

Elf Shoes

a free read by *Windy Hardwick*



SEASONS
GREETINGS

Enterprise

Musa
PUBLISHING

Elf Shoes

by

Mindy Hardwick

*Merry Christmas
from Misa*

Euterpe 

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Elf Shoes

“Samson is back on the Island.” Mom stepped onto the ladder’s lower step. She tied a small round ornament to the Christmas tree branch.

“Mmm...” I tugged my thick green tights to my waist. I played one of Santa’s elves at the Island Santa Workshop. Every year the tights were too long and bunched into my elf shoes. I hated my elf shoes. The shoes were pointed at the tops and didn’t fit.

“I hope things go better for Samson on the Island,” Mom said. “He was such a nice boy.”

“Me too,” I said. Everyone had been talking about Samson. He’d been living with his Mom on the mainland for the last two years. Over the summer he was caught tagging and spent ninety days in a juvenile detention center. After his release his Mom sent him back to the Island to live with his Dad. No one had seen him since he returned.

“Don’t forget your ears.” Mom pointed to a set of large, plastic, pointed ears lying on the table.

“Got them.” I slipped the plastic ears over the tips of my ears and adjusted them to fit straight.

Outside, a car horn honked.

I walked over to the living room window, pushed aside the lace curtains, and looked down onto the rain soaked street. Amy Kirkwood's car waited at the curb. Amy was the second grade teacher at the Island Elementary School. She'd been in charge of Santa's Workshop for the last five years. I liked Amy and sometimes babysat for her twins. I did not like the passenger inside Amy's car.

"Sammy." I rolled my eyes. Sammy was the Island terror who no one seemed to mind but me. People liked to say she just had a hard time. Sammy's dad died in a fishing accident, and Sammy lived with her mom and grandma Opal. Opal owned the stained glass shop and taught stained glass to my best friend, Jasmine. Jasmine was two years younger than me. She was a lot of fun. She'd grown up in Chicago and saw things differently than most of the people on the Island. People said Sammy had calmed down since Jasmine became her mentor. I couldn't see any difference.

I dropped the curtains into place and stepped into the pointed elf shoes. I winced. I tried to convince Amy that elves didn't need to wear shoes. We could wear striped colored socks. But, Amy didn't budge. She insisted elves had to wear the green pointed shoes.

The car horn blared again.

"Sammy," I grumbled.

"It's Christmas." Mom hung a silver star on the tree. "Give her a break."

"I'll try. But it won't be easy!" I grabbed my jacket from the hook by the door. Elf costumes were not very warm. I hoped Santa's workshop at the Island View Resort was near a heater.

I opened the front door to our apartment and hurried down the stairwell. We lived in a two-bedroom apartment above Mom's shop, *Spectacular Scents and Surprises*. The front window was decorated with festive ribbon and wrapped packages of bath salts and soaps. Melissa, Mom's holiday helper, perched on a stool at the register. She

wore a red and white Santa cap. Melissa sipped a large cup of coffee and waved to me. I waved back and pulled open the heavy, wood door leading to the sidewalk.

The rain was coming down hard. I jerked my jacket hood up around my pointed elf ears. The Christmas lights up and down Main Street twinkled in the grey, rainy morning. December was the darkest time of the year on the Island but the holiday lights always made things a little brighter. I hurried to the car and hopped into the back.

“You’re late!” Sammy said.

“I’m right on time.” I slipped off the pointed elf shoes. It was a ten minute drive to the resort. I wasn’t going to wear the shoes a minute longer than necessary. My toes were already screaming in pain.

Amy pulled away from the curb. We drove past Opal’s stained glass shop. Both Jasmine and Opal were cutting glass at the wood tables. Amy drove slowly down Main Street. She turned left onto the road leading out to the resort. I leaned back in my seat. Would I be the first to see Samson? At sixteen, Samson was two years older than me. His dad was the resort’s chef. Mom and Samson’s dad, Rob, dated each other for three years. Samson and I spent hours hiking the trails around the resort, riding bikes, eating blackberries, and swimming in the resort’s pool. I adored Samson and hoped Mom and Rob would get married. I wanted an older brother. But after two years, Mom and Rob broke up. Afterwards Samson was sent to live with his Mom on the mainland. I hadn’t seen him since I was eleven. A lot could change in three years. Would I look different to Samson?

Amy pulled into the resort’s full parking lot. My stomach danced. I’d been playing elf for the last three years, but this year I was the elf taking the Santa pictures. It was all a part of the Island art mentor program. Rebecca was my island mentor and the resort’s promotion manager. She’d given me the job of writing one blog post a week about the resort. I took pictures of each room and described how

it was named after someone important on the island. Rebecca kept telling me I was doing good work, but it all seemed a little bland to me. I wanted a story that would be different and unique, a story that sizzled.

“Get out!” Sammy pounded on my window.

“Coming,” I grumbled. I slipped into my elf shoes and opened the car door. Rain water gushed off the roof and left a puddle by the door. I dashed around the puddle and through the oak doors.

The smell of bacon, waffles, and coffee greeted me. Light piano music tinkled from the dining room. Amy stopped at the front desk. She held a stack of colorful red and green flyers.

The Island holiday dance.

The holiday dance was an annual event. It included the yearly giving tree, a large community pot-luck, and a dance. The dance was a formal dance. No one under the age of fourteen could attend. I’d just turned fourteen the day after Halloween. But I still needed a date—something which was not as easy to accomplish as turning fourteen.

I headed down the hallway to Santa’s workshop. Sammy dashed in front of me.

When I reached the end of the hall, Rebecca stepped out from behind a table. A computer was set up on a large table. A stack of cardboard frames were on the left hand side of the computer. After I took the Santa pictures, the families could see the pictures on the computer. They would be able to pick out a background and a small cardboard frame to go with their pictures.

“Hey, Alexa.” Rebecca hugged me. “Are you ready for your big day?” She stepped back and held out a camera.

“Sure.” I took the camera. We practiced all week. But I was still nervous.

“Why don’t you take a couple warm up shots of Santa?” Rebecca asked. “I can make sure everything is working.”

“Okay.” I stepped into the workshop and blinked. Santa’s workshop never changed. The walls were painted with toys and small elves. Six strings of lights covered the tops of the walls, giving the workshop a very bright glow. A very thin Santa sat on the red plush chair.

“Willis!”

There was only one person who called me by my last name. “Samson?”

Santa grinned. “Long time, no see.”

“What are you doing here?” I asked. I blushed. I realized how bad that sounded. “I mean, it’s okay that you’re here...but...where is the mayor?” The mayor always played Santa. His hair was white. He grew a beard just for his Santa role. We usually didn’t have to stuff the mayor with too many pillows.

“His daughter had a baby,” Samson said. “He went to the mainland last night.”

“Oh.” I leaned against the side wall of the workshop. The wall swayed behind me. I couldn’t see much of Samson. A thick white beard covered most of his lower face and he wore the Santa suit. But I could hear his childhood voice was gone and in its place was a deep smooth voice. He’d also gotten a lot taller.

“Careful,” Samson said. “I don’t think those walls hold much weight.”

“Right,” I mumbled and stepped away from the wall. “Should we get the practice shot?” I tried to refocus myself. It really wasn’t that unlikely for Samson to appear at Santa’s workshop. He and his dad lived in one of the small craftsman-style houses surrounding the resort. The houses were reserved for the fulltime employees. If the mayor had been a last minute cancellation, Samson was an easy fill-in.

Samson leaned back in the Santa chair. He placed his arms on the chair rests. "Is this how I should sit?"

"Um..." I set the camera down. "I think you need some more padding. A pillow or something."

"You're right." Samson stood.

My breath caught. We'd always been the same height. Now Samson towered over me by at least three inches. But before I had time to think about it, or how much my stomach was dancing with butterflies, Samson dashed out of the workshop. I tried to take deep breaths. *Focus*, I told myself. *Focus*. Samson had always seen me as a younger little sister. There was no reason to think his opinion had changed. I did not want to get my hopes up only to have them dashed.

"Everything okay?" Rebecca peered around the side wall of the workshop.

"Santa needed some more padding," I said. "He'll be right back." My voice sounded steady and did not betray my inner turmoil.

Sammy hopped onto the Santa chair. Her legs didn't touch the ground. She held a basket full of candy canes. Two were in her mouth. "Why is your face red?" She mumbled through her candy.

"Take the candy canes out of your mouth," I said. "Candy is for the children who visit Santa."

"I am visiting Santa," Sammy said. "Where is he?"

"He had to find some padding," I said.

"Oh." Sammy sucked hard on her candy cane. She seemed to be thinking.

"You know this isn't the real Santa, right?" I was pretty sure Opal or Rebecca told Sammy the resort Santa wasn't the real one, but I wanted to make sure.

"There's no Santa," Sammy said firmly. She cupped her hands over her lips and whispered loudly. "This is all just pretend."

“Right.” I shrugged. I tried to be nice to Sammy, but it was impossible.

I wiggled my toes inside my tight shoes. If I took them off, no one would ever know. Amy left after dropping off the flyers and Rebecca wouldn’t mind.

Samson tapped my arm. “What do you think?”

I forgot about the shoes and eyed Samson. A large, striped green and yellow pillow stuck out of Samson’s shirt. “Are those the lawn chair cushions?”

“Shhh...” Samson put his fingers to his lips. “No one will ever know.”

“Yes they will,” I said. “The pillow is hanging too low.”

Samson shoved the pillow up his shirt. “Better?”

“Better,” I said.

He winked at me. “You’re great, Willis.”

“Thanks,” I mumbled. Our conversation felt the way I remembered. Light and easy. The only problem was I didn’t want things to be the way it had been. I wanted there to be something more. I wanted Samson to see me as something more.

“What’s the matter?” Samson turned around in a circle. “Are the pillows hanging out too far?”

“Everything is great.” I lifted the camera. I forced myself to forget my wishful longings. “Smile.”

Samson gave me a cheesy smile. I snapped the picture.

“Santa!” Two small children peeked around the wall of the workshop.

“The line starts here,” Rebecca called. “Over here!”

“Candy canes for everyone!” Sammy said. She moved among the quickly-forming line with her basket of candy canes.

“Good luck, Santa,” I said.

“Good luck, Willis.” Samson reached over and pulled me into a large bear hug.

“Ompf.” My heart thudded to my elf shoes. I inhaled the warm spicy smell of Samson’s soap. I couldn’t move.

Samson patted my back like a fellow football player. When he let me go, I stumbled toward the back of the workshop. He defiantly did not see me as a potential girlfriend.



The morning passed quickly. There was only one screaming girl scared of Santa, and I took only one blurry picture. I tried not to think about Samson too much. At noon, Rebecca turned Santa’s clock to *will return at one o’clock*.

Samson pulled off his beard, hat, and wig. His thick, dark, wavy hair tumbled out. “Whew! It’s hot in there.”

I stepped out of my elf shoes. I wiggled my toes. I was not stepping foot in those shoes until one o’clock.

“Lunch is in the café,” Rebecca said. “I’ve got a table set up for Santa and his Elves.”

“No,” Samson groaned. “I can’t put on the wig and beard.”

“Please,” I added. “I don’t want to wear my shoes any longer.”

Rebecca frowned. “We can’t have Santa and his elf eating in the restaurant out of costume. What will the kids think?”

“We can eat somewhere else,” I said. “Please, Rebecca. We need a break.”

“Okay,” Rebecca grumbled. “I’ll eat at the table with Sammy.”

“I’m not eating without Santa,” Sammy said. She placed her hands on her hips. “I’m eating with them.”

“Cripes.” I rolled my eyes. Why did she have to be so difficult?

“How about we get a sandwich and eat in my office?” Rebecca said to Sammy. “I’ll let you play on the computer.” She winked at me.

“Thank you,” I mouthed.

Sammy picked up another candy cane from the basket. She unwrapped it and popped it in her mouth. “I’m not that hungry.”

“Come on.” Rebecca placed her hand firmly on Sammy’s shoulder. “I bet you can find some room in that stomach for lunch. I might even be able to find some Christmas candy in my office.”

Samson chuckled. “I’m starving. Let’s see if we can find something to eat at my house.”

“Sure.” I followed Samson out the side door of the resort. The rain had stopped but a heavy mist covered everything. I shivered. It was warm inside Santa’s workshop, and I hadn’t remembered to pick up my coat.

“Cold?” Samson shrugged out of his red Santa jacket. He handed the jacket to me. “This is warmer than the elf costume.”

“Thanks.” I slipped into the oversized red jacket and pulled it around me. The jacket was warm. I smelled the same spicy smell as when Samson hugged me. I inhaled deeply.

As I walked on the brick pathway next to Samson, my elf shoes made small clicking noises. Samson hummed what sounded like “Jingle Bells.”

When we arrived at Samson’s house, Rob met us at the door. “What are you doing back?” He frowned and crossed his hands over his chest.

“We’re getting lunch,” Samson said.

I took a step behind Samson. Rob could be a little bit scary sometimes. I thought that was probably why Mom and Rob broke up. Mom

always said they just couldn't resolve a couple things. I wondered if one of those things was Rob's gruffness.

"You're supposed to eat at the Resort," Rob said. "Rebecca had a table for you."

Samson shrugged. "It didn't work out." He stepped past Rob.

"Hi, Alexa," Rob said gruffly.

"Hi," I muttered. I hoped Rob didn't ask me about Mom. I didn't want to tell him that Mom still kept his pictures on her bedroom dresser. Sometimes, I caught her looking at the old photo albums.

In the kitchen, Samson opened the refrigerator. He pulled out a large bowl of chicken salad. Samson took two plates from an upper cabinet and handed me a pair of tongs. Rob leaned against the counter and eyed us.

I took the tongs and heaped salad on my plate. Samson did the same. Rob didn't say a word.

"Let's go to the porch," Samson said. "There's a space heater. It won't be cold."

"Great idea." I wanted to get away from the obvious tension between Samson and Rob. I followed Samson through the house and onto the front porch.

When we got to the porch, Samson didn't sit down. He stared into the gray choppy waters beyond the resort. "My dad and I haven't gotten along for a couple years. I didn't want to come back here. But Mom said she couldn't give me constant supervision. She was traveling a lot for her job. I got caught up with the wrong people." Samson stared hard at the water as if he was searching for something. "I knew Dad would never forgive me. He wanted me to be his perfect son. Perfect sons don't serve time in juvenile detention." Samson turned to me. "I'm glad you're here. I always liked hanging out with you." He reached over and ruffled my hair.

“Thanks,” I said. “I always liked hanging out with you, too.” I swallowed hard. Samson didn’t see me as anything more than a little sister. It didn’t matter if my heart crashed around my chest all morning and I couldn’t stop thinking about him.

Samson turned to fiddle with a small space heater. I shivered. It was going to take a while to warm up the porch. “I think we should find somewhere warm to eat, don’t you?” I looked across the courtyard to the well-lit resort.

“You’re right,” Samson said, and smiled at me. “Sorry about that. I thought Dad kept the heater on all the time. There’s a quiet spot on the second floor for the resort. I don’t really want to go back inside the house with Dad if you don’t mind.”

“No problem,” I said. I didn’t want to go back inside with Rob and Samson either.

I carried my plate and walked with Samson across the grounds. We hurried around the resort’s soggy gardens and through the front door. I didn’t worry if it was strange to see an elf wearing a Santa jacket or a Santa wearing a T-shirt and Santa pants. I trailed in front of Samson up the main staircase and to the second floor. Samson pointed to a long window bench at the end of the hallway. I sat down on the thick cushions with my plate of food in my lap. I didn’t eat anything.

“I hear you’re writing a blog post every week,” Samson said. He took a large bit of salad and chewed.

“Yes.” I flushed. “I write about the different rooms. I want to write about something a little more exciting, but I can’t find a topic.”

“Have you been in that room yet?” Samson pointed to the room at the other end of the hall.

“No.” I shook my head. “I don’t think so.”

“Ah.” Samson grinned at me. “Let’s go.”

I set down my plate. “Do you have a key?”

“I can get one.” Samson darted into a room labeled Supply Closet. He emerged two seconds later with a large chain of keys. He dangled the keys in the air. “You just have to know where to look!”

I jumped up and, feeling like I was eleven again, yelled out, “Race you!” I bolted down the hallway. Samson ran behind me.

I got to the door first and slammed it with my hand. “I won!”

“You cheated!” Samson said. “You took off first.” Samson gently pushed me out of the way and inserted the key into the lock. He turned the knob and opened the door.

I stepped around him. The room was filled with boxes. “What is this?” I asked. “A supply room?”

“This,” Samson said, “is where the resorts leftovers are kept. Christmas is that way.” He pointed to the left. “Old photo albums are that way.” He pointed to the right.

“There must at least a year’s worth of blog posts in this room. I could take pictures and focus on a different item each week.”

“Everyone forgets about this room,” Samson said. “I bet Rebecca doesn’t even know it’s here.”

“But you remembered.” I turned and looked up at Samson. “You care about the Resort, don’t you?”

“I do,” Samson said quietly. “I think that’s one of the problems with my dad and I. He’s doing some things that are, well...”

I waited to see if he’d finish, but he didn’t say anything. I didn’t want to push and turned away. “What’s that?” I walked to a large wood wardrobe in the back of the room.

“Clothes the guests left, I guess.”

I picked my way through the room and pulled opened the door. My breath caught. Ball gowns of all colors hung from gold hangers. I fingered a red velvet dress with lace trim. The dress would be perfect for the Island holiday dance. Carefully I lifted the dress from

the closet. I slipped off the Santa jacket and dropped it on the floor. I pulled the dress over my elf suit. It fit perfectly. I twirled around. “How do I look?”

“Nice.” Samson’s voice cracked and his face colored. “You look really nice.”

Before I could say anything, there was a pounding on the stairs. “Alexa! Samson!” Sammy hollered.

“Uh, oh.” I quickly peeled off the dress and hung it back on the hanger. I tossed the Santa jacket to Samson.

“There you are!” Sammy stood in the doorway. She placed her hands on her hips. “We’ve been looking all over for you.”

“You found us,” I said.

“What were you doing?” Sammy eyed us.

“Eating lunch,” I said.

“Your plates are over there.” Sammy pointed to our plates on the window bench.

“Alexa was working on her school assignment.” Samso placed his hand on my lower back. I leaned into his touch. Was I imaging it, or did his touch feel a bit gentler than his football hug?

“You’re in trouble!” Sammy turned and raced toward the stairs.

I raised my eyebrow at Samson. “Trouble.”

He grinned at me. “Trouble.”



The afternoon at the workshop went smoothly. There were no screaming children, and I took all the pictures correctly on the first shot. I even managed to slip off my elf shoes and leave them in the corner by Santa’s chair. At five o’clock, Rebecca closed the

workshop line. “Everyone did a great job. There are Christmas cookies in the lobby.”

“Cookies!” Sammy leaped in the air, twirled, and dashed down the hall.

I set the camera on the table and turned to look for my elf shoes. “Do you know...”

“Are you looking for these?” Samson dangled my elf shoes from his fingertips.

“Yes.” I reached out and my fingers touched Samson’s.

Samson held my shoes away from me. “Do elves like to dance?”

“Sometimes,” I said. My heart pounded.

“Would you like to go to the Island dance?”

“Yes,” I said softly.

Samson twirled one of my shoes around his fingers. “But you don’t want to wear these shoes?”

“No.” I laughed. “I don’t want to wear those shoes.”

Samson placed my shoe in his palm. I picked up the shoe. Samson’s fingers curled up to touch mine. The shoe fell to the ground. “Alexa.”

I held my breath.

“It’s a nice name.”

I exhaled. “Thank you, Santa.”

I left my shoes on the floor.

About the Author

Mindy Hardwick writes stories for children and young adults. Mindy facilitates a poetry workshop with teens at Denney Youth Juvenile Justice Center. She is the co-editor of four anthologies, written by the youth at Denney, as well as the teens' blog at:

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Mindy is included on the Washington State Arts Commission Teaching Artist Roster, and worked with the youth of the Tulalip Tribe in the 2011 New Directions Music and Art Prevention Program. Mindy is one of the teaching artists included in the Reclaiming Futures Program at Denney Juvenile Justice Center. She holds an MFA in Writing for Children and Young Adults from Vermont College and is a member of Seattle SCBWI.

When Mindy is not writing, she likes to art journal and visit the San Juan Islands, where she takes hikes and enjoys seeing eagles from pebble beaches. Mindy lives in the Pacific Northwest with her cocker spaniel, Stormy, and her feisty cat, Cleo. Visit Mindy at:

www.mindyhardwick.com.