

Winter Lily

By Jenny Good

A Note from the Author

After my last adventure of trying to discover where Harold had got himself off to, I have received several letters from people who have had Harold sightings or even had him appear in their lives for the briefest Christmas moment.

Through many of the stories I laughed while I cried. . Harold, it seems, is up to his usual mischief of making people believe in miracles.

There was one letter in particular that caught my attention and was probably the most poignant story of the many I have seen. It came from a doctor—a surgeon, to be exact. This was surprising to me, as scientific minds do tend to be the most skeptical and therefore the least likely to believe in things that cannot be touched, tasted, seen or explained, let alone felt by the heart and soul of a believer. In her letter she told of two twins, Lily and Rosie, who were patients of hers almost thirty years ago.

What caught my attention was the nature of these two girls, and it made my heart ache to know them. They truly embodied the spirit of Christmas in their kind and giving natures. Over the past year I have questioned what Christmas *really* means. And the answer I got from people all over, regardless of race, creed or religion, was the idea that Christmas represents the ability of mankind to overcome hatred and truly find it in their hearts to give of themselves.

I set out to find Dr. Rachel Taylor. She was quite easy to locate actually, as she had mentioned in her letter the hospital where she met Lily and Rosie.

So, over Christmas holiday last year, I hopped on a plane to go out and meet this illustrious doctor. When I arrived at the hospital, I was dismayed to find that Dr. Taylor had cut back her working hours, due to her age and her failing health.

After explaining who I was to some very suspicious staff, I finally convinced someone on the staff—Nelly was her name—that my intentions toward Dr. Taylor were, in fact, good. I showed her the letter that Dr. Taylor had sent me. I watched as Nelly’s eyes filled with tears that soon slipped down her cheeks.

“I remember these girls,” Nelly said. “The sweetest things you ever did see. I still have the picture they drew of me.”

She showed me a child’s drawing, faded by age and yellowed on the edges, of a younger, thinner Nelly in an old-fashioned nurse’s uniform—the white kind with the little hat, like in the movies.

I smiled at the curly, multi-colored writing:

“Dear Nelly:
Thank you for taking such good care of us.

We love you.
Love,
Lily and Rosie”

Then Nelly showed me another picture—this one of an elf. The title at the top said simply, “Harold the Elf,” and was signed by Lily at the bottom.

“This one she named Harold the Elf. She was so funny about that elf. She would *swear* up and down that he was sitting right next to her and would have full conversations as if he were. No one had the heart to tell her that there was nothin’ there. So we played along to avoid traumatizing the little thing. It was her sister’s idea, actually. We would sit in that room and have conversations with the air that would make the girls laugh so hysterically. But you should really let Rachel tell you the story. It is, after all, hers.”

With that, she gave me Dr. Rachel Taylor’s address and phone number.

I drove to her house, and, when I arrived, the first thing that I noticed was the candle burning in the window. It is an old tradition that when you await the arrival of someone dearly loved, you light a candle in the window to help guide the way home. I wondered who Dr. Taylor was waiting for.

I knocked on the door and waited, still wondering about the candle. The door was opened by a friendly woman that reminded me of my grandmother. She smiled at me and said, “Come in, I have been expecting you.”

“You know who I am?” I asked with much surprise.

She replied with the most mischievous grin, “Of course I do. I did not get to where I am without first doing my homework. Something you obviously know about. So come in, and I will tell you my tale.”

For several hours I listened to her story. We laughed and cried over the antics of Harold, Lily and Rosie. At the end of her story, I looked around her home and began to see the details that I had missed when I had first arrived, and which you will understand when you come to the end of the book.

But I will tell you one thing; in Lily, Rosie and Dr. Rachel Taylor’s story, I found that purest of human emotions: selflessness.

The bulk of their story begins on Christmas Eve and ends on Christmas morning, thirty years to the day of my arrival on Dr. Taylor’s doorstep.

Chapter One

On a dark, warm night, just as winter was fading into spring, twins were born. As the rain tapped against the pavement outside, the doctor coaxed two beautiful little girls into the world.

Lily came first, screaming to the world with all the spunk her little body could manage. Rosie followed shortly thereafter, quiet and calm and seemingly alert. While Lily hollered and howled at being separated from her twin in the cold hospital room, Rosie lay silent, waiting for her turn to be bathed, swaddled and returned to her mother and sister.

The doctor pressed the stethoscope to Lily's chest and listened with dismay as she heard the irregular heartbeat of the newborn. She checked the rest of the baby's vital signs and found them all to be normal. She listened to the heart again, hoping that what she heard had been an echo of the rain outside. But it was not to be. This baby had been born with a heart too large for her body.

The doctor sent Lily for some X-rays to see how bad off her new patient actually was. She moved on to Rosie's physical exam. The doctor picked up tiny Rosie and put her on the scale. She was one pound lighter than her big sister. She put the stethoscope up to Rosie's heart and listened to the strong beat, inwardly sighing a breath of relief. Her heart was perfect.

She took Rosie's blood pressure, a little high for one so new to life. This concerned the doctor a little. She checked the rest of the baby's vital signs, then sent her for some X-rays as well, just to ensure that she didn't have the same problem as her twin.

Dr. Taylor smiled as she heard Lily screaming down the hall as she was being brought back to her mama. So far, Rosie hadn't uttered a sound. She just lay there, patiently waiting for her sister.

The nurse returned Lily to her mama for her first meal and took Rosie down the hall to the X-ray room. Dr. Taylor decided that she wouldn't tell the mother what she found on the first exam just yet. Since these babies were her first, Dr. Taylor told her that all the checkups were normal and not to worry. After all, there was no point in distressing the woman right after she had given birth.

Lily quieted down a little when she was put in her mama's arms, though she still let out an occasional ear-splitting squall, demanding for her sister. Dr. Taylor watched Lily and her mama with a mixture of pride and sadness.

The nurse, Nelly, delivered the X-rays, and Dr. Taylor took them into a different room to study them. As she looked at the tiny bones that the X-ray displayed, she felt her stomach drop to her feet. Lily's heart did not look good. It was better than what she had originally thought, but worse than what a newborn baby should have. Dr. Taylor knew that Lily would not have the kind of life that every child deserves, and that she wouldn't be able to

run and jump and twirl with her friends. Lily would be confined to a life of restricted activity. Dr. Taylor also knew that, with a heart like Lily's, her life would eventually be cut very short. Her little body just couldn't compete with the spirit that Lily brought into the world. She rubbed her eyes and sighed again. Nelly had returned Rosie to her parents shortly after Dr. Taylor had taken the X-rays to the next room.

When Dr. Taylor entered the room she found each parent holding a girl in their arms and watching them, exchanging smiles when Lily fussed because Rosie was too far away. Nelly came to the door with Rosie's X-rays. Dr. Taylor again went to the room next door.

She studied Rosie's X-rays with the same heavy heart. While Rosie's heart, lungs and other vital organs were healthy her kidneys were not. She could see the bumps on Rosie's kidneys that told her that Rosie would have much of the same life-style and life span as her twin.

She knew that the girls' parents would never have enough money to afford the treatment these girls would need to prolong their lives.

What they needed was a miracle.

Up in the North Pole on that very same spring day, Mrs. Claus pulled out the list and added Lily and Rosie May. She found Dr. Taylor's name on the list and shook her head. Dr. Taylor's name had been crossed off, as she had stopped believing many years ago. Mrs. Claus knew that earlier that evening Dr. Taylor had wished for a miracle. It was not going to be the miracle that she wished for, but it would be a miracle just the same.

For the next several Christmases, Mrs. Claus kept her eye on the May twins and Dr. Taylor. Out of the pure goodness of her heart, Dr. Taylor decided to take on the care of these babies as they grew up. She took on their medical expenses, and she did what she could to help the May family out with whatever they needed, whether it was food, clothing or medicine. Sometimes she and the Mays raised some money from wealthy people. Sometimes they just managed to pull off some miracles by intention alone. With each passing year, though, Dr. Taylor became more and more hopeless about Lily and Rosie's conditions.

Eight Christmases after Lily and Rosie were born, Mrs. Claus knew that something had to be done. She knew there was only one that could actually handle the job. And she also knew that there was not much time left.

She got out her quill and some paper and starting writing a letter. When she finished it, she went outside and found Dancer (one of the few reindeer that wasn't on vacation) and asked him to deliver it. Pleased to have something to do, Dancer raced off into the night on a mission to deliver the letter.

Harold was playing hide-and-seek with his new friend, Justin. He and Justin had met at the beach a few days ago and become fast friends. Justin loved that he was the only person for miles that could see Harold. They both thought it was extremely funny to have conversations in front of people who couldn't see or hear Harold.

Justin's parents were the reason that Harold had come in search of Justin. They had stopped believing in Santa when they were both very young. Harold thought it was time that some of that magic was restored in their lives. So, he sought Justin out on the beach and befriended him.

Justin was an only child, and his family didn't celebrate Christmas at all. They wouldn't let Justin believe in Santa Claus or bake him cookies on Christmas Eve. But, in spite of all that, Justin still wrote Santa a letter each year and mailed it secretly from school.

Harold knew this mission would take him at least until Christmas to accomplish. Harold and Justin got along famously. Justin was ten years old and a firm believer in all things magical. Harold, being one of the magical things himself, instantly became Justin's best friend. Their friendship confirmed everything Justin had known all along.

Harold was crouching behind a tree waiting for Justin to find him when Dancer arrived with a letter. He was obviously exhausted from his journey. It is very hard for Santa, his elves and his reindeer to be away from the North Pole for very long. The magic that keeps Pole Valley safe from the bitter wind does not last long outside of the valley, and, the longer they are away, the more the rest of world affects them. Without the magic of Pole Valley keeping him safe, Santa would begin to become just like you and me--normal, everyday average folk. The elves would simply vanish, as they are part of a world that doesn't exist here at all, except in the minds of the very young or the true believers.

Harold was the only one who could be away from Pole Valley for long periods of time without it affecting him. That is probably because his destiny was to make people believe in miracles they had forgotten, and since people didn't usually come up to the North Pole, he had to go to them.

Harold took the letter from Dancer and gave him a piece of food from his magic pouch. Since it was elfin food that Santa had delivered last Christmas, it had enough magic to perk him right up. He darted away to return to the North Pole before Santa's magic could run out and he became just another reindeer.

Harold called a stop to the game of hide-and-seek and then opened the letter from Mrs. Claus.

Dear Harold:

There is someone who desperately needs your help. This will be your hardest mission of all, as it will involve many people who need to learn how to believe again. Two girls were born a few years ago; and eight Christmases have gone by since then. They both still very much believe.

However, that is not the reason I write you. I am writing you because these girls have a doctor that stopped believing many years ago, and it is time that she learn what it means to really believe in something that her mind cannot accept, yet her heart desperately needs to. I want you to show her. Her name is Dr. Rachel Taylor.

The coming year will be hard for her. She needs something to hold on to. I think you can give that to her.

Love,

Mrs. Claus

P.S. I have enclosed some cookies straight from the oven. Enjoy them!

Harold looked at the letter and turned it over, but there were no cookies to be found. Then he smiled, closed his eyes and wished. He opened his eyes and found a plate of oven-warm cookies and two glasses of milk on a tray that had once been the letter.

“Whoa! That’s neat!” Justin said, having seen the letter change into the cookie tray.

“Here,” Harold said, holding out a cookie. “Mrs. Claus bakes the *best* cookies in the whole wide world!”

Justin took a bite and nearly fell over. They were the perfect balance of creamy chocolate and sugar sweetness, with just a touch of magic to make the taste linger.

“This is the best cookie EVER!” Justin yelled, jumping up and down.

“I know,” Harold said.

Harold sighed because he knew it was time to leave Justin. What Mrs. Claus didn’t seem to understand is that away from Pole Valley, time traveled very fast. What may have seemed like weeks to Mrs. Claus was actually almost an entire year. It was almost Christmas Eve. You see, time in the North Pole is much different. Time goes very slowly so that Santa and the elves can make all the toys that Santa delivers on Christmas.

Harold looked at Justin and Justin knew that bad news was on the way.

“You have to go?” Justin asked.

“Yep. I have to go.” Harold said.

“Why?” Justin asked.

“Because someone needs my help to remember that Santa Claus exists,” Harold said.

“Harold, why do people forget that he is real?” Justin asked.

“Justin,” Harold said, “there is something strange about this place that makes people suspicious of everything they can’t see or touch or taste or smell. Perhaps it’s the way they hate each other or hurt each other that makes it impossible for them to see the magic in their lives every day. I’m not sure what it is, but the older people get, the less they remember the things that were important when they were kids. It makes me very sad.”

“Me too,” Justin said. “Who do you go to next?”

“I have to find a Dr. Rachel Taylor,” Harold said.

“Oh! I know her! She’s my doctor!” Justin jumped up and down, excited that Harold wouldn’t be going off too far.

“You know her?” Harold asked.

“Well, I used to know her. She’s been really busy lately taking care of these two girls. So she stopped seeing the rest of her patients, because the girls are really sick.

Harold thought about that for a moment, nodding his head absent-mindedly. Maybe this wouldn’t be as difficult as he thought it was going to be.

Meanwhile, several miles away from where Harold and Justin had been playing hide-and-seek, Dr. Taylor knocked on the door at the May house. It was time to take Lily and Rosie to the hospital. She had held out as long as she could and fought to keep them at home, but they were at a point where they had to have constant medical care.

When Mrs. May opened the door, Dr. Taylor smiled and said, “It’s time, Sharon. They have to go now.” Mrs. May nodded sadly and went to her husband’s arms to cry.

Dr. Taylor had just gotten back the latest set of test results that she had done on the twins, and they didn’t look very hopeful. It was strange, because, as Lily’s health worsened, Rosie’s health declined shortly thereafter.

Dr. Taylor went to the twins’ room and found them both in their huge bed, drawing pictures. Since they were born, both girls *refused* to sleep in separate beds. As babies they would cry until they were put together. When Lily had to go into the hospital a few years back, Rosie went and made their nurse put two beds together so that they wouldn’t be apart.

Dr. Taylor knew that if Lily were to die, Rosie would probably follow shortly after her. A few years ago, Dr. Taylor had put Rosie's name on a donor list to receive a kidney transplant. At that time kidney transplants were a relatively new procedure with an okay success rate. Dr. Taylor thought it was at least worth a shot. If they could get a good match, then Rosie would have a good chance at life. Unfortunately for Lily, there was not much Dr. Taylor could do to help her. It was simply a matter of time.

"Hi, Dr. Rachel!" The twins said in unison when she entered their room.

"Hi, my little flowers," Dr. Rachel said. "How are you both feeling?"

"Fine," Lily said.

"A little tired," Rosie said.

Lily turned to Rosie and frowned. "Why didn't you tell me that you were feeling tired? You should be napping if you are tired, not drawing pictures."

"Don't be my mother," Rosie said back.

"Our mother," Lily corrected.

Lily was constantly watching over Rosie to make sure that she was okay. It had been that way since they were babies. If Rosie started to cry, then Lily would grab onto some part of her body until she stopped. The love they had for each other was obvious in every action they took. Dr. Rachel smiled as she watched them argue back and forth over whether it was right that Rosie drew rather than slept.

"What do you think, Dr. Rachel? Do you think that Rosie should be sleeping or drawing?"

Before Dr. Rachel had a chance to answer, Rosie burst into tears.

"I just want to spend as much time with you as I can!" She cried.

Lily took Rosie in her arms, as a mother would, and hugged her and rocked her back and forth.

"It's okay, Rosie, don't cry. Don't cry. It's okay."

Dr. Rachel hung back while they hugged. It was amazing how different they were. Lily seemed like she was a hundred years old. She had crammed so much life into eight years. Rosie, on the other hand, acted like an eight-year-old. It sometimes surprised Dr. Rachel that they were mere minutes apart.

When Rosie had stopped crying, Lily released her and turned to Dr. Rachel.

“Is it time to go to the hospital?” Lily asked.

Dr. Rachel nodded.

“Will Nelly be there?” Rosie asked.

“Yep. Nelly will be there,” Dr Rachel answered.

“Can we take our drawing stuff?” Lily asked.

“And our teddy bears?” Rosie asked.

“Yes, and yes,” Dr Rachel answered them both. “You tell me what you need, and I will pack it for you. The car should be here in a few minutes.”

By car she actually meant ambulance, but they had always pretended that it was a huge limousine coming to take them off to a new movie premiere or to meet the queen of some far-off land.

“Oh! Where are we going this time?” Rosie asked.

“Well, I thought, since it is almost Christmas, we would go up to the North Pole,” Dr. Rachel said.

“Oh, that sounds lovely,” Lily said. “Be sure to pack my furry coat and my jewels. I don’t want to be cold in the North Pole. And I feel positively naked without my jewels.”

Dr. Rachel laughed at Lily’s imagination.

“And Miss Rosie, what can I pack for you?”

Rosie thought for a moment, then said, “Don’t forget my silver-handled hairbrush. I don’t want to visit Santa with messy hair. I would also like you to pack my ball gown. I don’t want to miss out on any of the fantastic parties up there, or be underdressed.”

“Excellent choices, your majesties. I will have your cases ready momentarily.”

Since Dr. Rachel had been their doctor since birth, she knew everything that needed to be packed to keep the girls happy and entertained while they were in the hospital. She packed each girl a separate case, forgetting nothing.

When she finished packing the bags, she took them downstairs and set them by the door. She went and got a cup of coffee from the kitchen and sat with Mr. And Mrs. May for a few moments, offering whatever comfort she could give.

She glanced at her watch and saw that it was almost time for the ambulance to arrive. She went back upstairs. Through the cracked door she could hear the girls chattering away, excitedly. She smiled and walked into the room. She had assumed that they would be talking to each other, but that was not the case at all.

They were staring at some point in the air and talking to it. Taken aback, Dr. Rachel didn't say anything, but watched in fascination as the girls carried on a conversation with the air. She knew that they were imaginative children, but this was beyond anything she had ever seen them do. It was as though there actually *was* someone sitting there.

"May I interrupt?" Dr. Taylor asked with a grin.

Lily and Rosie turned in unison, their faces bright with awe and amazement.

"It's time," Dr. Rachel said.

"Can we bring a friend?" Lily asked, looking back at the empty chair.

"Of course. Who would you like to bring?" Dr. Rachel started looking around for a bear or doll she had perhaps forgotten to pack.

"We want to bring Harold," Rosie said, pointing to the chair.

"Who's Harold? Is he a new friend?" Dr. Rachel.

Both the twins looked at the chair as though it had just spoken.

"What do you mean she can't see you?" Lily asked, outraged.

They listened to the answer, then turned and looked at Dr. Rachel.

"You can't see Harold?" Rosie said. "He's right there!" She pointed.

Then she understood. Dr. Rachel went and picked up the chair. It was a lot heavier than it had looked, and she almost dropped. At that point the girls broke out into hysterical laughter.

"Not the chair, Dr. Rachel, the elf *in* the chair," Lily said, giggling as she watched Harold's face while Dr. Rachel set the chair back down.

She laughed. She had obviously just been had, but she decided to play along anyway. They all heard the ambulance pull up outside.

"Our sleigh is here to take us to the North Pole," Dr. Rachel said. "Would Harold like to come? Being an elf and all, he must really miss it up there."

The girls turned and watched the sadness creep over Harold's face. He had been away for a very long time. He missed his mom and Santa and the other elves. He missed playing Elf Ball on Christmas Eve. He missed watching the new reindeer learn to fly.

"Do you want to come, Harold?" Dr. Rachel asked. Though she was looking over in his direction, because she couldn't see him, she stared at a point above his head.

Harold winked at the girls and said, "Of course I would like to come. I am, after all, an elf!"

The girls smiled and relayed what he said.

Dr. Rachel smiled, then left to get the wheelchairs. She returned shortly and loaded Rosie into the wheelchair and took her out to the ambulance. She waited while Nelly loaded Rosie into the bed inside, then went back in to get Lily.

When she walked in, Lily asked her a question that she wasn't sure how to answer.

"Dr. Rachel, how much longer do I have to live?"

"I honestly don't know, Lily. It could be days, it could be several more years."

Lily nodded. Dr. Rachel could tell that she was thinking about something. She waited while Lily formed her next question.

"How much longer do you think Rosie has to live?"

Dr. Rachel sat on the bed and let Lily crawl into her lap. "Rosie doesn't have much time left. She needs new kidneys and I don't know when she will be able to get them."

Lily nodded again, then asked, "If she gets new kidneys, does that mean she will live longer?"

Dr. Rachel nodded and answered, "Yes. How much longer, I don't know. This procedure is still fairly new. And while the success rate is good, it isn't a hundred percent yet."

"If she gets new kidneys and I'm not here, will you make sure that she's okay?"

Suppressing the urge to cry, Dr. Rachel nodded and smiled. She didn't actually trust her voice to come out sounding normal, so she said nothing.

She took Lily out and again waited while Nelly loaded her next to her sister. They immediately reached out for each other and clasped hands. Dr. Taylor gave her car keys to Mr. May and got in beside Lily. With her free hand, Lily reached out and grabbed Dr.

Rachel's hand. Dr. Rachel smiled as Rosie reached out and grabbed Nelly's hand, sitting on the other side of the ambulance. They rode to the hospital, all holding hands.

At one point, Lily looked over and started laughing. She nudged Rosie, who looked where Lily had and also started to laugh. Dr. Rachel and Nelly exchanged confused looks.

Lily and Rosie were laughing at Harold squashed up against door. Dr. Rachel didn't leave him much room to sit, so he was forced to contort his body into a weird shape to fit into the ambulance.

"Just sit on the bed," Rosie said.

"Who're you talkin' to, girl?" Nelly asked.

"Harold," Rosie said.

"And who's that?" Nelly asked.

"The elf. At the end of our bed," Rosie said.

"She can't see him, Ro," Lily said.

Rosie nodded, then moved her feet over so that Harold would have a place to sit.

When they arrived at the hospital Dr. Rachel and Nelly each took a girl to the room that had been prepared for them. Nelly had already pushed the bed together and set up the room so that they would feel as comfortable as possible.

She hung a calendar on the wall with an 'X' through every day that had passed. There were only two days left until Christmas.

"Okay, my little flowers, this is what I need right now. Rosie, I need you to sleep, right now. Okay?"

Rosie nodded.

"Lily, I need some tests from you. Okay?"

Lily nodded.

"What about Harold?" Rosie asked.

"I need Harold to sit tight for a little bit while I get these tests done and you take a nap."

Rosie looked at an empty space in the room, apparently checking this with Harold and listening to what he was saying.

“Harold is actually going to go get someone to visit us. Is it okay if we have some friends over?”

Since Dr. Rachel knew that, due to their restricted life, both Lily and Rosie didn't have any friends aside from each other, she saw no problem having a few more imaginary characters come and visit.

“That is perfectly fine,” Dr. Rachel said.

For the next hour Dr. Rachel was busy with Lily. After Lily took all the tests that she needed, Dr. Rachel had Nelly take her back to the room while she went for a much needed lunch break. After lunch she went up to visit with the girls and make sure that Rosie had taken the nap that she had promised to take.

When she walked into the room she was surprised to see one of her old patients.

“Justin? What are you doing here?” Dr. Rachel asked.

“I am visiting my friends,” Justin said.

“How do you Lily and Rosie?”

“I just met them, actually. Harold told me I needed to come and visit, and that we would be good friends. So I did. And we are.”

There was something very strange happening that Dr. Rachel didn't quite understand. How was it possible that Justin, who had never met these girls, would know about *their* imaginary friend? She shook her head and left the children to their own imaginary world filled with Santa's elves.

Maybe Mr. and Mrs. May knew Justin's parents and they had asked him to come and visit. But if that were the case, then why hadn't they been on the list of people to ask for donations? Dr. Rachel knew that Justin's parents were very wealthy. She also knew that they gave money to many worthwhile causes.

She sighed and walked down the hall, thinking all this over. Perhaps she would call Justin's parents and thank them for sending Justin to visit the girls.

She went to the nurse's station and dialed Justin's home number. While the phone rang she tapped her finger, thinking about what a strange day this was turning out to be.

When Justin's father picked up the phone, the day started to become a little weirder.

“Hello Ralph, this is Dr. Taylor.”

Justin’s father broke in, “Is everything okay? Has Justin been hurt? He has been missing for hours.”

“Oh, he’s fine. He’s here at the hospital visiting two of my patients, actually. That is why I was calling. I thought perhaps you sent him here to visit. Is that incorrect?”

“We didn’t send him anywhere. In fact, maybe while you have him, you can run a few tests on him. He’s been very strange, and I think he might have a head injury.”

“What’s been happening?” Dr. Rachel asked.

“Well, he has been talking to the air, whom he calls—”

“Harold?” Dr Rachel broke in.

“Yes! How did you know that?”

“It is a very long story. Perhaps you and Helen should come down to the hospital and we should talk.”

“Okay. We will be there shortly.”

Dr. Rachel hung up the phone and sat there, unsure of what course of action to take next. Three children, who had never met before, were all seeing the same elf. She wondered if perhaps there was something in the water they were drinking that was making them see things. But then, why would they all see the same elf named Harold? She didn’t understand.

She stood up and walked back to the room. She stood at the door while the three children, all crammed into the same bed, studied the point in the air then looked back at the drawing that Lily was making.

“Lily, that is pretty good,” Justin said. “It looks just like him.”

They all looked up and then back down again. Dr. Rachel watched while Lily wrote something, then signed her name at the bottom. She held out the drawing to the point where Dr. Rachel assumed Harold was supposed to be. She wondered if there were things that could exist separate from what science had proven.

“Dr. Rachel’s here, I can’t take it.” Dr. Rachel nearly fell down when she heard the voice, but she didn’t see where it was coming from. She knew it wasn’t Justin, because she had been watching him very closely. She knew it wasn’t Rosie or Lily, because she knew their voices too well.

There must be someone else in the room. She started opening cabinets and closets. She checked under the bed and in the bathroom, looking for *some* explanation as to why she heard that voice.

The children watched her curiously.

Harold exchanged a glance with Lily, then spoke again. "Dr. Rachel, can you hear me?"

Dr. Rachel sped up her search, moving frantically around the room.

"Dr. Rachel?" Harold asked again.

"All you have to do is believe in miracles, Dr. Rachel. Then all of this will be explained. Believe, Dr. Rachel," Harold said.

Dr. Rachel covered her face with her hands and squeezed her eyes closed, but she still heard the voice. Finally she said, louder than was necessary, "Okay! Okay! I believe in miracles! I need one right now. I really, really need one."

"Open your eyes, Dr. Rachel," Rosie said.

She opened her eyes to see a boy that had not been there before. He was more of an elf than a boy, but a boy all the same.

"Hello. I'm Harold the Elf," Harold said.

Dr. Rachel passed out cold.

When Justin's parents arrived, Dr. Rachel was still trying to figure out what exactly had happened. She was in a state of shock, but beneath all of that was a small flicker of hope that she hadn't felt in a very long time.

Justin's parents walked into the room to see Dr. Rachel staring at an empty chair. Justin and two girls they had never seen before were crushed together on the bed.

Justin looked up when they entered. "Hi Mom. Hi Dad. I want you to meet my new friends. This is Lily, and this is Rosie."

"Nice to meet you, Lily. Nice to meet you, Rosie," Mrs. Burton, Justin's mother, said.

"Nice to meet you," the girls said in unison.

"Justin," Mr. Burton said, "it's time to go home now."

Justin looked up and shook his head. “No Dad, I have to stay here for a couple of days.”

“Justin,” Mr. Burton said with a warning in his voice, “we need to go home now.”

“Dad, I am going to stay here with Lily and Rosie.”

Dr. Rachel could sense the storm brewing, so she cut in. “Justin, you can come back tomorrow, I promise. They will still be here tomorrow.”

Justin looked at his dad, who nodded. “I will even drive you here myself.”

“Okay,” Justin said glumly.

He started to gather his things, while Dr. Rachel went out in the hall with his parents.

“What is wrong with those girls?” Mrs. Burton asked.

“Lily has an enlarged heart and Rosie has bad kidneys,” Dr. Rachel replied.

“Is there anything you can do?” Mr. Burton asked.

“Well, Rosie is on a donor list, but the likelihood of her getting a donor *and* her parents’ being able to afford it is very small. Lily’s chances are even less than that. What we need is a miracle.”

“Do you know how Justin met these girls?” Mrs. Burton asked.

Dr. Rachel looked back at the room and smiled. “They actually have a mutual friend. Perhaps you have heard of him. Goes by the name of Harold.”

“So this thing that Justin has is contagious?” Mr. Burton asked.

Dr. Rachel smiled. “Very.”

“What is it called? Is it possible that we have it?” Mrs. Burton asked.

“It’s possible. It’s called hope. It has almost been eradicated, but a rare strain pops up every now and again. Especially in younger patients,” Dr. Rachel replied. She winked at them while they thought about that.

They hadn’t missed her meaning when she explained that what their son had was no more than a case of childhood faith. It is a rare disease, indeed, that doesn’t affect adults much at all.

They smiled at Dr. Rachel and took Justin down the hall, each one holding a hand.

The next day was Christmas Eve. Justin came to visit, and Dr. Rachel watched with some concern as the color of Lily's face seemed to fade over the course of the day.

She was so bright and happy that Dr. Rachel didn't have the heart to worry her with more tests. There weren't any more tests that she could do anyway. So she let the children play and talk and draw to their hearts' content. Harold flitted in and out of the room; he was a very busy elf. He delivered all the letters that the children wrote to Santa, and, for the most part, left them alone with each other.

When Justin's parents came to get him that evening, they stopped first to see Dr. Rachel. She was sitting in her office doing some paperwork. Harold was seated in a chair in the corner.

Mr. and Mrs. Burton tapped on Dr. Rachel's door. Dr. Rachel looked up, smiled and invited them inside.

"We have been thinking and talking a lot about what you said yesterday about hope. And we found that we, too, need to believe in miracles a little. So we want to help give you a miracle. It's not the one I know you need, but perhaps it will help a little."

Harold jerked his head up at the word miracle. His eyebrows almost went over his head he raised them so high. Perhaps the Burtons weren't as far gone as he had thought they were.

Up in the North Pole Santa shouted:

"Put Ralph Burton and Helen Burton *back on the list!*"

A great cheer echoed across the valley.

"We would like to cover any expenses the girls may have, medical or otherwise," Mrs. Burton said.

Dr. Rachel started to cry. It was certainly a start.

Harold handed her a tissue.

"Oh! I didn't realize you had company," Mrs. Burton said, somewhat confused.

Mr. Burton stared at Harold for a moment, then nodded his head.

“Harold, right?” he said. Harold grinned and nodded.

Mr. Burton started to laugh. Mrs. Burton did what most people do when they first see Harold appear; she fainted, of course.

When the Burtons left, Dr. Rachel delivered the news of their generosity to the May family. They were all overjoyed. Now all they needed was a good set of kidneys for Rosie and a magic cure for Lily.

Author’s note

This next part of the story is where everything comes together. It is sad in many ways, yet full of miracles in many other ways. For this reason, I have decided to tell this from my own viewpoint.

At 8:51 p.m. that Christmas Eve, Lily’s heart, which was too large for her body, had stopped beating. Dr. Rachel, Rosie and Lily’s parents were all together when this happened.

Earlier that day, while Rosie had been out of the room with Nelly, Lily had pulled Dr. Rachel aside and asked her if Rosie could have her kidneys when she died. Due to the fact that Lily was Rosie’s twin sister, they wouldn’t be able to find a more perfect match.

At around 8:30 that night, Lily sent everyone out of the room so that she could spend some time with Rosie. During those few minutes they had together, Lily told her that she knew it was her time to go and that she wanted Rosie to have her kidneys. Lily also told Rosie that she needed to live enough for the both of them. Rosie understood what that meant, and she also understood the gift that Lily was giving her.

Lily could fight for her life-- she could hold out another year or two--, but Rosie’s chances of living were getting smaller and smaller with each passing hour. So Lily stopped fighting.

When Lily passed away, Dr. Rachel held Rosie’s hand while another surgeon performed the first kidney transplant where the donor was an identical twin. By Christmas morning, Dr. Rachel had her miracle. And while it wasn’t the miracle she wanted, it was a miracle all the same. Rosie survived the operation, and through her surviving, a small part of Lily also lived on.

I stayed at Dr. Rachel’s house all day and into the evening. At 8:30 that Christmas Eve, Nelly knocked on the door. We all smiled at each other.

I started looking around Dr. Rachel's house and saw the drawings by both Lily and Rosie, the pressed roses artistically framed in frames that had lilies carved into them. The girls' presence could be felt all over Dr. Rachel's home.

I watched as Dr. Rachel kept glancing at the clock.

"What are you waiting for?" I asked.

"You'll see," she said.

When the clock turned to 8:51 pm, the doorbell rang. We all got up to go to the door. When Dr. Rachel opened the door I caught my first sight of Rosie. She stood smiling, holding a crystal lily entwined with a rose. She was thirty-eight years old.

Behind her stood her husband, Dr. Justin Burton, who was now a pediatric kidney specialist. And behind him stood their four children-- two sets of twins: Lily, Violet, James and Alex.

Dr. Rosie Burton, Lily's baby sister, was now a pediatrician specializing in what is called congenital heart disease, the same disease that Lily had been born with. Dr. Rosie is one of the top doctors in the field and has performed many successful heart transplants.

I left shortly thereafter, not wanting to intrude on their reunion. They hadn't seen each other in almost twenty-five years, and I felt that they needed this time for each other.

As I walked down the driveway, the hair on the back of my neck stood on end. I turned around and looked into the window where Dr. Rachel kept her candle burning. There, a face peered out at me that I recognized immediately from Lily's drawing. Justin had been right. It did look a lot like him, and he hadn't changed much. Our eyes met and I smiled. He waved at me and I waved back. He grinned his mischievous grin, then blew out the candle that had been burning in the window.

Whoever Dr. Rachel had been waiting for had finally come home. He waved again and nodded at me as I turned to go.

Thirty years ago, to the day, her big sister gave her the biggest gift one can ever give—she gave her life—and Rosie has lived it to the fullest extent.

Do you believe?

The End