

Harry and Cleo meet the elf

(First of a three-part Christmas story)

By CARL STODDARD

Harry and Cleo live in a small cottage on the edge of the Forever Forest. The cottage belongs to Mr. and Mrs. Wallywhigg, an old couple who make and sell cuckoo clocks.

The Wallywhiggs treat Harry and Cleo like real people. Harry and Cleo like real people too, but they're not.

Harry is a little dog who toiled for the color of his nose and plops ears that perk up when he's excited. Cleo is a tall, slender cat who works hard.

One day in late December, the Wallywhiggs left the cottage and drove to the city to buy more cuckoo clocks for their clocks. Harry and Cleo stayed behind to warm their paws by the fireplace.

That is the cold stormy night was swirling deep from behind a cloud the cottage. The Wallywhiggs were in the Forever Forest.

So, Harry and Cleo, especially when they don't need to sleep in a comfortable bed near the fireplace.

Harry looked up from his place by the hearth. There was never a word to do to be compared.

"DON'T YOU want to go outside and dash around in the snow? We could sniff the snowflakes and crash through snow drifts. We could even tunnel into the snow," Harry said.

Cleo looked at the slender paw, looked at the clock and said, "Satisfied that it was raining, the cuckoo clock deeper into the couch when Mrs. Wallywhigg's favorite chair. I don't want to go outside, spread. Besides, we can't go out even if we wanted to. The Wallywhiggs left the door when they left. Remember? And we don't know how to open it."

Harry whined in frustration and then picked up a book from the floor. He was trying to think of a way to get out into that wonderful white snow when he heard a clatter at the window.

What? What? What? It was that the tattered, brown, old feet Harry began running around the room.

Heard a flutter. He asked excitedly, "That noise, what was it? Let's go see let's go see."

Cleo raised her head just a little from the cushion. "You go see the said. I like it here by the fireplace. It's so perfect."

Harry ran to the window and looked outside. He stood on his hind legs and started to move toward a window. All he could see was snow. It was snow.

HE LOOKED THIS way and that and started to look to see further. All he saw was a white world in the distance the dark and the freezing cold of the Forever Forest.

Butterflies in the air, a voice said.

Harry whined and jumped and stood in a knot toward the window. His teeth were bared. He always tried to look mean when he was scared.

Cleo raised her head from the cushion and one ear flicked.

Says if I trusted you, the voice said. The voice being a little man with very red hair and a red beard. He was wearing a tattered fur coat. Red pointed shoes that matched his beard were peeking out from under his coat.

Harry and Cleo just looked at him. They didn't know what to say.

"I'm Elmo. Pity," he said as he closed the door behind him. "I'm an elf. Aren't you a little elf?" Harry asked cautiously. "From the North Pole?"

"Of course," Elmo said, raising himself up as tall as he could. "All elves are from the North Pole. If you are an elf, you live at the North Pole and work for Santa Claus."

"I don't know that," Harry said.

"Well, you're a dog," Elmo said. "Why should you know about such things? Then the elf began sweeping the snow off his coat and onto the floor. A puff of air began to form around his feet as the snow melted.

Cleo stood up and stretched a great stretch. She stretched every fiber of her body. Still standing on her feet, she looked down at the little elf. He wasn't much taller than she was.

"NOW LISTEN," the elf began. "You walked in here without even knocking on the door. Then you start insulting Harry just because he's a stupid dog. Now you start dropping all over the floor. I don't like it, neither little bit, and I think you should apologize and explain yourself."

Quite right, my little friend, quite right," said the elf. "I should explain myself, and I swear by Santa's beard I will tell you the truth. But first, you must tell me how to find the Forever Forest."

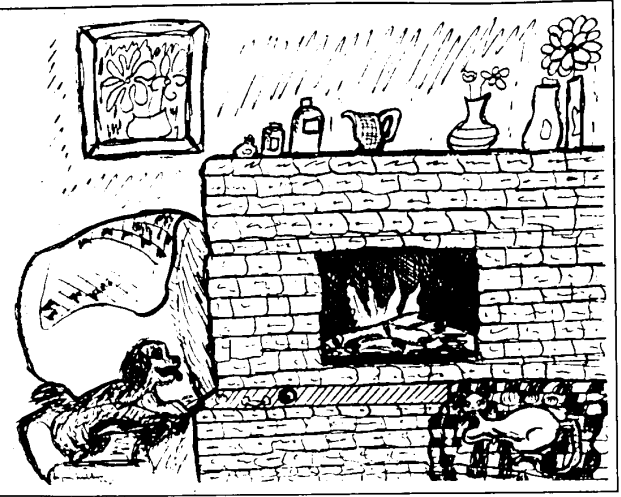
Harry pointed his little nose toward the window. "It's right over there. You can nearly see it from here." Then he turned back and looked at the elf. "You're not going into the Forever Forest, are you? No one went into the forest and returned. They just disappear—forever."

The elf listened to Harry and began tapping his foot impatiently. "Don't tell me what I can't do," he said. "I must go into the Forever Forest, no matter how dark and evil it may be. If I don't venture into the forest, there will be no Christmas this year. No Christmas at all."

"I must go," he continued, "and you must come with me. I, Elmo W. Pity and you, the cat named Cleo, and you, the dog named Harry, must join me for this journey."

Harry and Cleo stared at the elf in disbelief. How did he know their names? Why did he want them to go into the Forever Forest with him? And what terrible calamity was about to befall that most wonderful day of the year, Christmas?

(Harry and Cleo find they have friends in the Forever Forest in the next chapter of the story, when it continues in the next issue.)



"Don't you want to go outside and dash around in the snow?" Harry asked the cat. "We could go crashing through snow drifts and even tunnel in the snow." Little did Harry know that bigger adventures awaited him and his friend in Forever Forest.

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