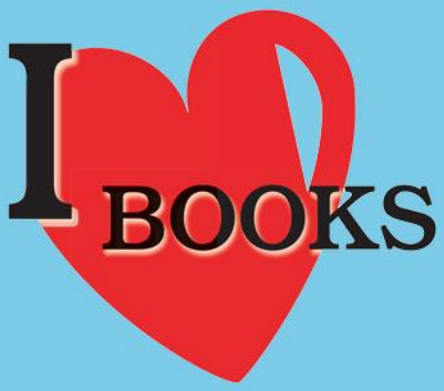



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Opening extract from

# The Girl Who Saved Christmas

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Please print off and read at your leisure.



*For Pearl, Lucas and Andrea.*
*The most magical human beings I know.*

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1

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# *The Girl Who Saved Christmas*

Do you know how magic works?

The kind of magic that gets reindeer to fly in the sky? The kind that helps Father Christmas travel around the world in a single night? The kind that can stop time and make dreams come true?

Hope.

That's how.

Without hope, there would be no magic.

It isn't Father Christmas or Blitzen or any of the other reindeer that make magic happen on the night before Christmas.

It's every child who wants and wishes for it to happen. If no one wished for magic to happen there would be no magic. And because we know Father Christmas comes every year we know now that magic – at least some kind of magic – is real.

But this wasn't always the case. There was once a time before stockings and Christmas mornings spent excitedly ripping off wrapping

paper. It was quite a miserable time, when very few human children had any reason to believe in magic at all.

And so, the very first night that Father Christmas ever decided to give human children a reason to be happy and to believe in magic, he had a lot of work to do.

The toys were in his sack, the sleigh and reindeer were ready, but as he flew out of Elfhelm he knew there wasn't enough magic in the air. He travelled through the Northern Lights but they were hardly glowing at all. And the reason for the low magic levels was that there wasn't much hoping going on. After all, how does a child hope for magic to happen if they have never seen it?

So that very first visit from Father Christmas nearly didn't happen. And that it did happen is thanks to one thing. A single human child. A girl, in London, who believed in magic totally. Who hoped and hoped for a miracle every single day. She was the child who believed in Father Christmas before anyone else. And she was the one who helped Father Christmas, just as his reindeer were starting to struggle, because the amount she hoped while lying in bed that Christmas Eve, added light to the sky.

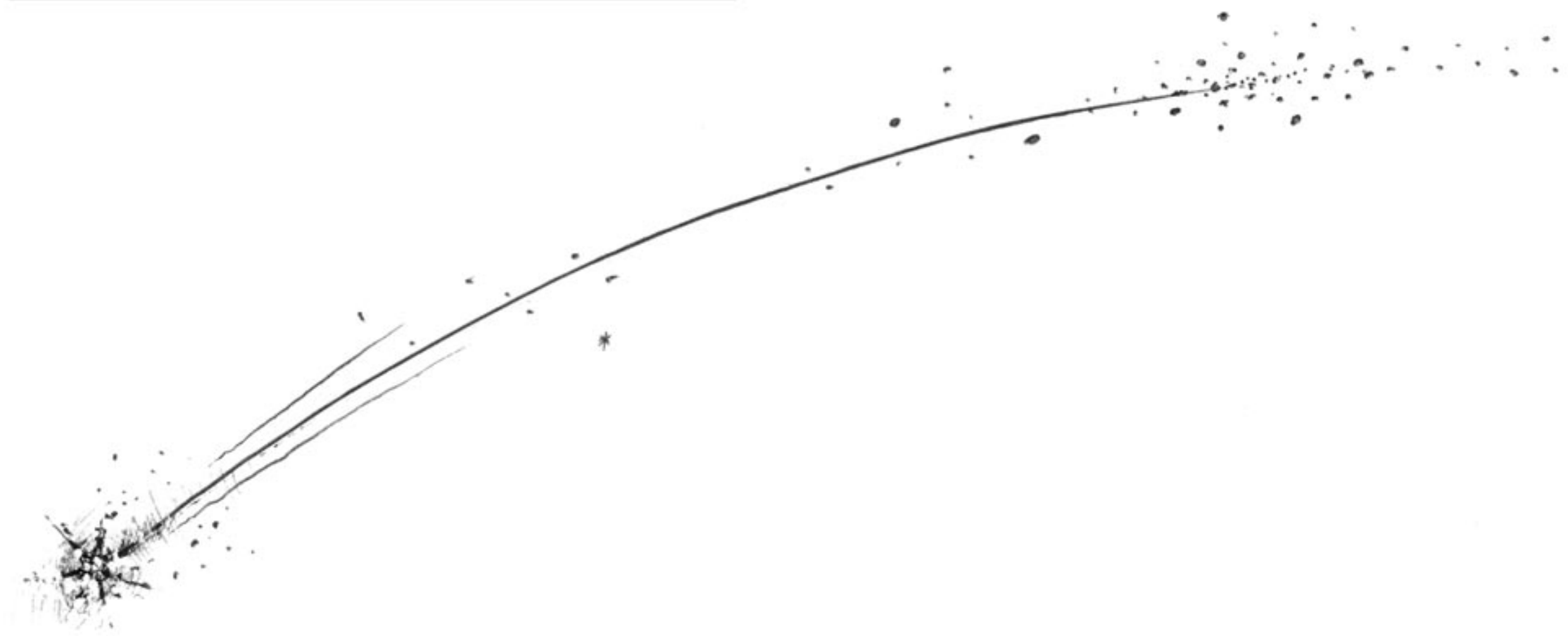
It gave Father Christmas purpose. A direction. And he followed a thin trace of light all the way to her home at 99 Haberdashery Road, London.

And once that was done, once he had placed a full stocking of toys at the foot of her bug-ridden bed, the hope grew. Magic was there, in the world, and it spread among the dreams of all children. But Father Christmas couldn't fool himself. Without that one child, that eight-year-old girl called Amelia Wishart, hoping so hard for magic to be real, Christmas would never have happened. Yes, it took elves and the reindeer and the workshop and all of that, but she was the one who saved it.

She was the first child.

The girl who saved Christmas.

And Father Christmas would never forget it . . .



*One year later . . .*



Dear Father Christmas

Hello, my name is Amelia Wishart.
I am nine years old and I live at
99 Haberdashery Road in London.

You know this because you have
been here. Last year. When you gave
me presents. That was very Kind.
I always believed that magical things
were possible, even when times were hard,
so it was so wonderful to see it was true.

*THANK YOU!*



Anyway, I live with my mum Jane
and my cat Captain Soot. I found
Captain Soot up a chimney. You see,
chimneys are rarely straight up and
down. Sometimes they have sideways
bits. Did you meet him? He is great.



But he sometimes steals sardines
from the fishmonger and gets into
fights with street cats and I
think he thinks he's a dog.

I know you are a busy man so I will just tell you what I would like for Christmas. I would like:

1. A new brush for sweeping chimneys.
2. A spinning top.
3. A book by Charles Dickens (my favourite author).
4. For my ma to get better.

Number 4 is quite important. It's more important than number 2. You can keep the spinning top.

It really was a magical thing to wake up to those presents last year.

Ma was a chimney sweep and now I am too. She can't go up chimneys anymore. She can't do anything anymore except lie in bed and cough. The doctor says only a miracle will fix her. But miracles need magic, don't they? And you are the only person I know who can do magic. So that is all I want.

I want you to make Ma well again, before it is too late.

That is the main thing I ask.

Yours faithfully,

Amelid

# *The Trembling Ground*

Father Christmas folded up Amelia's letter and put it in his pocket.

He walked through the snow-covered Reindeer Field and past the frozen lake, looking around at all the quiet sights of Elfhelm. The wooden village hall. The clog shop and the Bank of Chocolate and the Figgy Pudding café on the Main Path, not open for another hour. The School of Sleighcraft and the University of Advanced Toymaking. The tall (by elf standards) offices of the *Daily Snow* on Vodol Street. Its walls of reinforced gingerbread, shining orange in the clear morning light.

Then, as he trod through the snow, turning west towards the Toy Workshop and the wooded pixie hills beyond, he saw an elf in a brown tunic and brown clogs walking towards him. The elf wore glasses and was a bit short-sighted so didn't see Father Christmas.

'Hello, Humdrum!' said Father Christmas.

The elf jumped in shock.

# ELFHELM




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'Oh, h-hello, Father Christmas. I'm sorry. I didn't see you there. I've just been on a nightshift.'

Humdrum was one of the hardest working elves at the Toy Workshop. He was quite a strange, nervous little elf, but Father Christmas liked him a lot. As the Assistant Deputy Chief Maker of Toys That Spin or Bounce, he was a very busy member of the workshop, and never complained about working overnight.

'Everything all right at the workshop?' asked Father Christmas.

'Oh yes. All the toys that spin are spinning and all the toys that bounce are bouncing. There was a little bit of a problem with some of the tennis balls but we've fixed it now. They are bouncier than ever. The human children will love them.'

'Jolly good,' said Father Christmas. 'Well, you go home and get some sleep. And wish Noosh and Little Mim a "Merry Christmas" from me.'

'I will, Father Christmas. They will be very pleased. Especially Mim. His favourite new thing is a jigsaw with your face on it. Jiggle the jigsaw-maker made it especially for him.'

Father Christmas blushed. 'Ho ho . . . Merry Christmas, Humdrum!'

'Merry Christmas, Father Christmas!'

And just as they said goodbye they both felt something. A faint wobbling in their legs, as if the earth was shaking a little bit. Humdrum thought it was just because he was so tired. Father Christmas thought it was because he was so excited about the big day and night he had ahead of him. So neither said anything.

