

Jason's Elf

by Hank Lajoie

Eight year old Jason sat quietly on the antebellum style front porch, enjoying the warmth of the morning sun. He wore a windbreaker to ward off a slight chill in the air. His sun glasses shaded his eyes from the glare and also hid the fact that he was blind. Jason had been blind since birth, so he was not aware of what the lack of sight really meant at his age. Sitting next to him was his trusty dog Max. Although not a trained guide dog, Max was very attentive and protective of Jason.

Born on Christmas Eve, Jason always grew excited as the holidays approached, because he enjoyed getting gifts two days in a row. The wait was getting short now, just two weeks away. This was a big birthday this year, because Jason and Max were going to be trained together so that Max could become a certified guide dog. The training was his birthday present, but he didn't know yet what surprise Christmas may have in store for him.

“Good morning.” a small voice said.

Jason turned his head so that his ear faced the sound. “Who's there?”

“Just me,” the voice responded.

“Who's 'me'?”

“I'm an elf. You can call me Ellie.”

“My mom told me that elves were not real.”

“It's 'elves' not 'elfs’” the voice replied with a little giggle. “And I'm as real as you want me to be. Do you know what an elf is?”

“They work in Santa's workshop making toys, but Santa isn't real, either.”

“Well, he ain't a fat old guy in a red suit, but he represents a spirit we can all feel.”

“I can't see, so I don't know what a fat old guy in a red suit is.”

“I know you can’t see, but if you want, you can feel my face to see what I look like.”

Jason was silent for a moment, then, “If I feel your face, it just tells me what you feel like. I still won’t know how you look.”

Ellie giggled again. “You’re smart, ain’t you?”

“I go to school. A special school where they teach us that touching and listening are our best senses, but still not the same as looking.”

Ellie took Jason’s hand and brought it to her face. Jason was familiar with the gentle touches that would help him determine a person’s features.

“You have a little nose,” Jason said with a smile. He stopped suddenly. “Your ears are pointy. Mine are rounded.”

“All elves have pointy ears, but I don’t know why.”

“Why are you here?”

“Because I saw that you needed a friend. That’s what elves really do ... make friends with someone who’s lonely.”

“I ain’t lonely,” Jason said quickly. “I got my parents and Max. Hey, Max is awfully quiet. He should be sniffing you out.”

“Max can’t see me,” Ellie said. “Only who I want to see me will see me.”

“You mean you’re invisible?”

“Something like that. Want me to let Max see me?”

“If you don’t scare him.”

“Don’t worry. I’ll talk to him.”

“Max can’t talk. He’s just a dog. He can understand some stuff, though.”

“Just a minute,” Ellie replied. Again, there was the hint of a giggle in her voice.

Max gave a sudden “woof” and sprang to his feet. Then he whimpered and the sound of his tail thumping against the chair told Jason that all was well.

“Why is he whimpering?” Jason asked.

“I’m introducing myself and we’re talking.”

“You can talk dog? Can you teach me?”

“It can’t be taught or learned. We are born with the ability but no one understands it ... or maybe the elders do.”

“Why do you think I’m lonely?”

“You have no visitors when you’re out here and except when you’re at school, there’s seldom anyone around your age with you. Haven’t you wondered about that?”

“I just figured we were all scattered and school is what brought us together.”

“Yeah, but that’s not your fault. So, I’m here to be your friend if you want. We can talk and I can teach you a lot of stuff.”

“What stuff?”

“Regular school stuff, and things you can’t see. I can show them to you. I can show you stuff like I can see. If I think real hard, you can see what my eyes see. Want to try it?”

“Sounds eerie ... even spooky.”

“Let me show you.” Ellie said as she moved behind Jason and rested her hands on his shoulders.

Jason let out a gasp as a clear picture of Max appeared, just as if Jason was viewing him with his own eyes. As Ellie moved from scene to scene, Jason was overwhelmed and soon became excited.

Suddenly, the front door opened and Jason’s mother appeared.

“I thought I heard you talking to someone,” she said. Her eyes wandered around as if expecting to discover someone else there.

Jason realized that she could not see Ellie, so quickly said, “Just Max. I was telling him how pretty a dog he is.”

“Well, I know you can’t see him, but you’re right. He is pretty.”

“But I did see him. Ellie helped and ...” Jason stopped, realizing he should probably say no more.

“I know how you can do that. Who is Ellie and where is she?”

“She’s here, but only Max and me can see her.”

“It’s Max and I, dear. So, Ellie is your imaginary friend?”

Jason feared he had already said too much. “Uh-huh.”

“Max sure looks fidgety,” she observed. “Lunch will be ready soon. I’ll come get you.”

She returned indoors and Jason looked nervously at Ellie. “I shouldn’t have said anything, right?”

“Well, you can’t un-say it. Let her believe you have an imaginary friend. A lot of kids your age have those.”

“They do?”

“Yup. Most of the kids we elves visit have them. It beats the loneliness.”

When Jason’s mother came to the door for him, Ellie was gone and Max was stretched out and half asleep. They went into the small kitchenette where sandwiches and milk sat on the dining table. The afternoon passed uneventfully, although Jason’s mother could hear Jason talking to his imaginary friend. She began to hope there would be no psychological problems often associated with imaginary friends.

Ellie left at dinner time, but returned at bed time. She sat on the edge of Jason's bed and told him wondrous stories of life as an elf until he fell soundly asleep.

Ellie and Jason spent hours together every day and Ellie allowed Jason to see what she could see. Unfortunately, staying on the porch most of the time, there were a limited number of things to show him. They studied clouds in the sky, the leaves and branches of nearby trees, cars and people passing by on the road nearby.

"Seeing is just wonderful," Jason said. "People who can see like you do are real lucky."

"Yes, we are," she whispered. Continuing at a whisper, she went on, "You need to believe that you will see some day ... it's called hope. Maybe that way, you will be able to see just like me."

"I wish it every day. I used to pray to see, too. Every night when I went to bed. I used to cry every morning when I woke up and still couldn't see."

"Well you should keep doing it," still whispering. "Tomorrow's your birthday, so I have to go back and leave you to your family for celebrations."

"Go back where? Will I see you after the Christmas celebrations?"

"I don't know," she said in a normal voice. "I've heard stories about things like that, but I really don't know."

"I'm going to miss you. I'm going to miss seeing things, too."

"Just remember ... keep wishing, every day and if I can come back I will. Maybe when I can let you see me."

"You have to come back, Ellie ... Ellie?"

Only silence ... Ellie was gone.

On his birthday, his parents had a celebratory dinner at Jason's favorite fast food restaurant, where they presented him with the gift certificate for guide dog training, both in print and in Braille. Even so, he felt sadness at Ellie's leaving and wished fervently for her return and the discovery of sight.

That night, while praying and wishing he nearly broke down and cried in frustration. As he drifted off to sleep, he was murmuring, “Ellie, come back and help me see.”

Christmas morning dawned and something was different. Even with his eyes still closed, he was aware of the presence of light. He quickly opened his eyes and he could see! He had to squint because of the brilliance of his surroundings. He looked around his room and saw it just as he had been able to when Ellie guided his sight.

“Mom! Mom!” he shouted.

Both his parents ran into the room, but before they could ask why he shouted, he yelled as loud as he could, “I can see! I can see!”

All three of them cried happy tears and Max danced around, knowing this was a happy time, but not why.

“It’s a Christmas miracle,” his mother sobbed. “We have to spend the day at church to give thanks.”

“But Jason has that party at school this afternoon,” his father said. “His classmates will be so excited for him.”

“We can go to church first, then the party. Oh, Lord ... I’m so happy!”

“I’m happy, too, mom ... I can see, all by myself.”

“Of course you can see all by yourself. But it’s Christmas morning so let’s go down to the tree ... oh, you can see how pretty the tree is, too.”

It was a hectic morning of opening presents and going to church. Friends of the family were amazed at Jason’s unexpected ability to see. The reverend said a special prayer of thanks for him and the choir dedicated “Alleluia” to him.

That afternoon at the school party, everyone was excited for Jason and some of his friends were sorry he would no longer attend their class. There were several new students that had yet to enter the level of Jason’s class and one of them sat next to him.

“I think it’s wonderful that you can see,” a small voice said.

“It’s more than wonderful,” Jason said. “I still have to see the eye doctor to make sure everything is OK.”

“Want to feel my face?”

“Sure, but I don’t have to, you know. I can see you. You have a little nose. You look nice. What’s your name?”

“Eleanor, but everyone calls me Ellie.”

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