



## A Letter from America

Once upon a time, a family of elephants lived in London. Mr. Elephant was the Ambassador to London from their home country of Elephas. Mrs. Elephant helped her husband to be the ambassador. She was also an artist who loved to paint and make statues.

Mr. and Mrs. Elephant had two children named Harold and Penelope. They went to school in London, where they had many friends.

Penelope was the smartest student in their class. She planned to be a paleontologist when she grew up.

Penelope loved to read books about dinosaurs

and other extinct animals. But she did not just like books about dinosaurs. She loved to read any book about any subject.

Harold was not as good a student as Penelope. He liked to spend his time playing games with his friends. His favorite games were those he made up with his toy soldiers.

Harold had a large collection of toy soldiers. He was always careful to save his pocket money. Then he could add new soldiers to his collection.

Harold wanted to be an astronaut when he grew up. Harold and Penelope's teacher was named Miss Wren. She often reminded Harold, "Now, Harold. You must study harder if you want to travel into space. You will need better grades in math and science."

One day, Mrs. Elephant opened a letter. "Oh, look," she said. "This is from one of my old students."

Before the family had moved to London, Mrs. Elephant was an art teacher. She had taught art classes at the Elephas University. She was an excellent teacher. And her classes were very popular with the students.

"Which one?" asked Mr. Elephant.

“Maria Gonzales,” said Mrs. Elephant. “You remember her. She came to Elephas from the United States to study art.”

“I remember her!” piped up Harold. She used to make yummy *empanadas*.” He rubbed his stomach and smacked his lips.

“Oh, Harold,” said Penelope. “You always remember food!”

“What is wrong with that?” asked Harold. “And she made *flan*, too!”

Mrs. Elephant continued reading her letter. “Maria says she is back in America. She lives in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Oh! How wonderful! She is going to have her first big art show. And she wants us to come see it!”

Harold and Penelope jumped up and down. “Yay!” cried Harold. “Can we please go? I want to see cowboys and Indians fighting!”

Mr. Elephant laughed. “I do not think you will see too many cowboys. Not in the city of Albuquerque. You might see some Native Americans. But they will not be fighting cowboys.”

“But I want to see someone get scalped,” said Harold.



“Oh, Harold. Do not say such horrible things,” said Mrs. Elephant. “Nobody gets scalped anymore. At least, I hope not,” she shuddered.

“Well, I want to see the dinosaurs,” said Penelope. “The desert is a great place to find fossils.”

“Dusty old bones,” said Harold.

Penelope stuck out her tongue at him. “And the things the Native Americans left behind. Like stone carvings, pottery, and arrowheads.”

“Arrowheads?” asked Harold. “If I can’t see somebody get scalped, I’d like an arrowhead.”

“It is settled then,” said Mrs. Elephant. “I have always wanted to visit the American Southwest. The views are wonderful. I must pack extra paints and canvasses. Then I can paint some landscapes.”

“What sort of art is Maria showing?” asked Mr. Elephant.

Mrs. Elephant read the letter again. “Hmmm, she does not say.”

“What kind of art did she study?” asked Mr. Elephant.

“All different kinds,” said Mrs. Elephant. “She took classes in drawing, painting, and making statues. She just could not make up her mind.”

“Well, I guess we will find out in Albuquerque,” said Mr. Elephant.

Mr. Elephant became serious. “Remember that elephants are not very common in America. People might become afraid if they see an elephant in New Mexico. So we must continue to wear our disguises.”

In England, Mr. and Mrs. Elephant wore raincoats and carried umbrellas. Harold and Penelope wore school uniforms. When they wore their disguises, they looked like an ordinary English family.



# Chapter Two

## Leaving London

On the day of their trip, the Elephants left the Elephas Embassy. They squeezed into a taxicab that took them to Heathrow Airport. On the way there, they pointed to their favorite sights.

“Look,” said Harold. “There is Big Ben! Do you remember when we first came to London?”

“Yes,” said Mr. Elephant. “You and Penelope were afraid you would not like it. You did not want to leave your friends in Elephas. Have you changed your minds?”

“Yes, Daddy!” said Harold and Penelope together.

“We love London. There are so many museums

here,” said Penelope.

“And soldiers on horses!” said Harold. He pointed out the taxi window. One of the Queen’s Guards was riding a horse.

At the airport, a porter loaded their suitcases onto a cart. He led the Elephants to the airline desk.

Mr. Elephant said, “I have tickets for four. The name is Elefant. E-L-E-F-A-N-T.

When Harold and Penelope had first heard this spelling, they were confused. Penelope had asked her father, “Daddy? Why did you spell our name Elefant with an F? Instead of with a PH?”

Her father had replied, “This is part of our disguise. What would people guess if they met a family named Elephant?”

Now, Harold and Penelope found it funny when their parents used this false spelling. It kept people from becoming suspicious that there were elephants around. They began to giggle, but Mrs. Elephant shushed them.

“Ah, yes, Mr. Elefant,” said the desk clerk. “I have your tickets right here. I hope you have a wonderful visit to New Mexico.”

“Thank you,” said Mr. Elephant. “I am certain





we will.” Mr. Elephant led his family to the first class area of the airplane.

The airplane soon took off. Harold and Penelope watched through the window. They saw the city of London disappear beneath their airplane.

“Look what I brought, Penelope,” said Harold. He pulled some metal toys out of his pockets.

“More toy soldiers?” asked Penelope.

“No,” said Harold. He held them up closer for her to see. “They are cowboys and Indians. Just like in the movies.”

Mr. Elephant looked at Harold’s toys. “I do not think you will see anyone who looks like that. Not many Native Americans carry bows and arrows. Or wear feathered headdresses. At least not everyday.”

“I do not care,” said Harold. “I still think they are fun.”