I believe!”

“I know you do, but it is not you who must believe. It is children like Emma who believe in us that keep us here. They keep our magic strong. If Harold succeeds in his mission, I promise you he can come home. But the only way he will be able to return is on Christmas Day, when not even the bitter wind dares disrespect that day. He has very little time.”

“Well,” his mother said, “Harold will do it.”

While Santa consoled his mother, Harold fought his way south. He fought his way through every type of breath that the bitter wind chose to send his way. He trudged through snow piled higher than he was tall, he skated his way across the thinning ice as he made his way south. After many hours of trudging, he finally stepped upon dry land, something he had never seen before. He bent down and picked up the wet dirt in his hand, smelling the fragrance of the gritty sand. He tasted it, and immediately spit it out after discovering that it was not quite as tasty as it smelled or felt to the touch.

A few feet away was a patch of winter grass, a tough hardy substance that was too hard to pull out of the ground. Harold bent down to smell it and taste it, like he did with the dirt. He made a face when the sour grass was crushed between his teeth, and immediately spit it out. As he was kneeling down a little bug crawled across his hand,

he picked it up inspected it, sniffed it, and then set it down again to be on it's path back home. And besides, it didn't look that appetizing anyway.

Even though there was a slight chill in the air, Harold lay down on the fragrant ground to take a nap, for he hadn't slept in days. Had he slept for even a second, the bitter wind would have swept him under her blanket of icy breath, and he would have vanished forever.

He dreamt of home, the smell of wood burning in the fireplace, the stew cooking on the stove. He dreamt of his friends that he had left, and was again talking to them near the paddocks while the young deer frolicked in the snow. He could almost taste the stew simmering in the huge pot.

It had been many days since he had eaten. He awoke with a start and looked around to find a nice, hot fire with a pot of stew cooking above the flames. Beside it sat an old fisherman who looked even older than Santa himself, if that were possible. He spoke in a language that Harold quickly recognized as English. All elves are taught from birth to speak 20 human languages so that should they be banished from the North Pole, they could easily survive. English was one of the languages that Harold could speak fluently, with any accent he liked.

The old fisherman eyed him and said in a crusty voice that sounded as though it hadn't been used in a hundred years.

“You get banished?”

“What?” Harold said.

“I know you're an elf. You're kind of young, but I've seen your kind before. Did you get banished?”

“You still believe in Santa?” Harold asked in amazement.

Offended the man sat up straighter and shook his finger in Harold's face “Of course I believe! I've written him every year for 96 years!”

“Mr. Hanson?” Harold said in awe. The elves often told stories of the very few human adults who still believed, and Mr. Hanson was always at the top of their list. He looked exactly the same as Harold remembered. About ten years ago, Mr. Hanson

sent a picture of himself to Santa and the elves, which has hung on the board since then, along with all the other many pictures that had been sent to them.

“I know,” Harold said. “We talk about you all the time.”

Mr. Hanson sat a little straighter, slicked the remaining fuzz on the sides of his head down and brushed the dirt off of his shirt.

“So, what are you doin’ here?”

“I left Pole Valley.” Harold said.

“Why did you do a dumb thing like that?” Mr. Hanson asked, puzzled.

“Because, children aren’t believing in Santa anymore, and it’s destroying our home. The bitter wind wants to tear it apart.”

“That wind is a grouchy old woman, Elf!”

“I know.”

“Where are you headed, Elf?”

“To the Balfour House.” Harold replied.

“Why?”

“Because a little girl lost her belief in Santa, and he took her off the list. But what is really sad, is that her big brother still believes.”

Mr. Hanson shook his head, handed Harold a bowl of thick stew and sighed saying on his expelled breath “Kids these days. Don’t know what’s happening with them.”

Harold nodded and began to eat his first meal in days.

Chapter 2

Back at the Balfour House, things were in quite a disarray. The Balfour's just weren't ready for Christmas. With Emma's announcement, Emma's mom and dad had to go out and buy her as many presents as they could so that she wouldn't feel left out when Joey got presents from Santa and she did not. You see, Joey still believed.

Emma's mom and dad rushed around trying to buy everything on Emma's list for her, spending their hard-earned money.

"When did you realize that Santa wasn't real?" Emma's dad asked her mom.

"What are you talking about, George? Santa is real."

"Mary. You're joking, right?" George said.

"No, I'm not. I believe in Santa Claus. I believe in everything he represents. He is hope for the future. He brings happiness and laughter. He brings families closer together. Oh, yes, George, I believe Santa is very real. As real as the happiness that he brings."

Up in Pole Valley the bitter wind gathered speed as she began her sweep of the quiet village as George lost his belief in Santa. But as she swept her tornado of snow to the boundary of the valley, she was repelled by the defense of Emma's mother, as she told George of her belief. The bitter wind whipped over the valley not even stirring a snowflake, howling her rage that she had been cast away once more.

Kris got up from his chair as he heard the bitter wind screaming outside. He looked out the window to see the calm day, and he smiled.

"Put Mary Balfour back on the list."

"Oh Kris," Mrs. Kringle sighed, "She's been gone a long time. I'm glad she's home."

"Me too." Kris said. Then he did something that he hadn't done in a long, long time. He laughed a great roaring laugh that shook his body from the roots of his hair to the tips of his toes, rocking back and forth, as it rumbled up from deep inside him.

“Mrs. Kringle,” Kris said still chuckling, “this Christmas we may just get our miracle!”

And again he laughed.

Inside the Elfin lodge, the elves were completely still. Not a breath of air was heard. Not a shuffle-hop, not even a blinking eye, as the merry laughter of Santa’s famous chuckle echoed throughout the Great Hall.

“Somebody’s come home.” Ozzie said smiling.

Millie whispered with tears in her eyes “Somebody’s begun to believe again.”

And the cheers of the elves could be heard even above the howling bitter wind outside Pole Valley.

Chapter 3

Harold traveled all night and all day with Mr. Hanson to get to the Balfour House. They rode in a train together until they reached the city where the Balfour's lived.

"This is as far as I go, Elf. I don't like cities."

"But where do I go?"

"They live on Mistletoe Lane, right?"

"Yes. 23987 Mistletoe Lane. Well it's been a long time, but if you walk up Sapphire Street, right here, you'll run right into Mistletoe Lane. Turn right, go about fifty steps and it will be right there, a big white house with a bright red door."

"How do you know that?" Harold asked in amazement.

"Some things you just know. I also got me a map and studied it while you were sleeping." He laughed when Harold kicked a stone and giggled himself. He should have known that.

"But then again, some things are just magic," and with that, Mr. Hanson turned around and disappeared into the crowd.

Harold shook his head and smiled. "Magic," he said simply.

Harold followed Mr. Hanson's directions exactly and found himself in front of a white house with a big red door. He reached out and knocked on the door. Emma's little face peeked out, looked around, saw nothing and walked away. Harold knocked again. Joey's face peeked out the window this time and upon seeing Harold, the door opened.

"Hi." Joey said.

"Hi, Joey." Harold said.

"How did you know my name?"

“Magic.” Harold said smiling.

“Are you a magician?” Joey asked in wonder.

“Nope. I’m an Elf.” Harold said.

“Oh.” Joey said disappointed. “You’re here to see Emma.”

“Actually, I’m here to see you.” Harold said on a spur of the moment decision.

“But...” Joey said, “I still believe in Santa. Why would you want to see me?”

Harold just shrugged.

“Because you can see me. Emma can’t.”

“Because she doesn’t believe.” Joey said wisely.

“That’s right.”

At that same moment, Mary, Emma and Joey’s mom, came walking around the corner.

“Joey, who is your friend?”

“Oh, this is Harold.” Joey said.

“Hello Harold. Would you like to come in and have some milk and cookies?”

Harold had heard for years and years about the treats that humans left for Santa each Christmas, and for years he had dreamt of what they would taste like, and finally as he walked inside and smelled the baking cookies, he knew he had found a small piece of Pole Valley right here in the Balfour House.

“Yes, Mrs. Balfour, I would really like some cookies.”

“Well come on in.” Mrs. Balfour smiled warmly and welcomed Harold into their house.

The trio didn't notice Emma standing in the other room watching her mother and her brother talking to the air, and inviting it in for cookies and milk.

Harold, Joey, and Mrs. Balfour walked into the kitchen and sat around the small table nestled near the fireplace. Mrs. Balfour got out three glasses of milk and a plate of cookies, and sat down to chat with the two boys.

Emma stepped cautiously into the kitchen and stared at the three glasses and the empty chair, and watched while her mother and her brother laughed and continued to talk to the air boy.

"They are playing a joke on me." Emma thought to herself. "They are playing make believe."

Emma thought that she would have the last laugh, so she walked up to the table, grabbed the glass of milk that was sitting where the air boy was, and drank it down in a few gulps.

"Emma!" Mrs. Balfour said in astonishment, "that is very, very rude. You apologize immediately to Harold!" And then to Harold, "I'm so sorry Harold. I don't know what has gotten into her."

"But mom!" Emma began to cry, "there is nobody there!" And Emma left the room sobbing.

Mrs. Balfour looked to Joey and Harold, and sat in confused silence not really sure what had just happened.

"Did she not see you?" Mrs. Balfour asked.

"She can't see me." Harold said sadly. "She can't see me because she doesn't believe I exist."

"I'm an elf, Mrs. Balfour. A genuine 100% real Santa Elf straight from Pole Valley in the North Pole."

"But..." Mrs. Balfour stared hard at Harold, "you're a real boy. A real live, breathing, flesh and bone, boy."

“No. I’m an Elf.” Harold said taking a big bite of chocolate chip cookie.

“Are all elves like you?” She asked softly.

“No. They all have pointy ears, and pointy toes. We elves are exactly what you imagine us to be, are, but my destiny was different.”

“And Santa? Is he round with long white hair and a long white beard?”

“He is everything you imagine him to be.” Harold said, grinning.

“Oh, my! What day is it today?” Mrs. Balfour said frantically.

“It is the day before Christmas Eve.” Harold said knowingly.

“There is so much to do! I have to bake the cookies, finish the decorations, clean the chimney...” Mrs. Balfour walked out of the kitchen listing off the things she needed to do. Harold laughed when she walked back in and said matter of factly “Is there still time to write him a letter?”

“Yes.” Harold answered.

Harold then looked at Joey who had been sitting glumly since Emma ran out. “How are you going to make my sister believe?”

“I’m not. You are.” Harold said.

“But how am I going to do that?” Joey asked.

“You are going to tell her this story...” and Harold proceeded to tell the story of what happens in Pole Valley every time a child stops believing. He told Joey of the bitter wind who has hated Santa Claus for so long, and finally has her chance, a small possibility to destroy him utterly. He told him of the elves that are sometimes caught outside when the bitter wind gets through and how they are never seen again. Finally, Harold told Joey about the list, and what happens when you stop believing.

“They just scratch your name off on the list. You should see this list! It is seventeen feet long with millions and millions of names on it. In one inch of paper there are ten thousand names written down. You can’t even see there are letters there. But

unfortunately, there is a lot of black lines crossing out the names. So that is my story that you should tell her. Then tell her that you believe, and your mom believes. Then let her decide. You must remember to let her use her own imagination, because Santa Claus is what she believes him to be, and she alone. Just like Santa Claus is exactly what you believe him to be. Now, go up there and teach your sister the most important lesson that she will ever learn.”

Joey walked up the stairs, sat down on Emma’s bed and began to tell the story that Harold had just told him. Harold sat patiently invisible in the kitchen while Mrs. Balfour got the house ready for Christmas Eve, and Mr. Balfour read his paper.

“Mary!” George called out all of a sudden, “you are right!”

Mrs. Balfour came bustling into the kitchen her arms piled high with lights and said “What dear?”

“You were right! I believe in Christmas! I believe in Santa Claus! I believe in everything it stands for! You were right!”

“I know.” Mrs. Balfour said smiling. “Did you see Harold?” She asked, pointing to the chair next to the one that Mr. Balfour had been sitting in.

“Who are you?” Mr. Balfour asked in surprise.

“I am Harold the Elf.”

Mr. Balfour collapsed onto the floor in a faint.

“Some people take it better than others,” Harold said wisely, as he looked across the table to Mrs. Balfour.

Up in Pole Valley a cry was heard throughout all the buildings in the valley, “Add George Balfour back on the list!” And again the laughter of pure joy echoed across the land.

Many hours into the night Joey finally finished his story to Emma. He ended it by saying these words:

“Now Emma, I don’t want to make you to believe in him, just because I do, but I want you to think about something. If you don’t believe in him, he won’t come. That’s why he won’t come to Bobby’s house, because Bobby doesn’t believe in him, but it is your decision to make.”

Emma sat quietly for a moment before she said softly “I believe, Joey. I believe in Santa Claus.”

Up in the Northern Tip of the North Pole Kris Kringle and his wife smiled at each other and said softly “We got our miracle. Harold can come home.”

As Emma and Joey walked down the stairs Harold greeted them and smiled. Emma cocked her head to one side and said “Oh! You’re an elf!”

“Yes, I am!” Harold said with pride. “I am Harold the Elf!”

The children spent the rest of the evening playing games and talking with Harold. The next day, Harold showed them how to build the biggest and best blanket fort that ever existed. As the evening rolled around, Harold turned to Emma and said softly, “What do you want for Christmas, Emma?”

Emma looked outside at the brown grass that had dried during the fall and said simply “I want it to snow. I want a white Christmas.”

“What do you want Harold?” Joey asked.

After thinking about it for a moment Harold said simply “I want to go home.”

“But we’ll never see you again.” Emma said sadly.

“That’s not true,” Harold said. “If you ever find yourself in the Northern Tip of the North Pole, go the farthest point that you can and turn right. Walk until you see the valley of snow and ice, and if you still believe, then look just beyond that and I will be there. Always.”

So it was, on Christmas Eve as the children were tucked away safe in their beds in the Balfour House, Santa quick as lightening, slid down the chimney, filled the stockings, left out the presents, tucked a sleeping Harold under his arm, and was out of the Balfour house without a whisper of sound. As the bells jingled on his sleigh, he called out “Merry Christmas to all, and to all a good night.” And as the sleigh disappeared in the darkness, little white flakes of snow fell to the ground.

Author’s Note

After she told me her story, she started to drift off to sleep. I turned to go. She held out her hand to her invisible companion in the corner, and in a twinkle of an eye, I caught a glimpse of a grinning boy that could only have been Harold the Elf.

As I left the hospital, I made one Christmas wish. I wished for snow that Christmas, just like Emma had, many decades ago.

I woke up the next morning, and it was the biggest snowfall in the history of our town. It stayed on the ground all winter long. It was perfect weather that looked as cold as the coldest day in winter where the icicles are so frozen that you cannot even break them off, yet it felt like an early day in spring right before the flowers bloom.

From that moment on I never stopped believing.

So now I ask you this, the same question she asked me:

Do you believe?

The End