*It’s a tough gig being Father Christmas*, he thought. Fifty minutes into his shift and he was feeling the heat. The photographer’s lights and the padding in his suit were making him hot - perspiration was running down his back and to make things even more uncomfortable, the synthetic beard was itching like crazy. He pushed his fake gold wire framed glasses back up the bridge of his nose and looked at the long line of expectant children, some bubbling over with excitement and others coyly hiding behind their parent’s legs. Steeling himself, he smiled benevolently and beckoned to the next child in line and hoisted her onto his knee as her mother looked on adoringly, despite having been relieved of $35 for the photographer’s fee.

‘And what’s your name little girl?’ Santa asked.

‘My name’s Alice and I’m six and a half’ she replied with child-like authority.

‘Alice eh? Well, isn’t that a pretty name for a pretty little girl’ Santa observed as Alice smiled approvingly.

‘And have you been a good little girl Alice?’ Santa asked quite seriously.

‘Oh yes Santa, I’ve been ever so good for Mummy and Daddy’ Alice nodded earnestly, twirling the bow on the front of her dress in her little fingers.

‘Well, I’m very glad to hear that Alice, because Santa likes it when children are good. Now tell me Alice what would you like Santa to bring you for Christmas this year - a new doll perhaps?’

‘Oh no Santa, what I really want is a nice little pony so I can go riding.’ Alice replied.

‘A pony eh?’ Santa asked cautiously as he looked over to Alice’s mother who was now standing rigidly with arms folded and a murderous, don’t-even-go-there expression on her face that was just daring Santa to say *Yes.*

Santa coughed and in an attempt to rescue the situation said, ‘My goodness me Alice, I don’t think I have a pony up at the North Pole, and even if I did, well…I don’t think I could fit a pony into my toy sack. Perhaps there might be something else you want?’

‘Mmmm … well … Mummy did say I should ask for World Peace and for Daddy to stop snoring at night but I don’t think she was being very serious. I suppose I could do with a new book about ponies. Yes, that’s what I want – a book about ponies … and perhaps World Peace would be good too cos I don’t think *anybody* can stop Daddy snoring.’

‘I think that’s a grand idea Alice – you tell your Mummy that you decided that Santa would bring you a book about ponies and I’ll work on the World Peace’ a relieved Santa replied.

‘Santa?’

‘Yes Alice’

‘Has there always only been one old Santa for ever and ever and ever?’ Alice asked.

‘Yes Alice, there has only ever been one old Santa - me’ Santa replied earnestly.

Alice was quiet for a few moments, deep in thought, before asking

‘Then who was Santa when *you* were a little boy?’

Santa sighed and looked at the little tot called Alice on his knee but was suddenly thinking of the little tot called whiskey in his hip flask.