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Just then there came a thunderous roar. The roar was like the sound of a thousand crashing waves. It was Freddy the Fierce.

Harry and Cleo find Christmas

(This is the final chapter of a three-part children's Christmas story, "Journey to the Forever Forest," written especially for the Observer & Eccentric newspapers.)

By CARL STODDARD

Harry the dog and Cleo the cat stood in the brown swaying grass of the Forever Forest and watched as Elmore the elf knocked one hundred and fifteen times on the right side of the tree.
At the moment the elf finished rapping, a door slid open in the base, revealing a dimly lit passageway.
Carefully, the three little adventurers stepped inside. At the other end of the passageway they would find the cave of Freddy the Fierce, the green polar bear who stole Santa Claus Christmas lists. One list included the names of all the good and bad boys and girls in the world. On the other list were the names of all the world's good and bad animals. It was Elmore's job to get the lists back to the North Pole in time for Christmas.

"AREN'T YOU AFRAID?" Harry asked Cleo as they followed the elf through the twisting, misty tunnel.
"Cats are never afraid," the long sleek cat assured him. "Cats are lazy and selfish sometimes, but never afraid."
"When you are afraid," she told the little dog, "you bark and run around the room and sometimes hide under the bed. What good does that do? Barking and hiding won't make anything go away."
"We cats just stop and arch our backs and look trouble right in the eye."
Elmore the elf was listening to all this as he led them through the tunnel. As he walked, he asked the cat, "If cats are so brave, why didn't you want to leave your cottage and join me on this journey into the Forever Forest?"
"I wasn't afraid," Cleo said, raising her head as high as she could in the tunnel. "I just didn't want to get my coat dirty in this miserable forest. I've spent so much time cleaning it."
Turning a corner, the trio was suddenly

blinded by a glaring light. They were at the end of the tunnel.
WHEN THEIR EYES became adjusted to the light, Elmore slowly led them out of the tunnel. They found themselves at the very edge of the Forever Forest. Before them stood a tall black mountain that went straight up until it disappeared in the clouds. Trees from the Forever Forest grew to the edges of the mountain, but no trees dared grow on the mountain itself. Elmore squinted his eyes and looked up at the mountain.
"There, near the top, I see it," he said in a high excited voice. "It's the cave of Freddy the Fierce. That's where Santa's (Continued on page 6A)

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