

## **A Christmas Story**

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Gabrielle has always loved Christmas. It's her favorite time of the year; the smell of pine, cinnamon, fresh falling snow, Church angels, and of course, Santa Claus.

It was her mom who first told her about Santa.

But Gabrielle was no ordinary kid. When her mother first told her about Santa she asked the most unusual questions –

“Mother, does he have kids?”

“Are they jealous of all the other kids who gets presents ever year?”

“What about his wife?”

“Do his elves get allowance for their work?”

“May I volunteer and go to the North Pole to help them pack the gifts or feed the reindeers? I'm sure they could use an extra set of hands.”

Every year, without fail, when the first leaf of autumn falls on Mrs. Lawson's beautiful rose garden, you will hear the same soothing voice from the bedroom window

“Angel, what is your Christmas list for Santa? We have to send it early, just to be sure,” Mrs. Lawson asks with a twinkle in her eyes.

“It's not Santa, mom, that's his nickname, we haven't even been properly introduced yet – it's Sir Nicholas,” Gabrielle answers in her most loud grown up voice because she is outside, making sure the roses are watered everyday.

“Shouldn't it be Saint Nicholas?” Mrs. Lawson quips, obviously enjoying the banter.

“Oh, Sir Saint Nicholas then,” Gabrielle agrees with a smile.

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“Honey, don't you think Ellie is too old for this bedtime story,” said Mr. Lawson with raised eyebrows as he found mother and daughter cuddled near the fireplace. Mrs. Lawson's soothing voice filling the quiet room as Gabrielle listened while thinking her mother must be the most beautiful woman in the world.

And her laugh was lovely, Gabrielle thought, like tinkling glass bells that end up in giddy giggles, “Oh, Christopher, “ standing up from the stack of pillows and tiptoeing to give her husband a fond kiss on the nose, “nobody's too old for a Christmas story.”

“I agree, Mother,” nodded Gabrielle and shrieking, “My turn!” and with all her five year old might, jumped as high as she could into her father’s arms and kissed him on the nose too.

“Elena dear,” Mr. Lawson started, while swaying his daughter around, “I’ll finish the story tonight, you look tired.”

Mrs. Lawson quickly wiped her eyes and straightened her dress, “I’m fine darling, we were almost done, aren’t we angel?” and she adjusted the shawl the slid down her shoulders as the room was getting cold.

And since Gabrielle was still dizzy from flying in her father’s arms which how she got her pet name angel, she didn’t notice that without the yellow flicker of the blazing warmth, the most gorgeous woman in the world had a ghastly pallor, and the shawl covered her arms and hands that shook as she held the book they were reading.

No, Gabrielle did not feel anything different that night. She can only remember the grin that spreads in her face whenever her dad calls her Ellie (only he does that). She can only remember the cool wind on her face as she closed her eyes and truly believed that she was the angel her mother loved. She can only remember her favorite Christmas story. She can only remember that that night, she was the happiest child in the world.

That was seven years ago. And everything after that night was a blur. That her mother has always been sickly ever since she was born. It was a blur of medicines and hospital visits and her mother crying out in pain while her father held on to his wife’s hand and Gabrielle holds the other, close to her heart.

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Gabrielle is special. She did not send Santa, oh, I mean Sir Saint Nicholas Christmas lists --she mailed him letters, every year, and made the postmaster promise to send it, on the first day of December.

It was her little secret. Nobody else knew, not even her mother.

She wrote to him about everything. How she stopped reading Christmas stories after her mother died. That she hates school because the lessons were too hard and she’s too afraid to ask her busy father, a lawyer who worked late nights to pay off medical loans. And there was this boy across the street who always swept the snow off their front porch without being asked, smiling and shrugging whenever he sees her but they never talk.

She never asked for anything for herself, Gabrielle only wanted someone to talk to, even if Sir Saint Nicholas never replied to any of her letters.

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It was again the first of December and she decided to write Sir Saint Nicholas her last letter. Thanking him for his patience and for reading everything she sent the past years. She was walking home from the post office and was surprised to find light and warmth through their glass windows and a stack of Christmas pillows by the fireplace. She hurriedly went in and was surprised to find a small green book in the middle of the cozy rug. Gabrielle wiped her eyes, straightened her dress, and pulled her shawl around her as she flipped through the pages ---

She read –

“Yes, my dear, this is a Christmas story.

Once there was a young couple who quietly got married on Christmas day. They met in an orphanage, both as volunteers to mix and give out soup to little children and carry on the spirit of Sir Saint Nicholas.

A year later, the young couple realized they were going to be blessed with a daughter. The hospital was against it because the young wife had a heart condition, but she was stubborn and loving. She loved her husband very much and their daughter in her womb even more; and with God’s grace and lots of prayers, a miracle was born – both mother and daughter were safe, both huddled in the arms of the grateful new father.

They lived a simple but happy life. And whenever I saw that young couple as I passed by your house every morning to work, they looked at you with so much awe and wonder and they would always hold hands whenever you played in your mother’s rose garden.

Did you ever notice why your Christmas tree never had a star or an angel on top? I always asked that of your mother whenever she invited us for Christmas dinner. And she would always say, “we have our own real angel right here,” as she proudly cradled you in her arms.

You are God’s gift to your parents and to us in this neighborhood. Since you never asked Santa, oh, I mean Sir Saint Nicholas for anything for yourself (you always told me so), I decided to keep your letters until you are old enough to understand, I gave them all to your father this morning and he is the one writing this down as I am too old to write it myself.

Your mother would have been very proud of the young lady you’ve become. You look just like her, “very pretty” as my son would always say.

Bless you dear child. Merry Christmas.

Truly yours,  
Mr. Harry Leighton  
Head Postmaster”

p.s. We live across the street.

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“Ellie, don’t you think you are too old for a bedtime story?”

Gabrielle looked up to the sound of her father’s voice thinking him the most handsome man in the world. Well, next to the boy across the street that is.

She laughed through her tears; her laugh was lovely, like tinkling glass bells that end up in giddy giggles, “Oh, Father,” standing up from the stack of pillows and tiptoeing to give her dad a fond kiss on the nose, “nobody’s too old for a Christmas story.”

And both hugged each other quietly for a very long time.