

Tinsel

The Girls Who Invented Christmas



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A Note on Elves

Every year on Christmas Day in a snowy land far, far away, elves build snowmen and then burrow inside them.

Anyone who has studied elves (and no one has) will know that this is the most important date in the elf calendar, because it is the day that they get their elf magic for the year.

Anyone who has studied elf magic (and no one has) will know that unlike other kinds of magic, elf magic is not *made*. They do not brew it in cauldrons, like witches, or summon it from the skies, like sorcerers. Instead, elves are completely reliant on an ancient Christmas

ritual known as Snowcus Pocus.

This ridiculous, cold and lengthy process – resulting in a limited quantity of magic – led elves to believe that their magic was the worst in the world. But they are sticklers for tradition and routine, and so every Christmas without fail they climb into their snowmen and wait for the important first snowfall of the day.

When the snow falls, the snowmen begin to glow, growing brighter and brighter. The technicolor icicles strung up around town flash as if the whole place has been dipped in a disco, and then the elves emerge, full of magic to last a whole year.

But elves are timid creatures and magic can be unwieldy. It scares them, so they almost never use it. Anyone who has studied the elf world (and no one has) will know that hidden in the North Pole is enough magic to make the wildest wishes come true.



Prologue

What do we know about ‘Mrs’ Claus? The truth is: *almost nothing*. She lives in the background of Christmas stories all around the world, and that is where we have kept her for hundreds of years. But what if, a long time ago, we got the story wrong? What if the truth disappeared out of sight, and she along with it?

It is a story she wanted people to know – a story of resilience and little acts of kindness. A story of *real* tinsel and how two formidable girls changed Christmas forever.

This is her story.

This is the story of Blanche Claus.





Chapter 1

The Bauble

Once upon a time – over one hundred years ago – there lived a girl with ice-white hair who truly hated Christmas.

The girl's name was Blanche Claus, and on this Christmas – the Christmas when we find her – everything seemed entirely ordinary at first. She was alone in London, huddled under the bridge she called home. Across the river, horse-drawn carriages danced along frozen streets, practically flying people to their destinations. She stared at the scene longingly. Everyone had somewhere to be on Christmas Day. Everyone except her.



Blanche, somewhat uniquely, spent her Christmases counting down the seconds until the day was over. Preferably as loudly as possible.

‘Eighty-six thousand, three hundred and twenty-four! Eighty-six thousand, three hundred and twenty-three!’

Her parents had died before her memories began, and Blanche’s life had been little more than a blizzard-blur of the city’s orphanages, each one more ghastly than the last. But by the time she was four she was determined never to spend another night in an orphanage again. No matter where she was taken, she rarely stayed longer than an hour. Despite the bolted doors and barred windows, she always escaped.

How she escaped remained a mystery to everyone.

‘Eighty-five thousand, one hundred and four! Eighty-five thousand, one hundred and three!’

She knew she wasn’t one of the lucky ones – she was alone, and Christmas more than any other day of the year reminded her of that.

‘EIGHTY-FOUR THOUSAND, EIGHT HUNDRED AND TWO! EIGHTY-FOUR THOUSAND, EIGHT HUNDRED AND ONE!’



Normally, the Christmas countdown would go on until the day was done or Blanche had fallen asleep, but this year was different. Something distracted her.

