

## Tales of Christmas Past

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**Merry Christmas!**

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# About This Book

The wonderful stories and poems in this collection were all written in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early twentieth century and give us a glimpse into the world as it once was.

Real horse and carriages raced through the snow with their bells jingling and Yule logs were lit in hard working fireplaces. Christmas trees were festooned with popcorn and candles and Santa Claus had not yet become the red suited jolly fat old man we are so familiar with.

We've also included some fantasy tales, poems of the time and some rather moralistic stories along the lines of Aesop's fables.

You'll find stories for just about every age group written in a style that may seem old-fashioned. Of course, it is old-fashioned, for most of the stories are over a hundred years old!

The illustrations are from the original books wherever possible, we've restored them as best we can but they are REALLY old and time has taken its toll on the paper they were printed on.

Please enjoy your journey into past Christmases and have a very Merry Christmas this year in your years to come!

The Publishers

# Christmas Every Day



*By William Dean Howells*

1892

THE little girl came into her papa's study, as she always did Saturday morning before breakfast, and asked for a story. He tried to beg off that morning, for he was very busy, but she would not let him. So he began:

"Well, once there was a little pig--"

She stopped him at the word. She said she had heard little pig-stories till she was perfectly sick of them.

"Well, what kind of story *shall* I tell, then?"

"About Christmas. It's getting to be the season."

"Well!" Her papa roused himself. "Then I'll tell you about the little girl that wanted it Christmas every day in the year. How would you like that?"

"First-rate!" said the little girl; and she nestled into comfortable shape in his lap, ready for listening.

"Very well, then, this little pig--Oh, what are you pounding me for?"

"Because you said little pig instead of little girl."

"I should like to know what's the difference between a little pig and a little girl that wanted it Christmas every day!"

"Papa!" said the little girl warningly. At this her papa began to tell the story.

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Once there was a little girl who liked Christmas so much that she wanted it to be Christmas every day in the year, and as soon as Thanksgiving was over she began to send postcards to the old Christmas Fairy to ask if she mightn't have it. But the old Fairy never answered, and after a while the little girl found out that the Fairy wouldn't notice anything but real letters sealed outside with a monogram--or your initial, anyway. So, then, she began to send letters, and just the day before Christmas, she got a letter from the Fairy, saying she might have it Christmas every day for a year, and then they would see about having it longer.

The little girl was excited already, preparing for the old-fashioned, once-a-year Christmas that was coming the next day. So she resolved to keep the Fairy's promise to herself and surprise everybody with it as it kept coming true, but then it slipped out of her mind altogether.

She had a splendid Christmas. She went to bed early, so as to let Santa Claus fill the stockings, and in the morning she was up the first of anybody and found hers all lumpy with packages of candy, and oranges and grapes, and rubber balls, and all kinds of small presents. Then she waited until the rest of the family was up, and she burst into the library to look at the large presents laid out on the library table--books, and boxes of stationery, and dolls, and little stoves, and dozens of handkerchiefs, and inkstands, and skates, and photograph frames, and boxes of watercolors, and dolls' houses--and the big Christmas tree, lighted and standing in the middle.

She had a splendid Christmas all day. She ate so much candy that she did not want any breakfast, and the whole forenoon the presents kept pouring in that had not been delivered the night before, and she went round giving the presents she had got for other people, and came home and ate turkey and cranberry for dinner, and plum pudding and nuts and raisins and oranges, and then went out and coasted, and came in with a stomachache crying, and her papa said he would see if his house was turned into that sort of fool's paradise another year, and they had a light supper, and pretty early everybody went to bed cross.

The little girl slept very heavily and very late, but she was wakened at last by the other children dancing around her bed with their stockings full of presents in their hands. "Christmas! Christmas! Christmas!" they all shouted.

"Nonsense! It was Christmas yesterday," said the little girl, rubbing her eyes sleepily.

Her brothers and sisters just laughed. "We don't know about that. It's Christmas today, anyway. You come into the library and see."

Then all at once it flashed on the little girl that the Fairy was keeping her promise, and her year of Christmases was beginning. She was dreadfully sleepy, but she sprang up and darted into the library. There it was again! Books, and boxes of stationery, and dolls, and so on.

There was the Christmas tree blazing away, and the family picking out their presents, and her father looking perfectly puzzled, and her mother ready to cry. "I'm sure I don't see how I'm to dispose of all these things," said her mother, and her father said it seemed to him they had had something just like it the day before, but he supposed he must have dreamed it. This struck the little girl as the best kind of a joke, and so she ate so much candy she didn't want any breakfast, and went round carrying presents, and had turkey and cranberry for dinner, and then went out and coasted, and came in with a stomachache, crying.

Now, the next day, it was the same thing over again, but everybody getting crosser, and at the end of a week's time so many people had lost their tempers that you could pick up lost tempers anywhere, they perfectly strewed the ground. Even when people tried to recover their tempers they usually got somebody else's, and it made the most dreadful mix.

The little girl began to get frightened, keeping the secret all to herself, she wanted to tell her mother, but she didn't dare to, and she was ashamed to ask the Fairy to take back her gift, it seemed ungrateful and ill-bred. So it went on and on, and it was Christmas on St. Valentine's Day and Washington's Birthday, just the same as any day, and it didn't skip even the First of April, though everything was counterfeit that day, and that was some little relief.

After a while turkeys got to be awfully scarce, selling for about a thousand dollars apiece. They got to passing off almost anything for turkeys--even half-grown hummingbirds. And cranberries--well they asked a diamond apiece for cranberries. All the woods and orchards were cut down for Christmas trees. After a while they had to make Christmas trees out of rags. But there were plenty of rags, because people got so poor, buying presents for one another, that they couldn't get any new clothes, and they just wore their old ones to tatters. They got so poor that everybody had to go to the poorhouse, except the confectioners, and the storekeepers, and the book-sellers, and they all got so rich and proud that they would hardly wait upon a person when he came to buy. It was perfectly shameful!

After it had gone on about three or four months, the little girl, whenever she came into the room in the morning and saw those great ugly, lumpy stockings dangling at the fireplace, and the disgusting presents around everywhere, used to sit down and burst out crying. In six months she was perfectly exhausted, she couldn't even cry anymore.

And how it was on the Fourth of July! On the Fourth of July, the first boy in the United States woke up and found out that his firecrackers and toy pistol and two-dollar collection of fireworks were nothing but sugar and candy painted up to look like fireworks. Before ten o'clock every boy in the United States discovered that his July Fourth things had turned into Christmas things and was so mad. The Fourth of July orations all turned into Christmas carols, and when anybody tried to read the Declaration of Independence, instead of saying, "When in the course of human events it becomes necessary," he was sure to sing, "God rest you merry gentlemen." It was perfectly awful.

About the beginning of October the little girl took to sitting down on dolls wherever she found them--she hated the sight of them so, and by Thanksgiving she just slammed her presents across the room. By that time people didn't carry presents around nicely anymore. They flung them over the fence or through the window, and, instead of taking great pains to write "For dear Papa," or "Mama " or "Brother," or "Sister," they used to write, "Take it, you horrid old thing!" and then go and bang it against the front door.

Nearly everybody had built barns to hold their presents, but pretty soon the barns overflowed, and then they used to let them lie out in the rain, or anywhere. Sometimes the police used to come and tell them to shovel their presents off the sidewalk or they would arrest them.

Before Thanksgiving came it had leaked out who had caused all these Christmases. The little girl had suffered so much that she had talked about it in her sleep, and after that hardly anybody would play with her, because if it had not been for her greediness it wouldn't have happened. And now, when it came Thanksgiving, and she wanted them to go to church, and have turkey, and show their gratitude, they said that all the turkeys had been eaten for her old Christmas dinners and if she would stop the Christmases, they would see about the gratitude. And the very next day the little girl began sending letters to the Christmas Fairy, and then telegrams, to stop it. But it didn't do any good, and then she got to calling at the Fairy's house, but the girl that came to the door always said, "Not at home," or "Engaged," or something like that, and so it went on till it came to the old once-a-year Christmas Eve. The little girl fell asleep, and when she woke up in the morning--

"She found it was all nothing but a dream," suggested the little girl.

"No indeed!" said her papa. "It was all every bit true!"

"What *did* she find out, then?"

"Why, that it wasn't Christmas at last, and wasn't ever going to be, anymore. Now it's time for breakfast."

The little girl held her papa fast around the neck.

"You shan't go if you're going to leave it so!"

"How do you want it left?"

"Christmas once a year."

"All right," said her papa, and he went on again.

Well, with no Christmas ever again, there was the greatest rejoicing all over the country. People met together everywhere and kissed and cried for joy. Carts went around and gathered up all the candy and raisins and nuts, and dumped them into the river, and it made the fish perfectly sick. And the whole United States, as far out as Alaska, was one blaze of bonfires, where the children were burning up their presents of all kinds. They had the greatest time!

The little girl went to thank the old Fairy because she had stopped its being Christmas, and she said she hoped the Fairy would keep her promise and see that Christmas never, never came again. Then the Fairy frowned, and said that now the little girl was behaving just as greedily as ever, and she'd better look out. This made the little girl think it all over carefully again, and she said she would be willing to have it Christmas about once in a thousand years, and then she said a hundred, and then she said ten, and at last she got down to one. Then the Fairy said that was the good old way that had pleased people ever since Christmas began, and she was agreed. Then the little girl said, "What're your shoes made of?" And the Fairy said, "Leather." And the little girl said, "Bargain's done forever," and skipped off, and hippity-hopped the whole way home, she was so glad.

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"How will that do?" asked the papa.

"First-rate!" said the little girl, but she hated to have the story stop, and was rather sober. However, her mama put her head in at the door and asked her papa:

"Are you never coming to breakfast? What have you been telling that child?"

"Oh, just a tale with a moral."

The little girl caught him around the neck again.

"We know! Don't you tell *what*, papa! Don't you tell *what*!"

# December – Christmass



John Clare (1793 – 1864)

from *The Shepherd's Calendar with Village Stories and Other Poems*

Christmass is come and every hearth  
Makes room to give him welcome now  
Een want will dry its tears in mirth  
And crown him wi a holly bough  
Tho tramping neath a winters sky  
Oer snow track paths and ryhmey stiles  
The huswife sets her spining bye  
And bids him welcome wi her smiles  
Each house is swept the day before  
And windows stuck wi evergreens  
The snow is beesomd from the door  
And comfort crowns the cottage scenes  
Gilt holly wi its thorny pricks  
And yew and box wi berrys small  
These deck the unusd candlesticks  
And pictures hanging by the wall

Neighbours resume their anual cheer  
Wishing wi smiles and spirits high  
Clad christmass and a happy year  
To every morning passer bye  
Milk maids their christmass journeys go  
Accompanyd wi favourd swain  
And childern pace the crumping snow  
To taste their grannys cake again

Hung wi the ivys veining bough  
The ash trees round the cottage farm  
Are often stript of branches now  
The cotters christmass hearth to warm  
He swings and twists his hazel band  
And lops them off wi sharpend hook  
And oft brings ivy in his hand  
To decorate the chimney nook

Old winter whipes his ides bye  
And warms his fingers till he smiles  
Where cottage hearths are blazing high  
And labour resteth from his toils

Wi merry mirth beguiling care  
Old customs keeping wi the day  
Friends meet their christmass cheer to share  
And pass it in a harmless way

Old customs O I love the sound  
However simple they may be  
What ere wi time has sanction found  
Is welcome and is dear to me  
Pride grows above simplicity  
And spurns it from her haughty mind  
And soon the poets song will be  
The only refuge they can find

The shepherd now no more afraid  
Since custom doth the chance bestow  
Starts up to kiss the giggling maid  
Beneath the branch of mizzletoe  
That neath each cottage beam is seen  
Wi pearl-like-berrys shining gay  
The shadow still of what hath been  
Which fashion yearly fades away

And singers too a merry throng  
At early morn wi simple skill  
Yet imitate the angels song  
And chant their christmass ditty still  
And mid the storm that dies and swells  
By fits-in humings softly steals  
The music of the village bells  
Ringing round their merry peals

And when its past a merry crew  
Bedeckt in masks and ribbons gay  
The 'Morrice danse' their sports renew  
And act their winter evening play  
The clown-turnd-kings for penny praise  
Storm wi the actors strut and swell  
And harlequin a laugh to raise

Wears his hump back and tinkling bell

And oft for pence and spicy ale  
Wi winter nosgays pind before  
The wassail singer tells her tale  
And drawls her christmass carols oer  
The prentice boy wi ruddy face  
And ryhme bepowderd dancing locks  
From door to door wi happy pace  
Runs round to claim his 'christmass box'

The block behind the fire is put  
To sanction customs old desires  
And many a faggots bands are cut  
For the old farmers christmass fires  
Where loud tongd gladness joins the throng  
And winter meets the warmth of may  
Feeling by times the heat too strong  
And rubs his shins and draws away

While snows the window panes bedim  
The fire curls up a sunny charm  
Where creaming oer the pitchers rim  
The flowering ale is set to warm  
Mirth full of joy as summer bees  
Sits there its pleasures to impart  
While childern tween their parents knees  
Sing scraps of carrols oer by heart

And some to view the winter weathers  
Climb up the window seat wi glee  
Likening the snow to falling feathers  
In fancys infant extacy  
Laughing wi superstitious love  
Oer visions wild that youth supplyes  
Of people pulling geese above  
And keeping christmass in the skyes

As tho the homstead trees were drest  
In lieu of snow wi dancing leaves  
As. tho the sundryd martins nest  
Instead of ides hung the eaves  
The childern hail the happy day  
As if the snow was april grass  
And pleasd as neath the warmth of may  
Sport oer the water froze to glass

Thou day of happy sound and mirth  
That long wi childish memory stays  
How blest around the cottage hearth  
I met thee in my boyish days  
Harping wi raptures dreaming joys  
On presents that thy coming found  
The welcome sight of little toys  
The christmass gifts of comers round

'The wooden horse wi arching head  
Drawn upon wheels around the room  
The gilded coach of ginger bread  
And many colord sugar plumb  
Gilt coverd books for pictures sought  
Or storys childhood loves to tell  
Wi many a urgent promise bought  
To get tomorrows lesson well

And many a thing a minutes sport  
Left broken on the sanded floor  
When we woud leave our play and court  
Our parents promises for more  
Tho manhood bids such raptures dye  
And throws such toys away as vain  
Yet memory loves to turn her eye  
And talk such pleasures oer again

Around the glowing hearth at night  
The harmless laugh and winter tale

Goes round-while parting friends delight  
To toast each other oer their ale  
The cotter oft wi quiet zeal  
Will musing oer his bible lean  
While in the dark the lovers steal  
To kiss and toy behind the screen

The yule cake dotted thick wi plumbs  
Is on each supper table found  
And cats look up for falling crumbs  
Which greedy childern litter round  
And huswives sage stuffd seasond chine  
Long hung in chimney nook to drye  
And boiling eldern berry wine  
To drink the christmass eves 'good bye'

# St. Nicholas



By Susan Coolidge

From "What Katy Did" 1872

What are the children all doing to-day?" said Katy, laying down "Norway and the Norwegians," which she was reading for the fourth time; "I haven't seen them since breakfast."

Aunt Izzie, who was sewing on the other side of the room, looked up from her work.

"I don't know," she said; "they're over at Cecy's, or somewhere. They'll be back before long, I guess."

Her voice sounded a little odd and mysterious, but Katy didn't notice it.

"I thought of such a nice plan yesterday," she went on. "That was that all of them should hang their stockings up here to-morrow night instead of in the nursery. Then I could see them open their presents, you know. Mayn't they, Aunt Izzie? It would be real fun."

"I don't believe there will be any objection," replied her aunt. She looked as if she were trying not to laugh. Katy wondered what *was* the matter with her.

It was more than two months now since Cousin Helen went away, and Winter had fairly come. Snow was falling out-doors. Katy could see the thick flakes go whirling past the window, but the sight did not chill her. It only made the room look warmer and more cosy. It was a pleasant room now. There was a bright fire in the grate. Everything was neat and orderly, the air was sweet with mignonette, from a little glass of flowers which stood on the table, and the Katy who lay in bed, was a very different-looking Katy from the forlorn girl of the last chapter.

Cousin Helen's visit, though it lasted only one day, did great good. Not that Katy grew perfect all at once. None of us do that, even in books. But it is everything to be started in the right path. Katy's feet were on it now; and though she often stumbled and slipped, and often sat down discouraged, she kept on pretty steadily, in spite of bad days, which made her say to herself that she was not getting forward at all.

These bad days, when everything seemed hard, and she herself was cross and fretful, and drove the children out of her room, cost Katy many bitter tears. But after them she would pick herself up, and try again, and harder.

And I think that in spite of drawbacks, the little scholar, on the whole, was learning her lesson pretty well.

Cousin Helen was a great comfort all this time. She never forgot Katy. Nearly every week some little thing came from her. Sometimes it was a pencil note, written from her sofa. Sometimes it was an interesting book, or a new magazine, or some pretty little thing for the room. The crimson wrapper which Katy wore was one of her presents, so were the bright chromos of Autumn leaves which hung on the wall, the little stand for the books – all sorts of things. Katy loved to look about her as she lay. All the room seemed full of Cousin Helen and her kindness.

"I wish I had something pretty to put into everybody's stocking," she went on, wistfully; "but I've only got the muffatees for Papa, and these reins for Phil." She took them from under her pillow as she spoke – gay worsted affairs, with bells sewed on here and there. She had knit them herself, a very little bit at a time.

"There's my pink sash," she said suddenly, "I might give that to Clover. I only wore it once, you know, and I don't *think* I got any spots on it. Would you please fetch it and let me see, Aunt Izzie? It's in the top drawer."

Aunt Izzie brought the sash. It proved to be quite fresh, and they both decided that it would do nicely for Clover.

"You know I sha'n't want sashes for ever so long," said Katy, in a rather sad tone. "And this is a beauty."

When she spoke next her voice was bright again.

"I wish I had something real nice for Elsie. Do you know, Aunt Izzie – I think that Elsie is the dearest little girl that ever was."

"I'm glad you've found it out," said Aunt Izzie, who had always been specially fond of Elsie.

"What she wants most of all is a writing-desk," continued Katy. "And Johnny wants a sled. But, oh, dear! those are such big things. And I've only got two dollars and a quarter."

Aunt Izzie marched out of the room without saying anything. When she came back she had something folded up in her hand.

"I didn't know what to give you for Christmas, Katy," she said, "because Helen sends you such a lot of things that there don't seem to be anything you haven't already. So I thought I'd give you this, and let you choose for yourself. But if you've set your heart on getting presents for the children, perhaps you'd rather have it now." So saying, Aunt Izzie laid on the bed a crisp, new five-dollar bill!

"How good you are!" cried Katy, flushed with pleasure. And indeed Aunt Izzie did seem to have grown wonderfully good of late. Perhaps Katy had got hold of her smooth handle!

Being now in possession of seven dollars and a quarter, Katy could afford to be gorgeously generous. She gave Aunt Izzie an exact description of the desk she wanted.

"It's no matter about it's being very big," said Katy, "but it must have a blue velvet lining, and an inkstand, with a silver top. And please buy some little sheets of paper and envelopes, and a pen-handle; the prettiest you can find. Oh! and there must be a lock and key. Don't forget that, Aunt Izzie."

"No, I won't. What else?"

"I'd like the sled to be green," went on Katy, "and to have a nice name. Sky-Scraper would be nice, if there was one. Johnny saw a sled once called Sky-Scraper, and she said it was splendid. And if there's money enough left, Aunt, won't you buy me a real nice book for Dorry, and another for Cecy, and a silver thimble for Mary? Her old one is full of holes. Oh! and some candy. And something for Debbie and Bridget – some little thing, you know. I think that's all!"

Was ever seven dollars and a quarter expected to do so much? Aunt Izzie must have been a witch, indeed, to make it hold out. But she did, and next day all the precious bundles came home. How Katy enjoyed untying the strings!

Everything was exactly right.

"There wasn't any Sky-Scraper," said Aunt Izzie, "so I got 'Snow-Skimmer' instead."

"It's beautiful, and I like it just as well," said Katy contentedly.

"Oh, hide them, hide them!" she cried with sudden terror, "somebody's coming." But the somebody was only Papa, who put his head into the room as Aunt Izzie, laden with bundles, scuttled across the hall.

Katy was glad to catch him alone. She had a little private secret to talk over with him. It was about Aunt Izzie, for whom she, as yet, had no present.

"I thought perhaps you'd get me a book like that one of Cousin Helen's, which Aunt Izzie liked so much," she said. "I don't recollect the name exactly. It was something about a Shadow. But I've spent all my money."

"Never mind about that," said Dr. Carr. "We'll make that right. 'The Shadow of the Cross' – was that it? I'll buy it this afternoon."

"Oh, thank you, Papa! And please get a brown cover, if you can, because Cousin Helen's was brown. And you won't let Aunt Izzie know, will you? Be careful, Papa!"

"I'll swallow the book first, brown cover and all," said Papa, making a funny face. He was pleased to see Katy so interested about anything again.

These delightful secrets took up so much of her thoughts, that Katy scarcely found time to wonder at the absence of the children, who generally haunted her room, but who for three days back had hardly been seen. However, after supper they all came up in a body, looking very merry, and as if they had been having a good time somewhere.

"You don't know what we've been doing," began Philly.

"Hush, Phil!" said Clover, in a warning voice. Then she divided the stockings which she held in her hand. And everybody proceeded to hang them up.

Dorry hung his on one side of the fireplace, and John hers exactly opposite. Clover and Phil suspended theirs side by side, on two handles of the bureau.

"I'm going to put mine here, close to Katy, so that she can see it the first thing in the morning," said Elsie, pinning hers to the bed-post.

Then they all sat down round the fire to write their wishes on bits of paper, and see whether they would burn, or fly up the chimney. If they did the latter, it was a sign that Santa Claus had them safe, and would bring the things wished for.

John wished for a sled and a doll's tea-set, and the continuation of the Swiss Family Robinson. Dorry's list ran thus:

"A plum-cake,  
A new Bibel,  
Harry and Lucy,  
A Kellidescope,  
Everything else Santa Claus likes."

When they had written these lists they threw them into the fire. The fire gave a flicker just then, and the papers vanished. Nobody saw exactly how. John thought they flew up chimney, but Dorry said they didn't.

Phil dropped his piece in very solemnly. It flamed for a minute, then sank into ashes.

"There, you won't get it, whatever it was!" said Dorry. "What did you write, Phil?"

"Nofing," said Phil, "only just Philly Carr."

The children shouted.

"I wrote 'a writing-desk' on mine," remarked Elsie, sorrowfully, "But it all burned up."

Katy chuckled when she heard this.

And now Clover produced her list. She read aloud:

"'Strive and Thrive,'  
A pair of kid gloves,

A muff,  
A good temper!"  
Then she dropped it into the fire. Behold, it flew straight up chimney.

"How queer!" said Katy; "none of the rest of them did that."

The truth was, that Clover, who was a canny little mortal, had slipped across the room and opened the door just before putting her wishes in. This, of course, made a draft, and sent the paper right upward.

Pretty soon Aunt Izzie came in and swept them all off to bed.

"I know how it will be in the morning," she said, "you'll all be up and racing about as soon as it is light. So you must get your sleep now, if ever."

After they had gone, Katy recollected that nobody had offered to hang a stocking up for her. She felt a little hurt when she thought of it. "But I suppose they forgot," she said to herself.

A little later Papa and Aunt Izzie came in, and they filled the stockings. It was great fun. Each was brought to Katy, as she lay in bed, that she might arrange it as she liked.

The toes were stuffed with candy and oranges. Then came the parcels, all shapes and sizes, tied in white paper, with ribbons, and labelled.

"What's that?" asked Dr. Carr, as Aunt Izzie rammed a long, narrow package into Clover's stocking.

"A nail-brush," answered Aunt Izzie; "Clover needed a new one."

How Papa and Katy laughed! "I don't believe Santa Claus ever had such a thing before," said Dr. Carr.

"He's a very dirty old gentleman, then," observed Aunt Izzie, grimly.

The desk and sled were too big to go into any stocking, so they were wrapped in paper and hung beneath the other things. It was ten o'clock before all was done, and Papa and Aunt Izzie went away. Katy lay a long time watching the queer shapes of the stocking-legs as they dangled in the firelight. Then she fell asleep.

It seemed only a minute, before something touched her and woke her up. Behold, it was day-time, and there was Philly in his night-gown, climbing up on the bed to kiss her! The rest of the children, half dressed, were dancing about with their stockings in their hands.

"Merry Christmas! Merry Christmas!" they cried. "Oh, Katy, such beautiful, beautiful things!"

"Oh!" shrieked Elsie, who at that moment spied her desk, "Santa Claus did bring it, after all! Why, it's got 'from Katy' written on it! Oh, Katy, it's so sweet, and I'm so happy." and Elsie hugged Katy, and sobbed for pleasure.

But what was that strange thing beside the bed? Katy stared, and rubbed her eyes. It certainly had not been there when she went to sleep. How had it come?

It was a little evergreen tree planted in a red flower-pot. The pot had stripes of gilt paper stuck on it, and gilt stars and crosses, which made it look very gay. The boughs of the tree were hung with oranges, and nuts, and shiny red apples, and pop-corn balls, and strings of bright berries. There were also a number of little packages tied with blue and crimson ribbon, and altogether the tree looked so pretty, that Katy gave a cry of delighted surprise.

"It's a Christmas-tree for you, because you're sick, you know!" said the children, all trying to hug her at once.

"We made it ourselves," said Dorry, hopping about on one foot; "I pasted the black stars on the pot."

"And I popped the corn!" cried Philly.

"Do you like it?" asked Elsie, cuddling close to Katy. "That's my present – that one tied with a green ribbon. I wish it was nicer! Don't you want to open 'em right away?"

Of course Katy wanted to. All sorts of things came out of the little bundles. The children had arranged every parcel themselves. No grown person had been allowed to help in the least.

Elsie's present was a pen-wiper, with a gray flannel kitten on it. Johnnie's, a doll's tea-tray of scarlet tin.

"Isn't it beau-ti-ful?" she said, admiringly.

Dorry's gift, I regret to say, was a huge red-and-yellow spider, which whirred wildly when waved at the end of its string.

"They didn't want me to buy it," said he, "but I did! I thought it would amoose you. Does it amoose you, Katy?"

"Yes indeed," said Katy, laughing and blinking as Dorry waved the spider to and fro before her eyes.

"You can play with it when we ain't here and you're all alone, you know," remarked Dorry, highly gratified.

"But you don't notice what the tree's standing upon," said Clover.

It was a chair, a very large and curious one, with a long-cushioned back, which ended in a footstool.

"That's Papa's present," said Clover; "see, it tips back so as to be just like a bed. And Papa says he thinks pretty soon you can lie on it, in the window, where you can see us play."

"How perfectly lovely everybody is," said Katy, with grateful tears in her eyes.

"Does he really?" said Katy doubtfully. It still hurt her very much to be touched or moved.

"And see what's tied to the arm of the chair," said Elsie.

It was a little silver bell, with "Katy" engraved on the handle.

"Cousin Helen sent it. It's for you to ring when you want anybody to come," explained Elsie.

More surprises. To the other arm of the chair was fastened a beautiful book. It was "The Wide Wide World" – and there was Katy's name written on it, 'from her affectionate Cecy.' On it stood a great parcel of dried cherries from

Mrs. Hall. Mrs. Hall had the most delicious dried cherries, the children thought.

"How perfectly lovely everybody is!" said Katy, with grateful tears in her eyes.

That was a pleasant Christmas. The children declared it to be the nicest they had ever had. And though Katy couldn't quite say that, she enjoyed it too, and was very happy.

# In the Great Walled Country



**Raymond MacDonald Alden**  
From *Why the Chimes Rang and Other Stories*, 1906

Away at the northern end of the world, farther than men have ever gone with their ships or their sleds, and where most people suppose that there is nothing but ice and snow, is a land full of children, called The Great Walled Country. This name is given because all around the country is a great wall, hundreds of feet thick and hundreds of feet high. It is made of ice, and never melts, winter or summer; and of course it is for this reason that more people have not discovered the place.

The land, as I said, is filled with children, for nobody who lives there ever grows up. The king and the queen, the princes and the courtiers, may be as old as you please, but they are children for all that. They play a great deal of the time with dolls and tin soldiers, and every night at seven o'clock have a bowl of bread and milk and go to bed. But they make excellent rulers, and the other children are well pleased with the government.

There are all sorts of curious things about the way they live in The Great Walled Country, but this story is only of their Christmas season. One can imagine what a fine thing their Christmas must be, so near the North Pole, with ice and snow everywhere; but this is not all. Grandfather Christmas lives just on the north side of the country, so that his house leans against the great wall and would tip over if it were not for its support. Grandfather Christmas is his name in The Great Walled Country; no doubt we should call him Santa Claus here. At any rate, he is the same person, and, best of all the children in the world, he loves the children behind the great wall of ice.

One very pleasant thing about having Grandfather Christmas for a neighbor is that in The Great Walled Country they never have to buy their Christmas presents. Every year, on the day before Christmas, before he makes up his bundles for the rest of the world, Grandfather Christmas goes into a great forest of Christmas trees, that grows just back of the palace of the king of The Great Walled Country, and fills the trees with candy and books and toys and all sorts of good things. So when night comes, all the children wrap up snugly, while the children in all other lands are waiting in their beds, and go to the forest to gather gifts for their friends. Each one goes by himself, so that none of his friends can see what he has gathered; and no one ever thinks of such a thing as taking a present for himself. The forest is so big that there is room for every one to wander about without meeting the people from whom he has secrets, and there are always enough nice things to go around.

So Christmas time is a great holiday in that land, as it is in all the best places in the world. They have been celebrating it in this way for hundreds of years, and since Grandfather Christmas does not seem to grow old any faster than the children, they will probably do so for hundreds of years to come.

But there was once a time, so many years ago that they would have forgotten all about it if the story were not written in their Big Book and read to them every year, when the children in The Great Walled Country had a very strange Christmas. There came a visitor to the land. He was an old man, and was the first stranger for very many years that had succeeded in getting over the wall. He looked so wise, and was so much interested in what he saw and heard, that the king invited him to the palace, and he was treated with every possible honor.

When this old man had inquired about their Christmas celebration, and was told how they carried it on every year, he listened gravely, and then, looking wiser than ever, he said to the king:

"That is all very well, but I should think that children who have Grandfather Christmas for a neighbor could find a better and easier way. You tell me that you all go out on Christmas Eve to gather presents to give to one another the next morning. Why take so much trouble, and act in such a round- about way? Why not go out together, and every one get his own presents? That would save the trouble of dividing them again, and every one would be better satisfied, for he could pick out just what he wanted for himself. No one can tell what you want as well as you can.

This seemed to the king a very wise saying, and he called all his courtiers and counselors about him to hear it. The wise stranger talked further about his plan, and when he had finished they all agreed that they had been very foolish never to have thought of this simple way of getting their Christmas gifts.

"If we do this," they said, "no one can ever complain of what he has, or wish that some one had taken more pains to find what he wanted. We will make a proclamation, and always after this follow the new plan."

So the proclamation was made, and the plan seemed as wise to the children of the country as it had to the king and the counselors. Every one had at

some time been a little disappointed with his Christmas gifts; now there would be no danger of that.

On Christmas Eve they always had a meeting at the palace, and sang carols until the time for going to the forest. When the clock struck ten every one said, "I wish you a Merry Christmas!" to the person nearest him, and then they separated to go their ways to the forest. On this particular night it seemed to the king that the music was not quite so merry as usual, and that when the children spoke to one another their eyes did not shine as gladly as he had noticed them in other years; but there could be no good reason for this, since every one was expecting a better time than usual. So he thought no more of it.

There was only one person at the palace that night who was not pleased with the new proclamation about the Christmas gifts. This was a little boy named Inge, who lived not far from the palace with his sister. Now his sister was a cripple, and had to sit all day looking out of the window from her chair; and Inge took care of her, and tried to make her life happy from morning till night. He had always gone to the forest on Christmas Eve and returned with his arms and pockets loaded with pretty things for his sister, which would keep her amused all the coming year. And although she was not able to go after presents for her brother, he did not mind that at all, especially as he had other friends who never forgot to divide their good things with him.

But now, said Inge to himself, what would his sister do? For the king had ordered that no one should gather any presents except for himself, or any more than he could carry away at once. All of Inge's friends were busy planning what they would pick for themselves, but the poor crippled child could not go a step toward the forest. After thinking about it a long time, Inge decided that it would not be wrong if, instead of taking gifts for himself, he took them altogether for his sister. This he would be very glad to do; for what did a boy who could run about and play in the snow care for presents, compared with a little girl who could only sit still and watch others having a good time? Inge did not ask the advice of any one, for he was a little afraid others would tell him he must not do it; but he silently made up his mind not to obey the proclamation.

And now the chimes had struck ten, and the children were making their way toward the forest, in starlight that was so bright that it almost showed their shadows on the sparkling snow. As soon as they came to the edge of the

forest, they separated, each one going by himself in the old way, though now there was really no reason why they should have secrets from one another.

Ten minutes later, if you had been in the forest, you might have seen the children standing in dismay with tears on their faces, and exclaiming that there had never been such a Christmas Eve before. For as they looked eagerly about them to the low-bending branches of the evergreen trees, they saw nothing hanging from them that could not be seen every day in the year. High and low they searched, wandering farther into the forest than ever before, lest Grandfather Christmas might have chosen a new place this year for hanging his presents; but still no presents appeared. The king called his counselors about him, and asked them if they knew whether anything of this kind had happened before, but they could tell him nothing. So no one could guess whether Grandfather Christmas had forgotten them, or whether some dreadful accident had kept him away.



As the children were trooping out of the forest, after hours of weary searching, some of them came upon little Inge, who carried over his

shoulder a bag that seemed to be full to overflowing. When he saw them looking at him, he cried:

"Are they not beautiful things? I think Grandfather Christmas was never so good to us before."

"Why, what do you mean?" cried the children. "There are no presents in the forest."

"No presents!" said Inge. "I have my bag full of them." But he did not offer to show them, because he did not want the children to see that they were all for his little sister instead of for himself.

Then the children begged him to tell them in what part of the forest he had found his presents, and he turned back and pointed them to the place where he had been. "I left many more behind than I brought away," he said. "There they are! I can see some of the things shining on the trees even from here."

But when the children followed his footprints in the snow to the place where he had been, they still saw nothing on the trees, and thought that Inge must be walking in his sleep, and dreaming that he had found presents. Perhaps he had filled his bag with the cones from the evergreen trees.

On Christmas Day there was sadness all through The Great Walled Country. But those who came to the house of Inge and his sister saw plenty of books and dolls and beautiful toys piled up about the little cripple's chair; and when they asked where these things came from, they were told, "Why, from the Christmas-tree forest." And they shook their heads, not knowing what it could mean.

The king held a council in the palace, and appointed a committee of his most faithful courtiers to visit Grandfather Christmas, and see if they could find what was the matter. In a day or two more the committee set out on their journey. They had very hard work to climb the great wall of ice that lay between their country and the place where Grandfather Christmas lived, but at last they reached the top. And when they came to the other side of the wall, they were looking down into the top of his chimney. It was not hard to go down this chimney into the house, and when they reached the bottom of it they found themselves in the very room where Grandfather Christmas lay sound asleep.

It was hard enough to waken him, for he always slept one hundred days after his Christmas work was over, and it was only by turning the hands of the clock around two hundred times that the committee could do anything. When the clock had struck twelve times two hundred hours, Grandfather Christmas thought it was time for his nap to be over, and he sat up in bed, rubbing his eyes.

"Oh, sir!" cried the prince who was in charge of the committee, "we have come from the king of The Great Walled Country, who has sent us to ask why you forgot us this Christmas, and left no presents in the forest."

"No presents!" said Grandfather Christmas. "I never forget anything. The presents were there. You did not see them, that's all."

But the children told him that they had searched long and carefully, and in the whole forest there had not been found a thing that could be called a Christmas gift.

"Indeed!" said Grandfather Christmas. "And did little Inge, the boy with the crippled sister, find none?"

Then the committee was silent, for they had heard of the gifts at Inge's house, and did not know what to say about them.

"You had better go home," said Grandfather Christmas, who now began to realize that he had been awakened too soon, "and let me finish my nap. The presents were there, but they were never intended for children who were looking only for themselves. I am not surprised that you could not see them. Remember that not everything that wise travelers tell you is wise." And he turned over and went to sleep again.

The committee returned silently to The Great Walled Country, and told the king what they had heard. The king did not tell all the children of the land what Grandfather Christmas had said, but, when the next December came, he made another proclamation, bidding every one to seek gifts for others, in the old way, in the Christmas-tree forest. So that is what they have been doing ever since; and in order that they may not forget what happened, in case any one should ever ask for another change, they have read to them every year from their Big Book the story of the time when they had no Christmas gifts.

# Three Christmas Trees



By Juliana Horatia Ewing 1871

This is a story of Three Christmas Trees. The first was a real one, but the child we are to speak of did not see it. He saw the other two, but they were not real; they only existed in his fancy. The plot of the story is very simple; and, as it has been described so early, it is easy for those who think it stupid to lay the book down in good time.

Probably every child who reads this has seen one Christmas-tree or more; but in the small town of a distant colony with which we have to do, this could not at one time have been said. Christmas-trees were then by no means so universal, even in England, as they now are, and in this little colonial town, they were unknown. Unknown that is, till the Governor's wife gave her great children's party. At which point we will begin the story.

The Governor had given a great many parties in his time. He had entertained big wigs and little wigs, the passing military, and the local grandees. Everybody who had the remotest claim to attention had been attended to: the ladies had had their full share of balls and pleasure parties: only one class of the population had any complaint to prefer against his hospitality; but the class was a large one—it was the children. However, he was a bachelor, and knew little or nothing about little boys and girls: let us pity rather than blame him. At last he took to himself a wife; and among the many advantages of this important step, was a due recognition of the claims of these young citizens. It was towards happy Christmastide, that "the Governor's amiable and admired lady" (as she was styled in the local newspaper) sent out notes for her first children's party. At the top of the notepaper was a very red robin, who carried a blue Christmas greeting in his mouth, and at the bottom—written with the A. D. C.'s best flourish—were the magic words, *A Christmas Tree*. In spite of the flourishes—partly perhaps, because of them—the A. D. C.'s handwriting, though handsome, was rather illegible. But for all this, most of the children invited contrived to read these words, and those who could not do so were not slow to learn the news by hearsay. There was to be a Christmas-Tree! It would be like a birthday party, with this above ordinary birthdays, that there were to be presents for every one.

One of the children invited lived in a little white house, with a spruce fir-tree before the door. The spruce fir did this good service to the little house, that it helped people to find their way to it; and it was by no means easy for a stranger to find his way to any given house in this little town, especially if the house were small and white, and stood in one of the back streets. For most of the houses were small, and most of them were painted white, and the

back streets ran parallel with each other, and had no names, and were all so much alike that it was very confusing. For instance, if you had asked the way to Mr. So-and-So's, it is very probable that some friend would have directed you as follows: "Go straight forward and take the first turning to your left, and you will find that there are four streets, which run at right angles to the one you are in, and parallel with each other. Each of them has got a big pine in it—one of the old forest trees. Take the last street but one, and the fifth white house you come to is Mr. So-and-So's. He has green blinds and a coloured servant." You would not always have got such clear directions as these, but with them you would probably have found the house at last, partly by accident, partly by the blinds and coloured servant. Some of the neighbours affirmed that the little white house had a name; that all the houses and streets had names, only they were traditional and not recorded anywhere; that very few people knew them, and nobody made any use of them. The name of the little white house was said to be Trafalgar Villa, which seemed so inappropriate to the modest peaceful little home, that the man who lived in it tried to find out why it had been so called. He thought that his predecessor must have been in the navy, until he found that he had been the owner of what is called a "dry-goods store," which seems to mean a shop where things are sold which are not good to eat or drink—such as drapery. At last somebody said, that as there was a public-house called the "Duke of Wellington" at the corner of the street, there probably had been a nearer one called "The Nelson," which had been burnt down, and that the man who built "The Nelson" had built the house with the spruce fir before it, and that so the name had arisen. An explanation which was just so far probable, that public-houses and fires were of frequent occurrence in those parts.

But this has nothing to do with the story. Only we must say, as we said before, and as we should have said had we been living there then, the child we speak of lived in the little white house with one spruce fir just in front of it.

Of all the children who looked forward to the Christmas-tree, he looked forward to it the most intensely. He was an imaginative child, of a simple, happy nature, easy to please. His father was an Englishman, and in the long winter evenings he would tell the child tales of the old country, to which his mother would listen also. Perhaps the parents enjoyed these stories the most. To the boy they were new, and consequently delightful, but to the parents they were old; and as regards some stories, that is better still.

"What kind of a bird is this on my letter?" asked the boy on the day which brought the Governor's lady's note of invitation. "And oh! what is a Christmas-tree?"

"The bird is an English robin," said his father. "It is quite another bird to that which is called a robin here: it is smaller and rounder, and has a redder breast and bright dark eyes, and lives and sings at home through the winter. A Christmas-tree is a fir-tree—just such a one as that outside the door—brought into the house and covered with lights and presents. Picture to yourself our fir-tree lighted up with tapers on all the branches, with dolls, and trumpets, and bonbons, and drums, and toys of all kinds hanging from it like fir-cones, and on the tip-top shoot a figure of a Christmas Angel in white, with a star upon its head."

"Fancy!" said the boy.

And fancy he did. Every day he looked at the spruce fir, and tried to imagine it laden with presents, and brilliant with tapers, and thought how wonderful must be that "old country"—*Home*, as it was called, even by those who had never seen it—where the robins were so very red, and where at Christmas the fir-trees were hung with toys instead of cones.

It was certainly a pity that, two days before the party, an original idea on the subject of snowmen struck one of the children who used to play together, with their sleds and snow-shoes, in the back streets. The idea was this: That instead of having a common-place snowman, whose legs were obliged to be mere stumps, for fear he should be top-heavy, and who could not walk, even with them; who, in fact, could do nothing but stand at the corner of the street, holding his impotent stick, and staring with his pebble eyes, till he was broken to pieces or ignominiously carried away by a thaw,—that, instead of this, they should have a real, live snowman, who should walk on competent legs, to the astonishment, and (happy thought!) perhaps to the alarm of the passers-by. This delightful novelty was to be accomplished by covering one of the boys of the party with snow till he looked as like a real snowman as circumstances would admit. At first everybody wanted to be the snowman, but, when it came to the point, it was found to be so much duller to stand still and be covered up than to run about and work, that no one was willing to act the part. At last it was undertaken by the little boy from the Fir House. He was somewhat small, but then he was so good-natured he would always do as he was asked. So he stood manfully still, with his arms folded

over a walking-stick upon his breast, whilst the others heaped the snow upon him. The plan was not so successful as they had hoped. The snow would not stick anywhere except on his shoulders, and when it got into his neck he cried with the cold; but they were so anxious to carry out their project, that they begged him to bear it "just a little longer;" and the urchin who had devised the original idea wiped the child's eyes with his handkerchief, and (with that hopefulness which is so easy over other people's matters) "dared say that when all the snow was on, he wouldn't feel it." However, he did feel it, and that so severely that the children were obliged to give up the game, and taking the stick out of his stiff little arms, to lead him home.

It appears that it is with snowmen as with some other men in conspicuous positions. It is easier to find fault with them than to fill their place.

The end of this was a feverish cold, and, when the day of the party came, the ex-snowman was still in bed. It is due to the other children to say that they felt the disappointment as keenly as he did, and that it greatly damped the pleasure of the party for them to think that they had prevented his sharing in the treat. The most penitent of all was the deviser of the original idea. He had generously offered to stay at home with the little patient, which was as generously refused; but the next evening he was allowed to come and sit on the bed, and describe it all for the amusement of his friend. He was a quaint boy, this urchin, with a face as broad as an American-Indian's, eyes as bright as a squirrel's, and all the mischief in life lurking about him, till you could see roguishness in the very folds of his hooded Indian winter coat of blue and scarlet. In his hand he brought the sick child's present: a dray with two white horses, and little barrels that took off and on, and a driver, with wooden joints, a cloth coat, and everything, in fact, that was suitable to the driver of a brewer's dray, except that he had blue boots and earrings, and that his hair was painted in braids like a lady's, which is clearly the fault of the doll manufacturers, who will persist in making them all of the weaker sex.

"And what was the Christmas-tree like?" asked the invalid.

"Exactly like the fir outside your door," was the reply. "Just about that size, and planted in a pot covered with red cloth. It was kept in another room till after tea, and then when the door was opened it was like a street fire in the town at night—such a blaze of light—Candles everywhere! And on all the branches the most beautiful presents. I got a drum and a penwiper."

"Was there an angel?" the child asked.

"Oh, yes!" the boy answered. "It was on the tip-top branch, and it was given to me, and I brought it for you, if you would like it; for, you know, I am so very, very sorry I thought of a snowman, and made you ill, and I do love you, and beg you to forgive me."

And the roguish face stooped over the pillow to be kissed; and out of a pocket in the hooded coat came forth the Christmas Angel. In the face it bore a strong family likeness to the drayman, but its feet were hidden in folds of snowy muslin, and on its head glittered a tinsel star.

"How lovely!" said the child. "Father told me about this. I like it best of all. And it is very kind of you, for it is not your fault that I caught cold. I should have liked it if we could have done it, but I think to enjoy being a snowman, one should be snow all through."

They had tea together, and then the invalid was tucked up for the night. The dray was put away in the cupboard, but he took the angel to bed with him.

And so ended the first of the Three Christmas-Trees.

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Except for a warm glow from the wood fire in the stove, the room was dark; but about midnight it seemed to the child that a sudden blaze of light filled the chamber. At the same moment the window curtains were drawn aside, and he saw that the spruce fir had come close up to the panes and was peeping in. Ah! how beautiful it looked! It had become a Christmas-tree. Lighted tapers shone from every familiar branch, toys of the most fascinating appearance hung like fruit, and on the tip-top shoot there stood the Christmas Angel. He tried to count the candles, but somehow it was impossible. When he looked at them they seemed to change places—to move—to become like the angel, and then to be candles again, whilst the flames nodded to each other and repeated the blue greeting of the robin, "A Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!" Then he tried to distinguish the presents, but, beautiful as the toys looked, he could not exactly discover what any of them were, or choose which he would like best. Only the Angel he could see clearly—so clearly! It was more beautiful than the doll under his pillow; it had a lovely face like his own mother's, he thought, and on its head

gleamed a star far brighter than tinsel. Its white robes waved with the flames of the tapers, and it stretched its arms towards him with a smile.

"I am to go and choose my present," thought the child; and he called "Mother! Mother dear! please open the window."

But his mother did not answer. So he thought he must get up himself, and with an effort, he struggled out of bed.

But when he was on his feet, everything seemed changed! Only the fire-light shone upon the walls, and the curtains were once more firmly closed before the window. It had been a dream, but so vivid that in his feverish state he still thought it must be true, and dragged the curtains back to let in the glorious sight again. The fire-light shone upon a thick coating of frost upon the panes, but no further could he see, so with all his strength he pushed the window open and leaned out into the night.

The spruce fir stood in its old place; but it looked very beautiful in its Christmas dress. Beneath it lay a carpet of pure white. The snow was clustered in exquisite shapes upon its plummy branches; wrapping the tree top with its little cross shoots, as a white robe might wrap a figure with outstretched arms.

There were no tapers to be seen, but northern lights shot up into the dark blue sky, and just over the fir-tree shone a bright, bright star.

"Jupiter looks well to-night," said the old Professor in the town observatory, as he fixed his telescope; but to the child it seemed as the star of the Christmas Angel.

His mother had really heard him call, and now came and put him back to bed again. And so ended the second of the Three Christmas-Trees.

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It was enough to have killed him, all his friends said; but it did not. He lived to be a man, and—what is rarer—to keep the faith, the simplicity, the tender-heartedness, the vivid fancy of his childhood. He lived to see many Christmas-trees "at home," in that old country where the robins are redbreasts, and sing in winter. There a heart as good and gentle as his own became one with his; and once he brought his young wife across the sea to

visit the place where he was born. They stood near the little white house, and he told her the story of the Christmas-trees.

"This was when I was a child," he added.

"But that you are still," said she; and she plucked a bit of the fir-tree and kissed it, and carried it away.

He lived to tell the story to his children, and even to his grand-children; but he never was able to decide which of the two was the more beautiful—the Christmas-Tree of his dream, or the Spruce Fir as it stood in the loveliness of that winter night.

This is told, not that it has anything to do with any of the Three Christmas-Trees, but to show that the story is a happy one, as is right and proper; that the hero lived, and married, and had children, and was as prosperous as good people, in books, should always be.

Of course he died at last. The best and happiest of men must die; and it is only because some stories stop short in their history, that every hero is not duly buried before we lay down the book.

When death came for our hero he was an old man. The beloved wife, some of his children, and many of his friends had died before him, and of those whom he had loved there were fewer to leave than to rejoin. He had had a short illness, with little pain, and was now lying on his deathbed in one of the big towns in the North of England. His youngest son, a clergyman, was with him, and one or two others of his children, and by the fire sat the doctor.

The doctor had been sitting by the patient, but now that he could do no more for him he had moved to the fire; and they had taken the ghastly, half-emptied medicine bottles from the table by the bed-side, and had spread it with a fair linen cloth, and had set out the silver vessels of the Supper of the Lord.

The old man had been "wandering" somewhat during the day. He had talked much of going home to the old country, and with the wide range of dying thoughts he had seemed to mingle memories of childhood with his hopes of Paradise. At intervals he was clear and collected—one of those moments had

been chosen for his last sacrament—and he had fallen asleep with the blessing in his ears.

He slept so long and so peacefully that the son almost began to hope that there might be a change, and looked towards the doctor, who still sat by the fire with his right leg crossed over his left. The doctor's eyes were also on the bed, but at that moment he drew out his watch and looked at it with an air of professional conviction, which said, "It's only a question of time." Then he crossed his left leg over his right, and turned to the fire again. Before the right leg should be tired, all would be over. The son saw it as clearly as if it had been spoken, and he too turned away and sighed.

As they sat, the bells of a church in the town began to chime for midnight service, for it was Christmas Eve, but they did not wake the dying man. He slept on and on.

The doctor dozed. The son read in the Prayer Book on the table, and one of his sisters read with him. Another, from grief and weariness, slept with her head upon his shoulder. Except for a warm glow from the fire, the room was dark. Suddenly the old man sat up in bed, and, in a strong voice, cried with inexpressible enthusiasm,

*"How beautiful!"*

The son held back his sisters, and asked quietly,

*"What, my dear Father?"*

"The Christmas-Tree!" he said in a low, eager voice. "Draw back the curtains."

They were drawn back; but nothing could be seen, and still the old man gazed as if in ecstasy.

"Light!" he murmured. "The Angel! the Star!" Again there was silence; and then he stretched forth his hands, and cried passionately,

"The Angel is beckoning to me! Mother! mother dear! Please open the window."

The sash was thrown open, and all eyes turned involuntarily where those of the dying man were gazing. There was no Christmas-tree—no tree at all. But over the house-tops the morning star looked pure and pale in the dawn of Christmas Day. For the night was past, and above the distant hum of the streets the clear voices of some waits made the words of an old carol heard—words dearer for their association than their poetry—

"While shepherds watched their flocks by night,  
All seated on the ground,  
The Angel of the Lord came down,  
And glory shone around."

When the window was opened, the soul passed; and when they looked back to the bed the old man had lain down again, and like a child, was smiling in his sleep—his last sleep.

And this was the Third Christmas-Tree.

# Why The Chimes Rang



Raymond MacDonald Alden  
From *Why the Chimes Rang and Other Stories*, 1906

There was once, in a far-away country where few people have ever traveled, a wonderful church. It stood on a high hill in the midst of a great city; and every Sunday, as well as on sacred days like Christmas, thousands of people climbed the hill to its great archways, looking like lines of ants all moving in the same direction.

When you came to the building itself, you found stone columns and dark passages, and a grand entrance leading to the main room of the church. This room was so long that one standing at the doorway could scarcely see to the other end, where the choir stood by the marble altar. In the farthest corner was the organ; and this organ was so loud that sometimes when it played, the people for miles around would close their shutters and prepare for a great thunderstorm. Altogether, no such church as this was ever seen before, especially when it was lighted up for some festival, and crowded with people, young and old.

But the strangest thing about the whole building was the wonderful chime of bells. At one corner of the church was a great gray tower, with ivy growing over it as far up as one could see. I say as far as one could see, because the tower was quite great enough to fit the great church, and it rose so far into the sky that it was only in very fair weather that any one claimed to be able to see the top. Even then one could not be certain that it was in sight. Up, and up, and up climbed the stones and the ivy; and, as the men who built the church had been dead for hundreds of years, every one had forgotten how high the tower was supposed to be.

Now all the people knew that at the top of the tower was a chime of Christmas bells. They had hung there ever since the church had been built, and were the most beautiful bells in the world. Some thought it was because a great musician had cast them and arranged them in their place; others said it was because of the great height, which reached up where the air was clearest and purest: however that might be, no one who had ever heard the chimes denied that they were the sweetest in the world. Some described them as sounding like angels far up in the sky; others, as sounding like strange winds singing through the trees.

But the fact was that no one had heard them for years and years. There was an old man living not far from the church, who said that his mother had spoken of hearing them when she was a little girl, and he was the only one who was sure of as much as that. They were Christmas chimes, you see, and

were not meant to be played by men or on common days. It was the custom on Christmas Eve for all the people to bring to the church their offerings to the Christ-child; and when the greatest and best offering was laid on the altar, there used to come sounding through the music of the choir the Christmas chimes far up in the tower. Some said that the wind rang them, and others that they were so high that the angels could set them swinging. But for many long years they had never been heard.

It was said that people had been growing less careful of their gifts for the Christ-child, and that no offering was brought, great enough to deserve the music of the chimes. Every Christmas Eve the rich people still crowded to the altar, each one trying to bring some better gift than any other, without giving anything that he wanted for himself, and the church was crowded with those who thought that perhaps the wonderful bells might be heard again. But although the service was splendid, and the offerings plenty, only the roar of the wind could be heard, far up in the stone tower.

Now, a number of miles from the city, in a little country village, where nothing could be seen of the great church but glimpses of the tower when the weather was fine, lived a boy named Pedro, and his little brother. They knew very little about the Christmas chimes, but they had heard of the service in the church on Christmas Eve, and had a secret plan, which they had often talked over when by themselves, to go to see the beautiful celebration.

"Nobody can guess, Little Brother," Pedro would say, "all the fine things there are to see and hear; and I have even heard it said that the Christ-child sometimes comes down to bless the service. What if we could see Him?"

The day before Christmas was bitterly cold, with a few lonely snowflakes flying in the air, and a hard white crust on the ground. Sure enough, Pedro and Little Brother were able to slip quietly away early in the afternoon; and although the walking was hard in the frosty air, before nightfall they had trudged so far, hand in hand, that they saw the lights of the big city just ahead of them. Indeed, they were about to enter one of the great gates in the wall that surrounded it, when they saw something dark on the snow near their path, and stepped aside to look at it.

It was a poor woman, who had fallen just outside the city, too sick and tired to get in where she might have found shelter. The soft snow made of a drift a sort of pillow for her, and she would soon be so sound asleep, in the wintry

air, that no one could ever waken her again. All this Pedro saw in a moment, and he knelt down beside her and tried to rouse her, even tugging at her arm a little, as though he would have tried to carry her away. He turned her face toward him, so that he could rub some of the snow on it, and when he had looked at her silently a moment he stood up again, and said:

"It's no use, Little Brother. You will have to go on alone."

"Alone?" cried Little Brother. "And you not see the Christmas festival?"

"No," said Pedro, and he could not keep back a bit of a choking sound in his throat. "See this poor woman. Her face looks like the Madonna in the chapel window, and she will freeze to death if nobody cares for her. Every one has gone to the church now, but when you come back you can bring some one to help her. I will rub her to keep her from freezing, and perhaps get her to eat the bun that is left in my pocket."

"But I can not bear to leave you, and go on alone," said Little Brother.

"Both of us need not miss the service," said Pedro, "and it had better be I than you. You can easily find your way to the church; and you must see and hear everything twice, Little Brother—once for you and once for me. I am sure the Christ-child must know how I should love to come with you and worship Him; and oh! if you get a chance, Little Brother, to slip up to the altar without getting in any one's way, take this little silver piece of mine, and lay it down for my offering, when no one is looking. Do not forget where you have left me, and forgive me for not going with you."

In this way he hurried Little Brother off to the city, and winked hard to keep back the tears, as he heard the crunching footsteps sounding farther and farther away in the twilight. It was pretty hard to lose the music and splendor of the Christmas celebration that he had been planning for so long, and spend the time instead in that lonely place in the snow.

The great church was a wonderful place that night. Every one said that it had never looked so bright and beautiful before. When the organ played and the thousands of people sang, the walls shook with the sound, and little Pedro, away outside the city wall, felt the earth tremble around him.

At the close of the service came the procession with the offerings to be laid on the altar. Rich men and great men marched proudly up to lay down their gifts to the Christ-child. Some brought wonderful jewels, some baskets of gold so heavy that they could scarcely carry them down the aisle. A great writer laid down a book that he had been making for years and years. And last of all walked the king of the country, hoping with all the rest to win for himself the chime of the Christmas bells. There went a great murmur through the church, as the people saw the king take from his head the royal crown, all set with precious stones, and lay it gleaming on the altar, as his offering to the holy Child. "Surely," every one said, "we shall hear the bells now, for nothing like this has ever happened before."

But still only the cold old wind was heard in the tower, and the people shook their heads; and some of them said, as they had before, that they never really believed the story of the chimes, and doubted if they ever rang at all.

The procession was over, and the choir began the closing hymn. Suddenly the organist stopped playing as though he had been shot, and every one looked at the old minister, who was standing by the altar, holding up his hand for silence. Not a sound could be heard from any one in the church, but as all the people strained their ears to listen, there came softly, but distinctly, swinging through the air, the sound of the chimes in the tower. So far away, and yet so clear the music seemed—so much sweeter were the notes than anything that had been heard before, rising and falling away up there in the sky, that the people in the church sat for a moment as still as though something held each of them by the shoulders. Then they all stood up together and stared straight at the altar, to see what great gift had awakened the long-silent bells.

But all that the nearest of them saw was the childish figure of Little Brother, who had crept softly down the aisle when no one was looking, and had laid Pedro's little piece of silver on the altar.

# Mr. White Helps Santa Claus



by Josephine Lawrence  
1928

PERHAPS you've never seen a little red envelope, an envelope no larger than your thumb, sticking in the crack of the floor some morning.

It's all right if you've never happened to see a little red envelope like that, but in case you have seen one, you might like to know that it was a letter from Santa Claus.

Santa Claus always writes his letters on bright red paper and he uses tiny square envelopes, but children do not see his letters often, because he doesn't write to them. No'm, the children write to Santa Claus, but you can easily see he wouldn't have much time to spend getting ready for Christmas if he ever tried to answer all the letters he receives.

The moment Mr. White saw one of those little red envelopes we've just told you about, he knew it was from Santa. It was the week before Christmas and a very busy time for everyone.

All the children were busy being good, Santa Claus was busy choosing presents for them, and as for Mr. White, he was busy explaining to the three White boys what Santa Claus wished them to do that Christmas Eve.

Mr. White knew exactly what they were to do, because it was only the



Christmas before that Santa Claus had brought him in his sleigh from North Pole Land.

"You are to go in the top of the children's stockings," said Mr. White patiently for the third time-those White boys *would* try to play the new mouth organ instead of listening to him.

"All of us in one stocking?" asked Willie White, who wore a checked jacket.

"Certainly not," Mr. White answered. "One of you in the top of each stocking. You mustn't handle the toys, or play with any of the things or eat any of the sweets, either."

"Not even gum-drops?" asked Wilfred White, whose jacket was red.

"Certainly not," Mr. White answered again.

"Nor the oranges?" asked Wilbur White - his jacket was bright red.

"Don't eat anything," said Mr. White and just then he spied the red letter and

knew Santa Claus had written to him.

"Excuse me, ' ' he murmured politely to the three White boys and then he opened the envelope and read the letter.

*"Dear Mr. White," wrote Santa Claus, "I have always been able to depend on you and I am sure you will not fail me now. The grandpa of the children in your house has some extra special gifts for them and he doesn't want them to be on the Christmas tree because they will see that Christmas Eve. This grandpa can not be at the house till Christmas Day. In fact he doesn't expect to get there much before dinner time. He has given me his presents and I will see you Christmas Eve. I'd like to leave these gifts in your care, if you are willing.*

*Affectionately your old friend,  
Santa Claus.*

*P. S. Mrs. Santa sends you her kindest regards."*

Now there, as Mr. White remarked excitedly, was something to think about.

The three White boys were terribly curious and they teased Mr. White with questions right up to Christmas Eve; but not a word could they get from him.

And when Santa Claus tumbled down the chimney Christmas Eve, the three White boys hovered as near as they dared, hoping to at least see what these gifts were that were not to go on the Christmas tree. That tree, blazing with lights and with a beautiful white and gold fairy on one of the branches, delighted the children. Santa Claus turned on the lights for them and then, while they were looking at their gifts, he and Mr. White got behind the sofa and had a confab all by themselves.



"That's all right then," Willie White heard Santa Claus say. "We'll keep it as our secret. I'll be back at midnight to fill the stockings"

And he went away after that.

It was Wilbur White who noticed that Mr. White looked different, but before he could say anything, he was popped into a stocking. You know how fast time flies on Christmas Eve. It was midnight, the children were asleep, and Santa Claus had come back to fill their stockings.

"I think Mr. White looks different --" Wilbur White began and it was then Santa Claus put him in a stocking and told him to keep still.

As soon as breakfast was over the next morning (Christmas morning), Hannah began to set the table for Christmas dinner. Right in the center of her table, after she had put on a beautiful linen tablecloth, she put Mr. White.

Dear me, he did look handsome! His tall hat was very shiny, his jacket was very blue, and he seemed to have a lot of little red ribbons coming out of his neck. A lovely wreath of holly was placed around him and the tall red candles that he had always admired. Then Hannah went back and forth,

from the pantry to the table, putting on the best plates and the tall glasses that sparkled because she had polished them so nicely, and the very necessary knives and forks.

The Christmas tree was in the dining room and Mr. White thought that a fine arrangement. He said it gave him something to look at. He didn't have much time to look at it at first, because Hannah kept going and coming and every time she came to the table she changed a plate, or moved a glass, or patted the holly wreath. Lastly, though, she put down great white napkins, neatly folded, and then she went off to her kitchen to see if the turkey was roasting properly.

It was then that Mr. White had a chance to admire the Christmas tree. The packages were gone, and some of the candy canes were missing, but there were plenty of lovely things still in place. The children were trying to keep the tree "all trimmed" as they said, to show their grandpa.

"How do you do?" said a very sweet little voice suddenly.

Mr. White would have jumped, if he could. But he had no legs and legs are absolutely necessary to anyone who jumps. Then he noticed that something bright and shiny was being swung before his face and a moment later he saw that it was one of the tinsel stars.

"Who's swinging that star?" asked Mr. White, trying to make his voice sound very deep and stern.

"I am," giggled the little voice.

"Who are you?" Mr. White asked, remembering that he had a secret with Santa Claus and that someone might be trying to get it away from him.



"Merry Christmas!" laughed the pretty voice. "I'm Princess Star Shine."

Mr. White blinked his eyes and wished he could take off his hat. He had never met a princess. But his hat was glued on and he hoped the princess would understand and excuse him.

Then, for Princess Starshine continued to swing the star, a bit of tinsel flew off and struck Mr. White in his eye!

"Ouch!" he said, and felt around for his silk pocket handkerchief.

"Oh-oh-oh!" the little voice said sadly. "Have I hurt you? Wait a minute and let me get that speck out of your eye."

And to Mr. White's great astonishment, the beautiful fairy from the Christmas tree flew down to the table.

He could see then that she wore tiny red shoes and a tall red hat and carried a slender wand. She had long golden hair and her dress was white gauze and altogether he had never seen anyone so pretty.

"Let me touch your eye with my wand, said Princess Starshine, "and it will not hurt you at all."

Mr. White took his handkerchief away from his sore eye and the princess touched it ever so gently with her wand.

"My goodness, it doesn't hurt a bit!" said Mr. White. "Thank you very much."

"Don't mention it," the fairy princess answered. "My wand is tipped with magic and I like to use it. Sh- here comes Hannah with more holly. I'd better fly back to the Christmas tree."

Before Mr. White could count two, the fairy was back in her place and there was Hannah, walking around and around the table, laying a little bunch of holly on each clean napkin.

"It's a fine-looking dinner table, if I do say it myself," said Hannah aloud. "You do yourself proud, Mr. White."

Hannah made him a bow and Mr. White smiled his best smile. That was the second time he wished his hat wasn't glued on, so he might tip it politely.



"Seems to me I never saw you with so many ribbons on before," said Hannah, staring at Mr. White. "But there, I suppose it is some of the children's doings."

She went back to her kitchen and the fairy princess flew down to the table again.

"How many people are coming to dinner?" asked the fairy, curiously.

"Oh, dozens," Mr. White answered wisely. "All the people in this house, and all the people next door, and Grandpa Perry from-far-away, and Uncle Oscar and Aunt Mary."

"And will they all look at the tree?" asked the fairy princess.

"Of course they will," Mr. White said.

Princess Starshine looked about the table and her eyes began to shine mischievously.

"Want to see some of my magic?" she asked.

Mr. White couldn't stop thinking about the secret he had with Santa Claus, and he wished he could. He was afraid he might mention it if he thought too much about it. So he was very willing to see some magic - he thought, and rightfully, too, that magic would give him something else to think about.

"Then just you watch," said Princess Starshine.

We've told you that she carried a wand and now, as Mr. White watched her, she tripped about the table, touching the candles, one after the other. The instant her wand touched the tip of a candle, it burst into flame.

"Oh-h, you're lighting them!" Mr. White cried. " ' They'll burn out before the folks come to dinner."

"I'll put them out-" began the fairy princess with her soft laugh.

She meant to say she would put them out right away, but before she could do that, there was a noise in the next room and quick as a flash Princess Starshine flew back to the branch on the Christmas tree, where she belonged

In the doorway stood Mother Evans and Daddy Evans, and Bobby and Betty and Baby Evans. They lived in Mr White's house, or he lived in their house, whichever way you wish to have it.

"Why I didn't know Hannah meant to light the candles!" cried Mother Evans "Grandpa hasn't come." Just then Hannah came into the dining room with the bread plate and as soon as she saw the lighted candles, she looked surprised.

"Did the company come, ma 'am?" she asked. "I see you've lighted the candles."

"I didn't light them," replied Mother Evans. "You must have lighted them, Hannah."

But Hannah declared she had not and none of the others had touched a match to them, and who lighted those candles always remained a mystery in that household. Mr. White could have told but, aside from politeness which made it impossible for him to tell tales, he had a rule he never broke - he did not speak aloud.



However, the candles were allowed to burn, for the door-bell rang a moment later, and there was Grandpa from-far-away, and Aunt Mary and Uncle Oscar and the people from the house next door.

You know all about how Christmas dinner tastes, so we won't tell you about this dinner, except to mention that the turkey was a little more of a golden brown than any other turkey you've seen. And the potatoes were so fluffy they looked like snow, and everyone's name was spelled out in red pimentos on the salad and the nuts and raisins were simply delicious. Oh, yes, and the plum pudding wasn't too rich for the children either.

And, when dinner was over. Grandpa from-far-away said he had given his presents to Santa Claus to deliver, but that Santa had not been able to tell him where they would be hidden. Had anybody- seen a letter from Santa Claus that morning?

Nobody had, but obligingly everyone began to look.

"I've got it!" shouted Bobby Evans, whose sharp eyes were the first to spy a little square red envelope sticking out from under the dining-room rug.

"That's it," said Grandpa, taking the letter.

He opened it and read it quickly. "Why Santa says that Mr. White is taking care of the presents," said Grandpa. "Listen and I'll read you what Santa has written: 'Pull the ribbons fair and square, you'll find presents hidden there.' "

It was a wonder Mr. White didn't blush, so many pairs of eyes stared *hard* at his dangling red ribbons.

"Let's each take one and when I count three, pull!" Grandpa suggested.

So each one at the table took a ribbon and Grandpa held up his hand. 'One!' he counted slowly.

"Two!" he said next.

"Three!"-and everyone jerked a ribbon.

Snip! Up went Mr. White's head, and out came little flat packages, wrapped in red tissue paper.

They looked exactly like Christmas presents and they were-beautiful shiny gold pieces which were meant to be spent during holiday week, Grandpa said. Everyone was delighted and away they all rushed into the next room to begin to plan what they would buy when they went shopping.

No one stayed to thank Mr. White for keeping the precious gold pieces so carefully, and when Hannah came in to clear off the table, she burst into laughter.

"Ha! Ha!" laughed Hannah, picking up Mr. White's head and trying to put it on straight for him. "I wish you could see yourself.



You're too funny for words. Your hat is over one ear. You look positively foolish."

All the time Hannah was talking, she was carrying Mr. White out to the kitchen and when she put him down on the kitchen table, to put his head on for him, she went right on telling him how foolish he looked. But she needed the room on the kitchen table for her dishes, so back to the dining room she carried Mr. White again, and plumped him down between two piles of clean plates.

His hat fell over one eye and he slid down till he leaned against a goblet. Hannah laughed at him once more and then she went back to the kitchen to eat her nice hot dinner.

"I don't care," said Mr. White drowsily, for the excitement had made him sleepy, "I don't care if I do look silly; I told Santa Claus I would help him and I have. I may have a head that wobbles, but I know how to keep a secret."

And the Princess Starshine called to him from the Christmas tree that that was true.

Later that evening Mr. White showed that he knew more than how to keep a secret. He knew how to warn Hannah that all was not well in the dining room.

It happened this way: the children had gone next door to see the Christmas tree there and had insisted on taking the Princess Starshine with them. This left Mr. White with no one to talk to, so he simply dozed gently, not exactly asleep, you understand, but just resting.

Hannah was talking to her best friend, Mrs. Nagel, in the kitchen, as she set bread for the next day. Hannah always baked bread on Thursday, no matter whether it was the day after Christmas or not. Mr. White, dozing between the two piles of clean plates, could hear their voices and he liked that because then he didn't feel so lonely.

Suddenly Mr. White thought he heard a voice that was not Hannah's voice, nor yet Mrs. Nagel's. It was as tiny a voice as the Princess Starshine's, but not nearly so sweet. This tiny voice was sharp and shrill.

"Eek!" it went. "E-eek! Oh, you must hurry-there are raisins and nuts and everything perfectly delicious."

Mr. White opened one eye cautiously.

"Eka, eka, eka!" began another little voice. "How about the Christmas tree? I would so love to nibble a candy cane."

Mr. White opened his other eye.

"The mice!" he said to himself. Now Mr. White was not unkind to mice. He rather admired their perseverance and their cheerfulness.

But he knew they had no business on the dining-room table and he thought only a very mean mouse would eat the candy on a Christmas tree. He tried to think of a way to warn Hannah, and in a moment he had the idea.



Mr. White simply let his head roll off the table!

Hannah heard the noise and came running in, and Mrs. Nagel came with her.

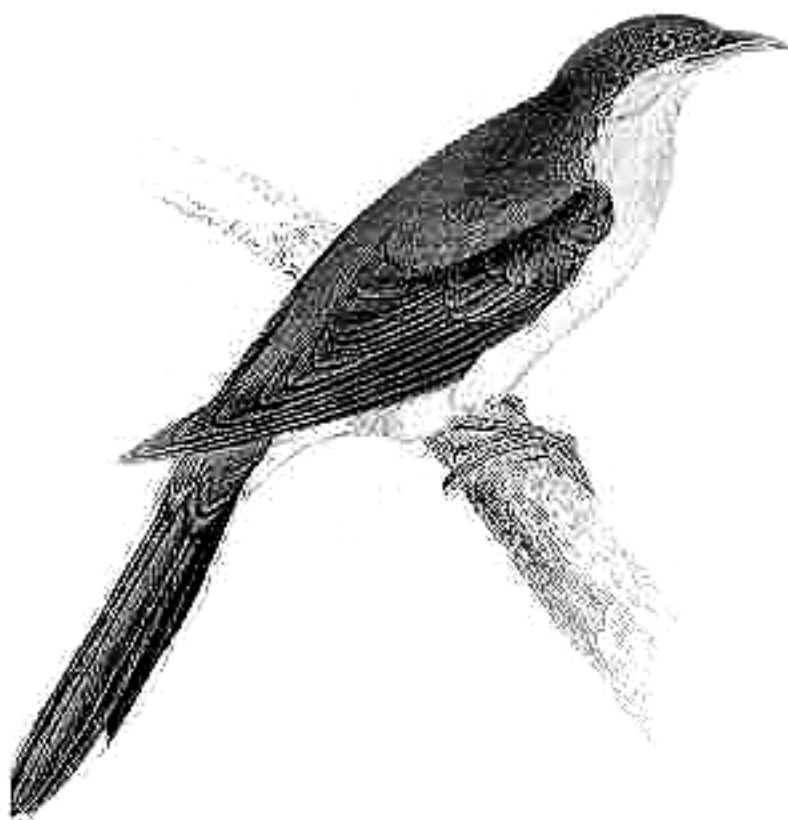
"I knew I ought to have cleared off the table and now I will," said Hannah wrathfully. "Those nasty mice have been in here-see this raisin dragged across the cloth."

Then she saw Mr. White's head on the floor and she picked it up and put him together again.

"I suppose the mice knocked him over, running past him, ' ' said Hannah, which shows you that she didn't know as much about it as you do yourself.

THE END

# The Christmas Cuckoo



by Frances Browne (1816-1879)

From: *Granny's Wonderful Chair* (c. 1857)

"ONCE upon a time there stood in the midst of a bleak moor, in the north country, a certain village; all its inhabitants were poor, for their fields were barren, and they had little trade, but the poorest of them all were two brothers called Scrub and Spare, who followed the cobbler's craft, and had but one stall between them. It was a hut built of clay and wattles. The door was low and always open, for there was no window. The roof did not entirely keep out the rain, and the only thing comfortable about it was a wide hearth, for which the brothers could never find wood enough to make a sufficient fire. There they worked in most brotherly friendship, though with little encouragement

"The people of that village were not extravagant in shoes, and better cobblers than Scrub and Spare might be found. Spiteful people said there were no shoes so bad that they would not be worse for their mending. Nevertheless Scrub and Spare managed to live between their own trade, a small barley field, and a cottage garden, till one unlucky day when a new cobbler arrived in the village. He had lived in the capital city of the kingdom, and, by his own account, cobbled for the queen and the princesses. His awls were sharp, his lasts were new; he set up his stall in a neat cottage with two windows. The villagers soon found out that one patch of his would outwear two of the brothers'. In short, all the mending left Scrub and Spare, and went to the new cobbler. The season had been wet and cold, their barley did not ripen well, and the cabbages never half closed in the garden. So the brothers were poor that winter, and when Christmas came they had nothing to feast on but a barley loaf, a piece of rusty bacon, and some small beer of their own brewing. Worse than that, the snow was very deep, and they could get no firewood. Their hut stood at the end of the village, beyond it spread the bleak moor, now all white and silent; but that moor had once been a forest, great roots of old trees were still to be found in it, loosened from the soil and laid bare by the winds and rains. One of these, a rough, gnarled log, lay hard by their door, the half of it above the snow, and Spare said to this brother—

"'Shall we sit here cold on Christmas while the great root lies yonder? Let us chop it up for firewood, the work will make us warm.'"

"'No,' said Scrub; 'it's not right to chop wood on Christmas; besides, that root is too hard to be broken with any hatchet.'"

"'Hard or not we must have a fire,' replied Spare.—'Come, brother, help me in with it. Poor as we are, there is nobody in the village will have such a yule log as ours.'

"Scrub liked a little grandeur, and in hopes of having a fine yule log, both brothers strained and strove with all their might till, between pulling and pushing, the great old root was safe on the hearth and beginning to crackle and blaze with the red embers. In high glee, the cobblers sat down to their beer and bacon. The door was shut, for there was nothing but cold moonlight and snow outside; but the hut, strewn with fir boughs, and ornamented with holly, looked cheerful as the ruddy blaze flared up and rejoiced their hearts.

"'Long life and good fortune to ourselves, brother!' said Spare. 'I hope you will drink that toast, and may we never have a worse fire on Christmas—but what is that?'

"Spare set down the drinking horn, and the brothers listened astonished, for out of the blazing root they heard, 'Cuckoo! cuckoo!' as plain as ever the spring bird's voice came over the moor on a May morning.

"'It is something bad,' said Scrub, terribly frightened.

"'Maybe not,' said Spare; and out of the deep hole at the side which the fire had not reached flew a large gray cuckoo, and lit on the table before them. Much as the cobblers had been surprised, they were still more so when it said—



"'Good gentlemen, what season is this?'

"'It's Christmas,' said Spare.

"'Then a merry Christmas to you!' said the cuckoo. 'I went to sleep in the hollow of that old root one evening last summer, and never woke till the heat of your fire made me think it was summer again; but now since you have burned my lodging, let me stay in your hut till the spring comes round—I only want a hole to sleep in, and when I go on my travels next summer be assured I will bring you some present for your trouble.'

"'Stay, and welcome,' said Spare, while Scrub sat wondering if it were something bad or not; 'I'll make you a good warm hole in the thatch. But you must be hungry after that long sleep?—here is a slice of barley bread. Come help us to keep Christmas!'

"The cuckoo ate up the slice, drank water from the brown jug, for he would take no beer, and flew into a snug hole which Spare scooped for him in the thatch of the hut.

"Scrub said he was afraid it wouldn't be lucky; but as it slept on, and the days passed he forgot his fears. So the snow melted, the heavy rains came, the cold grew less, the days lengthened, and one sunny morning the brothers were awakened by the cuckoo shouting its own cry to let them know the spring had come.

"'Now I'm going on my travels,' said the bird, 'over the world to tell men of the spring. There is no country where trees bud or flowers bloom, that I will not cry in before the year goes round. Give me another slice of barley bread to keep me on my journey, and tell me what present I shall bring you at the twelve-months' end.'

"Scrub would have been angry with his brother for cutting so large a slice, their store of barley-meal being low; but his mind was occupied with what present would be most prudent to ask: at length a lucky thought struck him.

"'Good master cuckoo,' said he, 'if a great traveler who sees all the world like you, could know of any place where diamonds or pearls were to be found, one of a tolerable size brought in your beak would help such poor men as my

brother and I to provide something better than barley bread for your next entertainment.'

"I know nothing of diamonds or pearls,' said the cuckoo; 'they are in the hearts of rocks and the sands of rivers. My knowledge is only of that which grows on the earth. But there are two trees hard by the well that lies at the world's end—one of them is called the golden tree, for its leaves are all of beaten gold: every winter they fall into the well with a sound like scattered coin, and I know not what becomes of them. As for the other, it is always green like a laurel. Some call it the wise, and some the merry tree. Its leaves never fall, but they that get one of them keep a blithe heart in spite of all misfortunes, and can make themselves as merry in a hut as in a palace.'

"'Good master cuckoo, bring me a leaf off that tree!' cried Spare.

"'Now, brother, don't be a fool!' said Scrub; 'think of the leaves of beaten gold! Dear master cuckoo, bring me one of them!'

"Before another word could be spoken, the cuckoo had flown out of the open door, and was shouting its spring cry over moor and meadow. The brothers were poorer than ever that year; nobody would send them a single shoe to mend. The new cobbler said, in scorn, they should come to be his apprentices; and Scrub and Spare would have left the village but for their barley field, their cabbage garden, and a certain maid called Fairfeather, whom both the cobblers had courted for seven years without even knowing which she meant to favor.

"Sometimes Fairfeather seemed inclined to Scrub, sometimes she smiled on Spare; but the brothers never disputed for that. They sowed their barley, planted their cabbage, and now that their trade was gone, worked in the rich villagers' fields to make out a scanty living. So the seasons came and passed: spring, summer, harvest, and winter followed each other as they have done from the beginning. At the end of the latter, Scrub and Spare had grown so poor and ragged that Fairfeather thought them beneath her notice. Old neighbors forgot to invite them to wedding feasts or merrymaking; and they thought the cuckoo had forgotten them too, when at daybreak, on the first of April, they heard a hard beak knocking at their door, and a voice crying—

"'Cuckoo! Cuckoo! Let me in with my presents.'

"Spare ran to open the door, and in came the cuckoo, carrying on one side of his bill a golden leaf larger than that of any tree in the north country; and in the other, one like that of the common laurel, only it had a fresher green.

"'Here,' it said, giving the gold to Scrub and the green to Spare, 'it is a long carriage from the world's end. Give me a slice of barley bread, for I must tell the north country that the spring has come.'

"Scrub did not grudge the thickness of that slice, though it was cut from their last loaf. So much gold had never been in the cobbler's hands before, and he could not help exulting over his brother.

"'See the wisdom of my choice!' he said, holding up the large leaf of gold. 'As for yours, as good might be plucked from any hedge. I wonder a sensible bird would carry the like so far.'

"'Good master cobbler,' cried the cuckoo, finishing the slice, 'your conclusions are more hasty than courteous. If your brother be disappointed this time, I go on the same journey every year, and for your hospitable entertainment will think it no trouble to bring each of you whichever leaf you desire.'

"'Darling cuckoo!' cried Scrub, 'bring me a golden one:' and Spare, looking up from the green leaf on which he gazed as though it were a crown jewel, said—

"'Be sure to bring me one from the merry tree,' and away flew the cuckoo.

"'This is the Feast of All Fools, and it ought to be your birthday,' said Scrub. 'Did ever man fling away such an opportunity of getting rich! Much good your merry leaves will do in the midst of rags and poverty!' So he went on, but Spare laughed at him, and answered with quaint old proverbs concerning the cares that come with gold, till Scrub, at length getting angry, vowed his brother was not fit to live with a respectable man; and taking his lasts, his awls, and his golden leaf, he left the wattle hut, and went to tell the villagers.

"They were astonished at the folly of Spare and charmed with Scrub's good sense, particularly when he showed them the golden leaf, and told that the cuckoo would bring him one every spring. The new cobbler immediately took him into partnership; the greatest people sent him their shoes to mend;

Fairfeather smiled graciously upon him, and in the course of that summer they were married, with a grand wedding feast, at which the whole village danced, except Spare, who was not invited, because the bride could not bear his low-mindedness, and his brother thought him a disgrace to the family.

" Indeed, all who heard the story concluded that Spare must be mad, and nobody would associate with him but a lame tinker, a beggar boy, and a poor woman reputed to be a witch because she was old and ugly. As for Scrub, he established himself with Fairfeather in a cottage close by that of the new cobbler, and quite as fine. There he mended shoes to everybody's satisfaction, had a scarlet coat for holidays, and a fat goose for dinner every wedding day. Fairfeather, too, had a crimson gown and fine blue ribbons; but neither she nor Scrub were content, for to buy this grandeur the golden leaf had to be broken and parted with piece by piece, so the last morsel was gone before the cuckoo came with another.

"Spare lived on in the old hut, and worked in the cabbage garden. (Scrub had got the barley field because he was the elder.) Every day his coat grew more ragged, and the hut more weather-beaten; but people remarked that he never looked sad nor sour; and the wonder was, that from the time they began to keep his company, the tinker grew kinder to the poor donkey with which he traveled the country, the beggar boy kept out of mischief, and the old woman was never cross to her cat or angry with the children.

"'Husband! husband! rise and see what a good bargain I have made.'



"Scrub gave one closing snore, and muttered something about the root being hard; but he rubbed his eyes, gazed up at his brother, and said—

"'Spare, is that really you? How did you like the court, and have you made your fortune?'

"'That I have, brother,' said Spare, 'in getting back my own good leathern doublet. Come, let us eat eggs, and rest ourselves here this night. In the morning we will return to our own old hut, at the end of the moorland village where the Christmas Cuckoo will come and bring us leaves.'

"'Scrub and Fairfeather agreed. So in the morning they all returned, and found the old hut little the worse for wear and weather. The neighbors came about them to ask the news of court, and see if they had made their fortune. Everybody was astonished to find the three poorer than ever, but somehow they liked to go back to the hut. Spare brought out the lasts and awls he had hidden in a corner; Scrub and he began their old trade, and the whole north country found out that there never were such cobblers.

"They mended the shoes of lords and ladies as well as the common people; everybody was satisfied. Their custom increased from day to day, and all that were disappointed, discontented, or unlucky, came to the hut as in old times, before Spare went to court.

"The rich brought them presents, the poor did them service. The hut itself changed, no one knew how. Flowering honeysuckle grew over its roof; red and white roses grew thick about its door. Moreover, the Christmas Cuckoo always came on the first of April, bringing three leaves of the merry tree—for Scrub and Fairfeather would have no more golden ones. So it was with them when I last heard the news of the north country."



# The Peterkin's Christmas Tree



By Lucretia P. Hale

From the Peterkin Papers 1886

EARLY in the autumn the Peterkins began to prepare for their Christmas-tree. Everything was done in great privacy, as it was to be a surprise to the neighbors, as well as to the rest of the family. Mr. Peterkin had been up to Mr. Bromwick's wood-lot, and, with his consent, selected the tree. Agamemnon went to look at it occasionally after dark, and Solomon John made frequent visits to it mornings, just after sunrise. Mr. Peterkin drove Elizabeth Eliza and her mother that way, and pointed furtively to it with his whip; but none of them ever spoke of it aloud to each other. It was suspected that the little boys had been to see it Wednesday and Saturday afternoons. But they came home with their pockets full of chestnuts, and said nothing about it.



At length Mr. Peterkin had it cut down and brought secretly into the Larkin's barn. A week or two before Christmas a measurement was made of it with Elizabeth Eliza's yard-measure. To Mr. Peterkin's great dismay it was discovered that it was too high to stand in the back parlor.

This fact was brought out at a secret council of Mr. and Mrs. Peterkin, Elizabeth Eliza, and Agamemnon.

Agamemnon suggested that it might be set up slanting; but Mrs. Peterkin was very sure it would make her dizzy, and the candles would drip.

But a brilliant idea came to Mr. Peterkin. He proposed that the ceiling of the parlor should be raised to make room for the top of the tree.

Elizabeth Eliza thought the space would need to be quite large. It must not be like a small box, or you could not see the tree.

"Yes," said Mr. Peterkin, "I should have the ceiling lifted all across the room; the effect would be finer."

Elizabeth Eliza objected to having the whole ceiling raised, because her room was over the back parlor, and she would have no floor while the alteration was going on, which would be very awkward. Besides, her room was not very high now, and, if the floor were raised, perhaps she could not walk in it upright.

Mr. Peterkin explained that he didn't propose altering the whole ceiling, but to life up a ridge across the room at the back part where the tree was to stand. This would make a hump, to be sure, in Elizabeth Eliza's room; but it would go across the whole room.

Elizabeth Eliza said she would not mind that. It would be like the cuddy thing that comes up on the deck of a ship, that you sit against, only here you would not have the sea-sickness. She thought she should like it, for a rarity. She might use it for a divan.

Mrs. Peterkin thought it would come in the worn place of the carpet, and might be a convenience in making the carpet over.

Agamemnon was afraid there would be trouble in keeping the matter secret, for it would be a long piece of work for a carpenter; but Mr. Peterkin proposed having the carpenter for a day or two, for a number of other jobs.

One of them was to make all the chairs in the house of the same height, for Mrs. Peterkin had nearly broken her spine by sitting down in a chair that she had supposed was her own rocking-chair, and it had proved to be two inches lower. The little boys were now large enough to sit in any chair; so a medium was fixed upon to satisfy all the family, and the chairs were made uniformly of the same height.



On consulting the carpenter, however, he insisted that the tree could be cut off at the lower end to suit the height of the parlor, and demurred at so great a change as altering the ceiling. But Mr. Peterkin had set his mind upon the improvement, and Elizabeth Eliza had cut her carpet in preparation for it.



So the folding-doors into the back parlor were closed, and for nearly a fortnight before Christmas there was great litter of fallen plastering, and laths, and chips, and shavings; and Elizabeth Eliza's carpet was taken up, and the furniture had to be changed, and one night she had to sleep at the Bromwicks', for there was a long hole in her floor that might be dangerous.

All this delighted the little boys. They could not understand what was going on. Perhaps they suspected a Christmas-tree, but they did not know why a Christmas-tree should have so many chips, and were still more astonished at

the hump that appeared in Elizabeth Eliza's room. It must be a Christmas present, or else the tree in a box.

Some aunts and uncles, too, arrived a day or two before Christmas, with some small cousins. These cousins occupied the attention of the little boys, and there was a great deal of whispering and mystery, behind doors, and under the stairs, and in the corners of the entry.

Solomon John was busy, privately making some candles for the tree. He had been collecting some bayberries, as he understood they made very nice candles, so that it would not be necessary to buy any.

The elders of the family never all went into the back parlor together, and all tried not to see what was going on. Mrs. Peterkin would go in with Solomon John, or Mr. Peterkin with Elizabeth Eliza, or Elizabeth Eliza and Agamemnon and Solomon John. The little boys and the small cousins were never allowed even to look inside the room.

Elizabeth Eliza meanwhile went into town a number of times. She wanted to consult Amanda as to how much ice-cream they should need, and whether they could make it at home, as they had cream and ice. She was pretty busy in her own room; the furniture had to be changed, and the carpet altered. The "hump" was higher than she expected. There was danger of bumping her own head whenever she crossed it. She had to nail some padding on the ceiling for fear of accidents.

The afternoon before Christmas, Elizabeth Eliza, Solomon John, and their father collected in the back parlor for a council. The carpenters had done their work, and the tree stood at its full height at the back of the room, the top stretching up into the space arranged for it. All the chips and shavings were cleared away, and it stood on a neat box.

But what were they to put upon the tree?

Solomon John had brought in his supply of candles; but they proved to be very "stringy" and very few of them. It was strange how many bayberries it took to make a few candles! The little boys had helped him, and he had gathered as much as a bushel of bayberries. He had put



them in water, and skimmed off the wax, according to the directions; but there was so little wax!

Solomon John had given the little boys some of the bits sawed off from the legs of the chairs. He had suggested that they should cover them with gilt paper, to answer for gilt apples, without telling them what they were for.

These apples, a little blunt at the end, and the candles were all they had for the tree!

After all her trips into town Elizabeth Eliza had forgotten to bring anything for it.

"I thought of candies and sugar-plums," she said; "but I concluded if we made caramels ourselves we should not need them. But, then, we have not made caramels. The fact is, that day my head was full of my carpet. I had bumped it pretty badly, too."

Mr. Peterkin wished he had taken, instead of a fir-tree, an apple-tree he had seen in October, full of red fruit.

"But the leaves would have fallen off by this time," said Elizabeth Eliza.

"And the apples, too," said Solomon John.

"It is odd I should have forgotten, that day I went in on purpose to get the things," said Elizabeth Eliza, musingly. "But I went from shop to shop, and didn't know exactly what to get. I saw a great many gilt things for Christmas-trees; but I knew the little boys were making the gilt apples; there were plenty of candles in the shops, but I knew Solomon John was making the candles."



Mr. Peterkin thought it was quite natural.

Solomon John wondered if it were too late for them to go into town now.

Elizabeth Eliza could not go in the next morning, for there was to be a grand Christmas dinner, and Mr. Peterkin could not be spared, and Solomon John was sure he and Agamemnon would not know what to buy. Besides, they would want to try the candles to-night.

Mr. Peterkin asked if the presents everybody had been preparing would not answer. But Elizabeth Eliza knew they would be too heavy.

A gloom came over the room. There was only a flickering gleam from one of Solomon John's candles that he had lighted by way of trial.

Solomon John again proposed going into town. He lighted a match to examine the newspaper about the trains. There were plenty of trains coming out at that hour, but none going in except a very late one. That would not leave time to do anything and come back.

"We could go in, Elizabeth Eliza and I," said Solomon John, "but we should not have time to buy anything."

Agamemnon was summoned in. Mrs. Peterkin was entertaining the uncles and aunts in the front parlor. Agamemnon wished there was time to study up something about electric lights. If they could only have a calcium light! Solomon John's candle sputtered and went out.

At this moment there was a loud knocking at the front door. The little boys, and the small cousins, and the uncles and aunts, and Mrs. Peterkin, hastened to see what was the matter.

The uncles and aunts thought somebody's house must be on fire. The door was opened, and there was a man, white with flakes, for it was beginning to snow, and he was pulling in a large box.

Mrs. Peterkin supposed it contained some of Elizabeth Eliza's purchases, so she ordered it to be pushed into the back parlor, and hastily called back her guests and the little boys into the other room. The little boys and the small cousins were sure they had seen Santa Claus himself.

Mr. Peterkin lighted the gas. The box was addressed to Elizabeth Eliza. It was from the lady from Philadelphia! She had gathered a hint from Elizabeth Eliza's letters that there was to be a Christmas-tree, and had filled this box with all that would be needed.

It was opened directly. There was every kind of gilt hanging-thing, from gilt pea-pods to butterflies on springs. There were shining flags and lanterns, and birdcages, and nests with birds sitting on them, baskets of fruit, gilt apples

and bunches of grapes, and, at the bottom of the whole, a large box of candles and a box of Philadelphia bonbons!

Elizabeth Eliza and Solomon John could scarcely keep from screaming. The little boys and the small cousins knocked on the folding-doors to ask what was the matter.

Hastily Mr. Peterkin and the rest took out the things and hung them on the tree, and put on the candles.

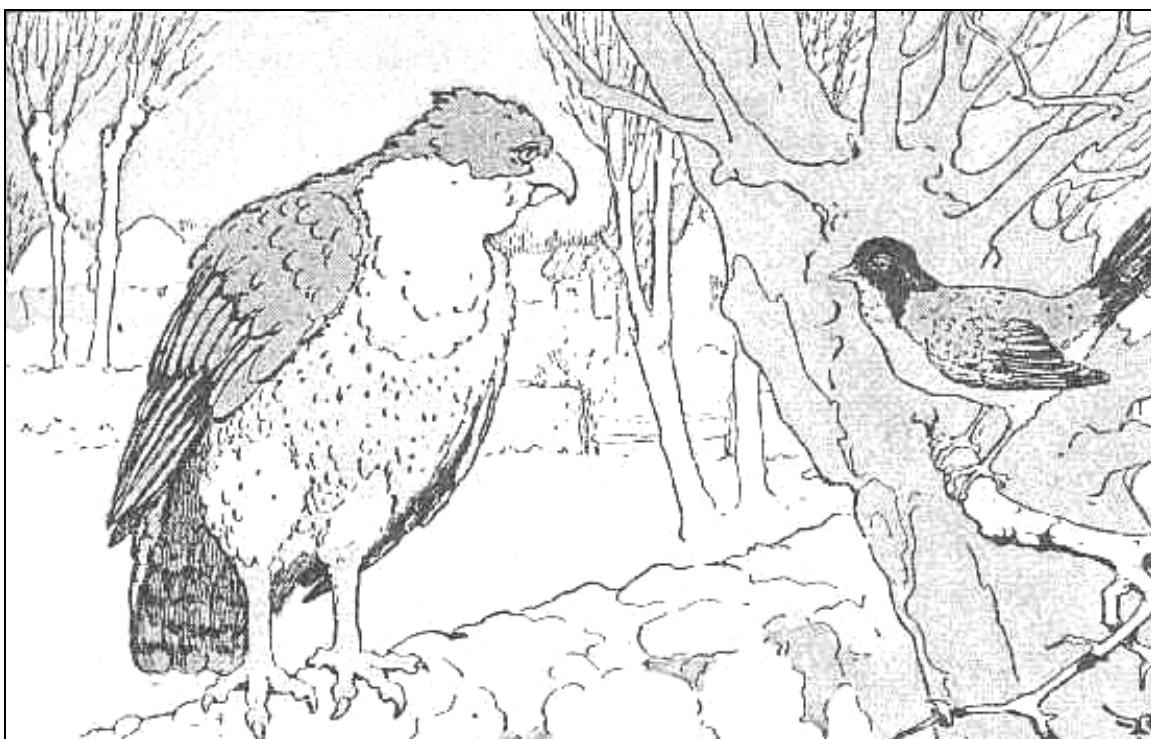


When all was done, it looked so well that Mr. Peterkin exclaimed:—

"Let us light the candles now, and send to invite all the neighbors to-night, and have the tree on Christmas Eve!"

And so it was that the Peterkins had their Christmas-tree the day before, and on Christmas night could go and visit their neighbors.

# Wee Robin's Christmas Song



A Scottish Folk Tale

Wee Robin Redbreast hopped upon a bush.  
An old gray pussy came by and said,  
"Where are you going, Wee Robin?"  
Wee Robin said, "I'm going to the king.  
I shall sing him a song  
this good Christmas morning."

Gray pussy said, "Come here, Wee Robin,  
I will show you a bonny ring  
round my neck."

But Wee Robin said, "No, no, Gray Pussy!  
No, no, you worried the wee mouse,  
but you can not worry me."  
So Wee Robin flew away.

Then Wee Robin came to a mud wall.  
There he saw a gray hawk.  
The gray hawk said,  
"Where are you going, Wee Robin?"

Wee Robin said, "I am going to the king.  
I shall sing him a song  
this good Christmas morning."

Gray hawk said, "Come here, Wee Robin,  
I will show you a bonny feather in my wing."

But Wee Robin said, "No, no, Gray Hawk!  
No, no, you pecked the wee linnet,  
but you can not peck me."  
So Wee Robin flew away.

Then Wee Robin came to a hole in a cliff.  
There he saw a sly fox.  
The sly fox said,  
"Where are you going, Wee Robin?"

Wee Robin said, "I am going to the king."

I shall sing him a song  
this good Christmas morning."

The sly fox said, "Come here, Wee Robin,  
I will show you a bonny spot on my tail."

But Wee Robin said, "No, no, sly fox!  
No, no, you worried the wee lamb,  
but you can not worry me."  
So Wee Robin flew away.

Then Wee Robin came to a spring.  
There he saw a wee lad getting a drink.

And the wee lad said,  
"Where are you going, Wee Robin?"

Wee Robin said, "I am going to the king.  
I shall sing him a song  
this good Christmas morning."

The wee lad said, "Come here, Wee Robin,  
I will give you some crumbs."

But Wee Robin said, "No, no, wee lad!  
No, no, you hit the little sparrow,  
but you can not hit me."  
So Wee Robin flew away.

Then Wee Robin came to the king's castle.  
There he saw the king and queen.  
"Now I shall sing my Christmas song," said Wee Robin.



So Wee Robin sang his good Christmas song.

Then the king said,  
"What can we give Wee Robin  
for his bonny Christmas song?"

"We can give him Jenny Wren  
for a wife," said the queen.

So Wee Robin and Jenny Wren  
flew away home.

# When the Yule Log Burns

## A Christmas Story



By Leona Dalrymple 1916

# Part One: In Which We Light a Yule Log

## I Kindlings

Polly, the Doctor's old white mare, plodded slowly along the snowy country road by the picket fence, and turned in at the snow-capped posts. Ahead, roofed with the ragged ermine of a newly-fallen snow, the Doctor's old-fashioned house loomed gray-white through the snow-fringed branches of the trees, a quaint iron lantern, which was picturesque by day and luminous and cheerful by night, hanging within the square, white-pillared portico at the side. That the many-paned, old-fashioned window on the right framed the snow-white head of Aunt Ellen Leslie, the Doctor's wife, the old Doctor himself was comfortably aware—for his kindly eyes missed nothing.

He could have told you with a reflective stroke of his grizzled beard that the snow had stopped but an hour since, and that now through the white and heavy lacery of branches to the west glowed the flame-gold of a winter sunset, glinting ruddily over the box-bordered brick walk, the orchard and the comfortable barn which snugly housed his huddled cattle; that the grasslands to the south were thickly blanketed in white; that beyond in the evergreen forest the stately pines and cedars were marvelously draped and coiffed in snow. For the old Doctor loved these things of Nature as he loved the peace and quiet of his home.

So, as he turned in at the driveway and briskly resigned the care of Polly to old Asher, his seamed and wrinkled helper, the Doctor's eyes were roving now to a corner, snug beneath a tattered rug of snow, where by summer Aunt Ellen's petunias and phlox and larkspur grew—and now to the rose-bushes ridged in down, and at last to his favorite winter nook, a thicket of black alders freighted with a wealth of berries. How crimson they were amid the white quiet of the garden! And the brightly colored fruit of the barberry flamed forth from a snowy bush like the cheerful elf-lamps of a wood-gnome.

There was equal cheer and color in the old-fashioned sitting-room to which the Doctor presently made his way, for a wood fire roared with a winter

gleam and crackle in the fireplace and Aunt Ellen Leslie rocked slowly back and forth by the window with a letter in her hand.

"Another letter!" exclaimed the Doctor, warming his hands before the blazing log. "God bless my soul, Ellen, we're becoming a nuisance to Uncle Sam!" But for all the brisk cheeriness of his voice he was furtively aware that Aunt Ellen's brown eyes were a little tearful, and presently crossing the room to her side, he gently drew the crumpled letter from her hand and read it.

"So John's not coming home for Christmas either, eh?" he said at last. "Well, now, that is too bad! Now, now, now, mother," as Aunt Ellen surreptitiously wiped her glasses, "we should feel proud to have such busy children. There's Ellen and Margaret and Anne with a horde of youngsters to make a Christmas for, and John—bless your heart, Ellen, there's a busy man! A broker now is one of the very busiest of men! And what with John's kiddies and his beautiful society wife and that grand Christmas eve ball he mentions—why—" the Doctor cleared his throat,— "why, dear me, it's not to be wondered at, say I! And Philip and Howard—busy as—as—as architects and lawyers usually are at Christmas," he finished lamely. "As for Ralph—" the Doctor looked away—"well, Ralph hasn't spent a Christmas home since college days."

"It will be the first Christmas we ever spent without some of them home," ventured Aunt Ellen, biting her lip courageously, whereupon the old Doctor patted her shoulder gently with a cheery word of advice.

Now, there was something in the touch of the old Doctor's broad and gentle hand that always soothed, wherefore Aunt Ellen presently wiped her troublesome glasses again and bravely tried to smile, and the Doctor making a vast and altogether cheerful to-do about turning the blazing log, began a brisk description of his day. It had ended, professionally, at a lonely little house in the heart of the forest, which Jarvis Hildreth, dying but a scant year since, had bequeathed to his orphaned children, Madge and Roger.

"And, Ellen," finished the Doctor, soberly, "there he sits by the window, day by day, poor lame little lad!—staring away so wistfully at the forest, and Madge, bless her brave young heart!—she bastes and stitches and sews away, all the while weaving him wonderful yarns about the pines and cedars

to amuse him—all out of her pretty head, mind you! A lame brother and a passion for books—" said the Doctor, shaking his head, "a poor inheritance for the lass. They worry me a lot, Ellen, for Madge looks thin and tired, and to-day—" the Doctor cleared his throat, "I think she had been crying."

"Crying!" exclaimed Aunt Ellen, her kindly brown eyes warm with sympathy. "Dear, dear!—And Christmas only three days off! Why, John, dear, we must have them over here for Christmas. To be sure! And we'll have a tree for little Roger and a Christmas masquerade and such a wonderful Christmas altogether as he's never known before!" And Aunt Ellen, with the all-embracing motherhood of her gentle heart aroused, fell to planning a Christmas for Madge and Roger Hildreth that would have gladdened the heart of the Christmas saint himself.

Face aglow, the old Doctor bent and patted his wife's wrinkled hand.

"Why, Ellen," he confessed, warmly, "it's the thing I most desired! Dear me, it's a very strange thing indeed, my dear, how often we seem to agree. I'll hitch old Billy to the sleigh and go straight after them now while Annie's getting supper!" And at that instant one glance at Aunt Ellen Leslie's fine old face, framed in the winter firelight which grew brighter as the checkerboard window beside her slowly purpled, would have revealed to the veriest tyro why the Doctor's patients liked best to call her "Aunt" Ellen.

So, with a violent jingle of sleigh-bells, the Doctor presently shot forth again into the white and quiet world, and as he went, gliding swiftly past the ghostly spruces by the roadside, oddly enough, despite his cheerful justification to Aunt Ellen, he was fiercely rebelling at the defection of his children. John and his lovely wife might well have foregone their fashionable ball. And Howard and Philip—their holiday-keeping Metropolitan clubs were shallow artificialities surely compared with a home-keeping reunion about the Yule log. As for the children of Anne and Ellen and Margaret—well, the Doctor could just tell those daughters of his that their precious youngsters liked a country Christmas best—he knew they did!—not the complex, steam-heated hot-house off-shoot of that rugged flower of simpler times when homes were further apart, but a country Christmas of keen, crisp cold and merry sleigh-bells, of rosy cheeks and snow-balls, of skating on the Deacon's pond and a jubilant hour after around

the blazing wood-fire: a Christmas, in short, such as the old Doctor himself knew and loved, of simplicity and sympathy and home-keeping heartiness!

And then—there was Ralph—but here the Doctor's face grew very stern. Wild tales came to him at times of this youngest and most gifted of his children—tales of intemperate living interlarded with occasional tales of brilliant surgical achievement on the staff of St. Michael's. For the old Doctor had guided the steps of his youngest son to the paths of medicine with a great hope, long abandoned.

Ah—well! The Doctor sighed, abruptly turning his thoughts to Madge and Roger. They at least should know the heart-glow of a real Christmas! A masquerade party of his neighbors Christmas eve, perhaps, such as Aunt Ellen had suggested, and a Yule-log—but now it was, in the midst of his Christmas plans, that a daring notion flashed temptingly through the Doctor's head, was banished with a shrug and flashed again, whereupon with his splendid capacity for prompt decision, the Doctor suddenly wheeled old Billy about and went sleighing in considerable excitement into the village whence a host of night-telegrams went singing over the busy wires to startle eventually a slumbering conscience or so. And presently when the Doctor drew up with a flourish before the lonely little house among the forest pines, his earlier depression had vanished.

So with a prodigious stamping of snow from his feet and a cheerful wave of his mittened hand to the boy by the window, the Doctor bustled cheerily indoors and with kindly eyes averted from the single tell-tale sauce-pan upon the fire, over which Madge Hildreth had bent with sudden color, fell to bustling about with a queer lump in his throat and talking ambiguously of Aunt Ellen's Christmas orders, painfully conscious that the girl's dark face had grown pitifully white and tense and that Roger's wan little face was glowing. And when the fire was damped by the Doctor himself, and his Christmas guests hustled into dazed, protesting readiness, the Doctor deftly muffled the thin little fellow in blankets and gently carried him out to the waiting sleigh with arms that were splendid and sturdy and wonderfully reassuring.

"There, there, little man!" he said cheerfully, "we've not hurt the poor lame leg once, I reckon. And now we'll just help Sister Madge blow out the lamp and lock the door and be off to Aunt Ellen!"

But, strangely enough, the Doctor halted abruptly in the doorway and turned his kindly eyes away to the shadowy pines. And Sister Madge, on her knees by Roger's bed, sobbing and praying in an agony of relief, presently blew out the lamp herself and wiped her eyes. For nights among the whispering pines are sleepless and long when work is scarce and Christmas hovers with cold, forbidding eyes over the restless couch of a dear and crippled brother.

## II Wishing Sparks

Round the Doctor's house frolicked the brisk, cold wind of a Christmas eve, boisterously rattling the luminous checkerboard windows and the Christmas wreaths, tormenting the cheerful flame in the old iron lantern and whisking away the snow from the shivering elms, whistling eerily down the Doctor's chimney to startle a strange little cripple by the Doctor's fire, who, queerly enough, would not be startled.

For to Roger there had never been a wind so Christmasy, or a fire so bright and warm, and his solemn black eyes glowed! Never a wealth of holly and barberry and alder-berries so crimson as that which rimmed the snug old house in Christmas flame! Never such evergreen wreaths, for, tucked up here in this very chair by Aunt Ellen, he had made them all himself of boughs from the evergreen forest! And never surely such enticing odors as had floated out for the last two days from old Annie's pots and pans as she baked and roasted and boiled and stewed in endless preparation for Christmas day and the Christmas eve party, scolding away betimes in indignant whispers at old Asher, who, by reason of a chuckling air of mystery, was in perpetual disgrace.

Wonderful days indeed for Roger, with Sister Madge's smooth, pale cheeks catching the flaring scarlet of the holly, and Sister Madge's slim and willing fingers so busy hanging boughs that she had forgotten to sigh; with motherly Aunt Ellen so warmly intent upon Roger's comfort and plans for the masquerade that many a mysterious and significant occurrence slipped safely by her kindly eyes; and with the excited Doctor's busy sleigh jingling so hysterically about on secret errands and his kindly face so full of boyish

mystery that Roger, with the key to all this Christmas intrigue locked safely in his heart, had whispered a shy little warning in the culprit's attentive ear.

And presently—Roger caught his breath and furtively eyed the grandfather's clock, ticking boastfully through a welter of holly—presently it would be time for the Doctor's masquerade, and later, when the clock struck twelve and the guests unmasked, that great surprise which the doctor had planned so carefully by telegram!

But now from the kitchen came the sound of the Doctor singing:

"Come bring with a noise,  
My merry, merry boys,  
The Christmas log to the firing!"

Roger clapped his thin little hands with a cry of delight, for old Asher and the Doctor were bringing in the Yule-log to light it presently with the charred remains of the Christmas log of a year ago. To-morrow another Yule-log would crackle and blaze and shower on the hearth, for the old Doctor molded a custom to suit his fancy. And here was Annie splendidly aproned in white, following them in, and Aunt Ellen in a wonderful old brown-gold brocade disinterred for the doctor's party from a lavender-sweet cedar chest in the garret. And Sister Madge!—Roger stared—radiant in old-fashioned crimson satin and holly, colorful foils indeed for her night-black hair and eyes! As for the doctor himself, Roger now began to realize that with his powdered wig, his satin breeches and gaily-flowered waistcoat—to say nothing of silken hose and silver buckles—he was by far the most gorgeous figure of them all!

"I," said the doctor presently, striking the burning Yule-log until the golden sparks flew out, "I charge thee, log, to burn out old wrongs and heart-burnings!" and then, in accordance with a cherished custom of his father's he followed the words with a wish for the good of his household.

"And I," said old Asher as he struck the log, "I wish for the good of the horses and cows and all the other live things and," with a terrific chuckle of mystery, "I wish for things aplenty this night."

"And I," said old Annie, with a terrible look at her imprudent spouse as she took the poker, "I wish for the harvest—and wit for them that lack it!"

But Roger had the poker now, his black eyes starry.

"I—I wish for more kind hearts like Aunt Ellen's and the Doctor's," he burst forth with a strangled sob as the sparks showered gold, "for more—more sisters like Sister Madge—" his voice quivered and broke—"and for—for all boys who cannot walk and run—" but Sister Madge's arm was already around his shoulders and the old Doctor was patting his arm—wherefore he smiled bravely up at them through glistening tears.

"Now, now, now, little lad!" reminded the Doctor, "it's Christmas eve!" Whereupon he drew a chair to the fire and began a wonderful Christmas tale about St. Boniface and Thunder Oak and the first Christmas tree. A wonderful old Doctor this—reflected Roger wonderingly. He knew so many different things—how to scare away tears and all about mistletoe and Druids, and still another story about a fir tree which Roger opined respectfully was nothing like so good as Sister Madge's story of the Cedar King who stood outside his window.

"Very likely not!" admitted the Doctor gravely.

"I've nothing like the respect for Mr. Hans Andersen myself that I have for Sister Madge."

"I thought," ventured Roger shyly, slipping his hand suddenly into the Doctor's, "that Doctors only knew how to cure folks!"

"Bless your heart, laddie," exclaimed the Doctor, considerably staggered; "they know too little of that, I fear. My conscience!" as the grandfather's clock came into the conversation with a throaty boom, "it's half-past seven!" and from then on Roger noticed the Doctor was uneasy, presently opining, with a prodigious "Hum!" that Aunt Ellen looked mighty pale and tired and that he for one calculated a little sleigh ride would brace her up for the party. This Aunt Ellen immediately flouted and the Doctor was eventually forced to pathetic and frequent reference to his own great need of air.

"Very well, my dear," said Aunt Ellen mildly, striving politely to conceal her opinion of his mental health, "I'll go, since you feel so strongly about it, but a sleigh ride in such a wind and such clothes when one is expecting party guests—" but the relieved Doctor was already bundling the brown-gold brocade into a fur-lined coat and furtively winking at Roger! Thus it was that even as the Doctor's sleigh flew merrily by the Deacon's pond, far across the snowy fields to the north gleamed the lights of the 7:52 rushing noisily into the village.

### III By the Fire

How it was that the old Doctor somehow lost his way on roads he had traveled since boyhood was a matter of exceeding mystery and annoyance to Aunt Ellen, but lose it he did. By the time he found it and jogged frantically back home, the old house was already aswarm with masked, mysterious guests and old Asher with a lantern was peering excitedly up the road. Holly-trimmed sleighs full of merry neighbors in disguise were dashing gaily up—and in the midst of all the excitement the Doctor miraculously discovered his own mask and Aunt Ellen's in the pocket of his great-coat. So hospitable Aunt Ellen, considerably perturbed that so many of her guests had arrived in her absence—an absence carefully planned by the Doctor—betook herself to the masquerade, and the Christmas party began with bandits and minstrels and jesters and all sorts of queer folk flitting gaily about the house. They paid gallant court to Roger in his great chair by the fire and presently began to present for his approval an impromptu Mummer's play.

And now the lights were all out and a masked and courtly old gentleman in satin breeches was standing in the bright firelight pouring brandy into a giant bowl of raisins; and now he was gallantly bowing to Roger himself who was plainly expected to assist with a lighted match. He did this with trembling fingers and eyes so big and black and eloquent that the Doctor cleared his throat; and as the leaping flames from the snapdragon bowl flashed weirdly over the bizarre company in the shadows. Roger, eagerly watching them snatch the raisins from the fire, fell to trembling in an ecstasy of delight. Presently a slender arm in a crimson sleeve, whose wearer was never very far from Roger's chair, slipped quietly about his shoulders and held him very tight. So, an endless round of merry Christmas games until, deep and mellow

came at last the majestic boom of the grandfather's clock striking twelve and with it a hearty babel of Christmas greetings as the Doctor, smiling significantly down into Roger's excited eyes, gave the signal to unmask.

By the fire a mysterious little knot of guests had been silently gathering, and now as Aunt Ellen Leslie removed her mask, hand and mask halted in mid-air as if fixed by the stare of Medusa, and the face above the brown-gold brocade flamed crimson. For here in Puritan garb was John Leslie, Jr., and his radiant wife—and Philip and Howard, smiling Quakers, and Anne and Margaret and Ellen with a trio of husbands, and beyond a laughing jester in cap and bells, whose dark, handsome face was a little too reckless and tired about the eyes, Roger thought, for a really happy Christmas guest—young Doctor Ralph.

As Aunt Ellen's startled eyes swept slowly from the smiling faces of her children to the proud and chuckling Doctor who had spent Heaven knows how many dollars in telegraphed commands—she laughed a little and cried a little and then mingled the two so queerly that she needs must wipe her eyes and catch at Roger's chair for support, whereupon a kindly little hand slipped suddenly into hers and Roger looked up and smiled serenely.

"Don't cry, Aunt Ellen!" he begged shyly. "I knew all about it too and the Doctor—he did it all!"

"And merry fits he gave us all by telegram, too, mother!" exclaimed Philip with a grin.

"Moreover," broke in John, patting his mother's shoulder, "there are eleven kids packed away upstairs like sardines—we hid 'em away while dad and you were lost, and—" but here with a deafening racket the stairs door burst wide open and with a swoop and a scream eleven pajama-ed young bandits with starry eyes bore down upon Aunt Ellen and the Doctor.

"Great Scott!" exclaimed John, thoroughly scandalized, "you disgraceful kids! Which one of you stirred this up?" But the guilty face at the tail of the romping procession was the face of old Asher.

Radiantly triumphant the old Doctor swung little John Leslie 3rd to his shoulder and faced his laughing family and as old Annie appeared with a steaming tray—he seized a mug of cider and held it high aloft.

"To the ruddy warmth of the Christmas log and the Christmas home spirit—" he cried—"to the home-keeping hearts of the country-side! Gentlemen—I give you—A Country home and a Country Christmas! May more good folk come to know them!" And little John Leslie cried hoarsely—

"Hooray, grandpop, hooray for a Country Christmas!"

Carelessly alive to the merry spirit of the night, the jester presently adjusted a flute which hung from his shoulder by a scarlet cord and lazily piping a Christmas air, wandered to another room—to come suddenly upon a forgotten playmate of his boyhood days.

"It—it can't be!" he reflected in startled interest. "It surely can't be Madge Hildreth!"

But Madge Hildreth it surely was, spreading the satin folds of his grandmother's crimson gown in mocking courtesy. Moreover it was not the awkward, ragged elfish little gipsy who had tormented his debonair boyhood with her shy ardent worship of himself and his daring exploits, but instead a winsome vision of Christmas color and Christmas cheer, holly-red of cheek, with flashes of scarlet holly in her night black hair and eyes whose unfathomable dusk reflected no single hint of that old, wild worship slumbering still in the girl's rebellious heart.

"And the symbolism of this stunning make-up?" queried Ralph after a while, lazily admiring.

The girl's eyes flashed.

"To-night, if you please," she said, "I am the spirit of the old-fashioned Christmas who dwells in the holly heart of the evergreen wood. A country Christmas, ruddy-cheeked and cheerful and rugged like the winter holly—simple and old-fashioned and hallowed with memories like this bright soft crimson gown!"

Well, she had been a queer, fanciful youngster too, Doctor Ralph remembered, always passionately aquiver with a wild sylvan poetry and over-fond of book-lore like her father. Mischievously glancing at a spray of mistletoe above the girl's dark head, he stepped forward with the careless gallantry that had won him many a kindly glance from pretty eyes and was strangely to fail him now. For at the look in Madge's calm eyes, he drew back, stammering.

"I—I beg your pardon!" said Doctor Ralph.

Later as he stood thoughtfully by his bedroom window, staring queerly at the wind-beaten elms, he found himself repeating Madge Hildreth's words. "Ruddy-cheeked and rugged and cheerful!"—indeed—this unforgettable Christmas eve. Yes—she was right. Had he not often heard his father say that the Christmas season epitomized all the rugged sympathy and heartiness and health of the country year! To-night the blazing Yule-log, his mother's face—how white her hair was growing, thought Doctor Ralph with a sudden tightening of his throat—all of these memories had strummed forgotten and finer chords. And darkly foiling the homely brightness came the picture of rushing, overstrung, bundle-laden city crowds, of shop-girls white and weary, of store-heaps of cedar and holly sapped by electric glare. Rush and strain and worry—yes—and a spirit of grudging! How unlike the Christmas peace of this white, wind-world outside his window! So Doctor Ralph went to bed with a sigh and a shrug—to listen while the sleety boughs tapping at his windows roused ghostly phantoms of his boyhood. Falling asleep, he dreamt that pretty Madge Hildreth had lightly waved a Christmas wand of crimson above his head and dispelled his weariness and discontent.

## IV Embers

And in the morning—there was the royal glitter of a Christmas ice-storm to bring boyhood memories crowding again, boughs sheathed in crystal armor and the old barn roof aglaze with ice. Yes—Ralph thrilled—and there were the Christmas bunches of oats on the fences and trees and the roof of the barn—how well he remembered! For the old Doctor loved this Christmas custom too and never forgot the Christmas birds. And to-day—why of course—there would be double allowances of food for the cattle and horses,

for old Toby the cat and Rover the dog. Hadn't Ralph once performed this cherished Christmas task himself!

But now, clamoring madly at his door was a romping swarm of youngsters eager to show Uncle Ralph the Christmas tree which, though he had helped to trim it the night before, he inspected in great surprise. And here in his chair by another Yule-log he found Roger, staring wide-eyed at the glittering tree with his thin little arms full of Christmas gifts. Near him was Sister Madge whose black eyes, Ralph saw with approval, were very soft and gentle, and beyond in the coffee-fragrant dining-room Aunt Ellen and old Annie conspired together over a mammoth breakfast table decked with holly.

"Oh, John, dear," Ralph heard his mother say as the Doctor came in, "I've always said that Christmas is a mother's day. Wasn't the first Christmas a mother's Christmas and the very first tree—a mother's tree?" and then the Doctor's scandalized retort—"Now—now, now, see here, Mother Ellen, it's a father's day, too, don't you forget that!"

And so on to the Christmas twilight through a day of romping youngsters and blazing Yule-logs, of Christmas gifts and Christmas greetings—of a haunting shame for Doctor Ralph at the memory of the wild Christmas he had planned to spend with Griffin and Edwards.

With the coming of the broad shadows which lay among the stiff, ice-fringed spruces like iris velvet, Doctor Ralph's nieces and nephews went flying out to help old Asher feed the stock. By the quiet fire the Doctor beckoned Ralph.

"Suppose, my boy," he said, "suppose you take a look at the little lad's leg here. I've sometimes wondered what you would think of it."

Coloring a little at his father's deferential tone Ralph turned the stocking back from the pitiful shrunken limb and bent over it, his dark face keen and grave. And now with the surgeon uppermost, Roger fancied Doctor Ralph's handsome eyes were nothing like so tired. Save for the crackle of the fire and the tick of the great clock, there was silence in the firelit room and presently Roger caught something in Doctor Ralph's thoughtful face that made his heart leap wildly.

"An operation," said the young Doctor suddenly—and halted, meeting his father's eyes significantly.

"You are sure!" insisted the old Doctor slowly. "In my day, it was impossible—quite impossible."

"Times change," said the younger man. "I have performed such an operation successfully myself. I feel confident, sir—" but Roger had caught his hand now with a sob that echoed wildly through the quiet room.

"Oh, Doctor Ralph," he blurted with blazing, agonized eyes, "you don't—you can't mean, sir, that I'll walk and run like other boys—and—and climb the Cedar King—" his voice broke in a passionate fit of weeping.

"Yes," said Doctor Ralph, huskily, "I mean just that. Dad and I, little man, we're going to do what we can."

By the window Sister Madge buried her face in her hands.

"Come, come, now Sister Madge," came the Doctor's kindly voice a little later, "you've cried enough, lass. Roger is fretting about you and Doctor Ralph here, he says he's going to take you for a little sleigh-ride if you'll honor him by going."

Outside a Christmas moon rode high above a sparkling ice-bright world and as the sleigh shot away into its quiet glory, Ralph, meeting the dark, tear-bright eyes of Sister Madge, tucked the robes closer about her with a hand that shook a little.

"'Gipsy' Hildreth!" he said suddenly, smiling, but the hated nickname tonight was almost a caress. "Tell me," Ralph's voice was very grave—"You've been sewing? Mother spoke of it."

"There was nothing else," said Sister Madge. "I could not leave Roger."

"And now Mother wants you to stay on with her. You—you'll do that?"

"She is very lonely," said Madge uncertainly and Ralph bit his lip.

"Mother lonely!" he said. "She didn't tell me that."

"Roger is wild to stay," went on Madge, looking away—"but I—oh—I fear it is only their wonderful kindness. Still there's the Doctor's rheumatism—and he does need some one to keep his books."

"Rheumatism!" said Ralph sharply.

"Yes," nodded Madge in surprise—"didn't you know. It's been pretty bad this winter. He's been thinking some of breaking in young Doctor Price to take part of his practise now and perhaps all of it later."

"Price!" broke out Ralph indignantly. "Oh—that's absurd! Price couldn't possibly swing Dad's work. He's not clever enough."

"He's the only one there is," said Madge and Ralph fell silent.

All about them lay a glittering moonlit country of peaceful, firelit homes and snowy hills—of long quiet roads and shadowy trees and presently Ralph spoke again.

"You like all this," he said abruptly, "the quiet—the country—and all of it?"

Sister Madge's black eyes glowed.

"After all," she said, "is it not the only way to live? This scent of the pine, the long white road, the wild-fire of the winter sunset and the wind and the hills—are they not God-made messages of mystery to man? Life among man-made things—like your cities—seems somehow to exaggerate the importance of man the maker. Life among the God-made hills dwarfs that artificial sense of egotism. It teaches you to marvel at the mystery of Creation. Yesterday when the Doctor and I were gathering the Christmas boughs, the holly glade in the forest seemed like some ancient mystic Christmas temple of the Druids where one might tell his rosary in crimson holly beads and forget the world!"

Well—perhaps there was something fine and sweet and holy in the country something—a tranquil simplicity—a hearty ruggedness—that city dwellers

forfeited in their head-long rush for man-made pleasure. After all, perhaps the most enduring happiness lay in the heart of these quiet hills.

"My chief is very keen on country life," said Ralph suddenly. "He preaches a lot. Development of home-spirit and old-fashioned household gods—that sort of thing! He's a queerish sort of chap—my chief—and a bit too—er—candid at times. He was dad's old classmate, you know." And Ralph fell silent again, frowning.

So Price was to take his father's practise! How it must gall the old Doctor! And mother was lonely, eh?—and Dad's rheumatism getting the best of him—Why Great Guns! mother and dad were growing old! And some of those snow-white hairs of theirs had come from worrying over him—John had said so. Ralph's dark face burned in the chill night wind. Well, for all old John's cutting sarcasm, his father still had faith in him and the trust in young Roger's eloquent eyes had fairly hurt him. God! they did not know! And then this queer Christmas heart-glow. How Griffin and Edwards and the rest of his gay friends would mock him for it? Friends! After all—had he any friends in the finer sense of that finest of words? Such warm-hearted loyal friends for instance as these neighbors of his father's who had been dropping in all day with a hearty smile and a Christmas hand-shake. And black-eyed Sister Madge—this brave, little fighting gipsy-poet here—where—But here Ralph frowned again and looked away and even when the cheerful lights of home glimmered through the trees he was still thinking—after an impetuous burst of confidence to Sister Madge.

So, later, when Doctor Ralph entered his father's study—his chin was very determined.

"I was ashamed to tell you this morning, sir," he said steadily, "but I—I'm no longer on the staff of St. Michael's. My hand was shaking and—and the chief knew why. And, dad," he faced the old Doctor squarely, "I'm coming back home to keep your practise out of Price's fool hands. You've always wanted that and my chief has preached it too, though I couldn't see it somehow until to-day. And presently, sir, when—when my hand is steadier, I'm going to make the little chap walk and run. I've—promised Sister Madge." And the old Doctor cleared his throat and gulped—and finally he wiped his glasses and walked away to the window. For of all things God could give him—this surely was the best!

"Oh, grandpop," cried little John Leslie 3rd, bolting into the study in great excitement—"Come see Roger! We kids have made him the Christmas king and he's got a crown o' holly on and—and a wand and he's a-tappin' us this way with it to make us Knights. And I'm the Fir-tree Knight—and Bob—he's a Cedar Knight and Ned's a spruce and Roger—he says his pretty sister tells him stories like that smarter'n any in the books. Oh—do hurry!"

The old Doctor held out his hand to his son.

"Well, Doctor Ralph," he said huskily, "suppose we go tell mother."

So while the Doctor told Aunt Ellen, Ralph bent his knee to this excited Christmas King enthroned in the heart of the fire-shadows.

"Rise—" said Roger radiantly, tapping him with a cedar wand, "I—I dub thee first of all my knights—the good, kind Christmas Knight!"

"And here," said Ralph, smiling, "here's Sister Madge. What grand title now shall we give to her?" But as Sister Madge knelt before him with firelit shadows dancing in her sweet, dark eyes, Roger dropped the wand and buried his face on her shoulder with a little sob.

"Nothing good enough for Sister Madge, eh?" broke in the old Doctor, looking up. "Well, sir, I think you're right."

Now in the silence Aunt Ellen spoke and her words were like a gentle Christmas benediction.

"'Unto us,'" said Aunt Ellen Leslie as she turned the Christmas log, "'this night a son is given!'"

But Ralph, by the window, had not heard. For wakening again in his heart as he stared at the peaceful, moonlit, "God-made" hills—was the old forgotten boyish love for this rugged, simple life of his father's dwarfing the lure of the city and the mockery of his fashionable friends. And down the lane of years ahead, bright with homely happiness and service to the needs of others—was the dark and winsome face of Sister Madge, stirring him to ardent resolution.

# Part Two: In Which We Light the New Log with the Embers of the Old

## I The Fire Again

"Doctor!" said little Roger slyly, "you got your chin stuck out!"

The Doctor stroked his grizzled beard in hasty apology.

"God bless my soul," he admitted guiltily. "I do believe I have. You've been so quiet," he added accusingly, "curled up there by the fire that I must certainly have gotten lonesome. And I most always stick out my chin that way when I'm lonesome."

Roger, by way of reparation, betook himself to the arm of the Doctor's chair.

The Doctor's arm closed tight around him. A year ago this little adopted son of his had been very lame. It was the first Christmas in his life, indeed, that he had walked.

"Out there," said the Doctor, "the winter twilight's been fighting the alder berries with purple spears. It's conquered everything in the garden and covered it up with misty velvet save the snow and the berries. But the twilight's using heavier spears now and likely it'll win. I want the alder berries to win out, drat it! Their blaze is so bright and cheerful."

Roger accepted the challenge to argument with enthusiasm.

"I want the twilight to win," he said.

The Doctor looked slightly scandalized.

"Oh, my, my, my, my!" he said. "I can't for the life of me understand any such gloomy preference as that. Bless me, if I can."

"Why," crowed Roger jubilantly, "I can, 'cause the more twilighty it gets, the more it's Christmas eve!"

The Doctor regarded his small friend with admiration.

"By George," he admitted, "I do believe you have me there—" but the Doctor's kindly eyes did not fire to the name of Christmas as Roger thought they ought.

"Almost," he said, "I thought you were going to stick out your chin again. And you're not lonesome now 'cause I'm here an' pretty noisy."

"Hum!" said the Doctor.

"Man to man, now!" urged Roger suddenly.

This was the accepted key to a confessional ceremony which required much politeness and ruthless honesty.

"Well, Mr. Hildreth," began the Doctor formally.

Roger's face fell.

"I'm your adopted son," he hinted, "and you said that made my name same as yours."

"Mr. Leslie!" corrected the Doctor, and Roger glowed.

"Well, Mr. Leslie," went on the Doctor thoughtfully, "I'm chuck full of grievances. There's the rheumatism in my leg, for instance. That's no sort of thing to have at Christmas."

"But that's better," said Roger. "You said so this morning. I 'spect you been thinkin' too much about it like you said I did when my leg was stiff."

"Ahem! And I did hope somebody would come home for Christmas. I like a house full of romping youngsters—"

Roger pointed an accusing finger.

"Aunt Ellen says every blessed one of your children, an' your grand-children too, begged and begged you to come to the city for Christmas an'—an' you wouldn't go 'cause you're old-fashioned and like a country Christmas so much better—an'—an' because you'd promised to teach me to skate on the Deacon's pond an' take me sleighin'."

"Dear me," said the Doctor helplessly, "for such a mite of a kiddy, you do seem remarkably well informed."

"Man to man," reminded Roger inexorably and the Doctor aired his final grievance.

"And then there's that youngest son of mine—"

"Doctor Ralph?"

"Doctor Ralph! What right had he, I'd like to know, to marry that pretty sister of yours and go off honeymooning holiday time. Didn't he know that we needed him and Sister Madge here for Christmas? I miss 'em both. Young pirate!"

Roger's heart swelled with loyalty. It was Doctor Ralph's skilful hand that had helped him walk.

"Most likely," he said fairly, "I'm a little to blame there. After I came home from the hospital, I did tell Sister Madge to marry him—"

"Most likely," acknowledged the Doctor, "I said something similar to Doctor Ralph. I can't have you shouldering all the responsibility. Well, your Honor, there's the Christmas evidence. What's the verdict?"

Roger considered. This man to man game had certain phraseological conclusions.

"No case!" he said suddenly, nor would he alter his decision when the Doctor protested against its severity.

"You had so awful many peoply sort of places to go," pointed out Roger, and the Doctor laughed.

"And let you spend this first Christmas on your two legs in a city?" he demanded. "Well, I guess not! No-sir-ee-bob! There!—the alder berries have faded out and the garden's thick with twilight."

"And it's Christmas Eve!" cried Roger, his black eyes shining with delight.

"Speaking of Christmas," said the Doctor, sniffing luxuriously, "I feel that I ought to slip out to the kitchen for a minute or so. I do smell something tremendously Christmasy and spicy—"

Roger caught his breath. With a Christmas intrigue as surely in the air as the smell of spice, here was dangerous ground.

"Aunt Ellen," he faltered, "Aunt Ellen said she couldn't pos'bly be bothered with—with any men folks in the kitchen—not even me."

"Pooh!" rebelled the Doctor largely, "that's merely a ruse of hers to protect the cookies. And what I'd like to know is just this—what's Aunt Ellen doing in the kitchen anyway? Certainly old Annie's able to do the Christmas fussing for three people. Aunt Ellen ought to be in here with us. That was part of my lonesome grievance but I forgot to mention it."

Roger, shivering apprehensively, visioned suspicious stores of Christmas delicacies—holly and evergreen—and a supper table set for ten! And off somewhere among those purple spears of twilight old Asher, the hired man, was waiting at the station with the big farm sleigh.

He must keep his eye upon the Doctor until six o'clock, and lure him away from the window.

"Tell me a story," begged Roger—"over here by the fire." And his voice was so very tremulous and urgent that the hungry Doctor abandoned his notion of a Christmas cookie, and complied.

To Roger, in a nervous ecstasy of anticipation, the story was a blurred hodge-podge of phrases and crackling fire, distant noises of clinking china and hurrying feet, and wild flights of imagination.... Old Asher must be coming past the red barn now ... and now down the hill ... and now past the Deacon's pond ... and now—

Sleigh-bells fairly leaped out of the quiet, and Roger jumped and gulped, aquiver with excitement. The Doctor regarded him with mild disfavor.

"Bless my soul," he said in surprise, "that was the quietest part of my story. You're restless."

"Go on!" said Roger hoarsely, and the obliging Doctor, mistaking his agitation for interest, went on with his tale.

But Roger had heard old Asher driving along by the picket fence and turning in at the gate-posts, and the story was no more to him than the noisy crackle of the log. Off somewhere in the region of the kitchen door he detected a subdued scuffle of many feet.

The grandfather's clock struck six.... Roger's cheeks were blazing—the fire and the Doctor still duetting.... Why, oh, why didn't somebody come and call them to supper?... There had been plenty of time now for everything. Why—

The door swung back and Roger jumped. Old Annie, Asher's wife, stood in the doorway, her wrinkled face inscrutable.

"Supper, sir!" she said and vanished. Hand in hand, the Doctor and Roger went out to supper.

The dining-room door was closed. That in itself was unusual. But the unsuspecting Doctor pushed through with Roger at his heels, only to halt and stare dumfounded over his spectacles while Roger screamed and danced and clapped his hands. For to the startled eyes of Doctor John Leslie, the snug, old-fashioned room was alive with boys and holly—boys and boys and boys upon boys, he would have told you in that first instant of delighted consternation, in different stages of embarrassment and rags. And one had but to glance at the faces of old Asher and Annie in the kitchen doorway, at

Aunt Ellen, hovering near her Christmas brood with the look of all mothers in her kind, brown eyes, and then at Roger, scarlet with enthusiasm, to know that the Doctor had been the victim of benevolent conspiracy.

"It's a s'prise!" shrieked Roger, "a Christmasy s'prise! Aunt Ellen she says you're so awful keen on s'prisin' other folks that we'd show you—an'—an' you'll have a bang-up Christmas with kids like you love an' so will I, an' so will they an' the minister he went to the city and found seven boys crazy for Christmas in the country an'—"

"Roger! Roger!" came Aunt Ellen's gentle voice—"do please take a breath, child. You're turning purple."

The Doctor adjusted his glasses.

"Seven boys!" he said. "Bless my soul, when I opened that door I saw seventy boys!" He counted them aloud—then for no reason at all save that he had glanced into seven eager faces, thinner and sharper than he liked, for all they glowed with excitement and furtive interest in the long supper table asparkle with lights and holly, he wiped his glasses and patted Roger on the back.

"Is your leg botherin' so much now, daddy Doctor?" demanded Roger.

"Nothing like so much," admitted the Doctor.

"Are you lonesome 'nuff now to stick out your chin?"

"Bless your heart, Roger," admitted the Doctor huskily, "I'm so full of Christmas I can hardly breathe!"

"Hooray!" said Roger. "Me, too."

## II It Blazes Higher

It was well that the Doctor had a way with boys, for there was a problem to be solved here with infinite tact—a problem of protuberant eyes and

paralyzing self-consciousness, of unnatural silences and then unexpected attempts at speech that died in painful rasps and gurgles, of stubbing toes and nudging elbows, of a centipedal supply of arms and legs that interfered with abortive and conscience-stricken attempts at courtesy, and above all an interest in the weave of the carpet that was at once a mania and an epidemic—but by the time supper was well under way, things, in the language of Roger, had begun to hum, and by the time the Doctor had mastered the identities of his guests, from Jim, the shy, sullen boy who would not meet his eyes, to Mike's little brother, Muggs, who consumed prodigious quantities of everything in staring silence, and looked something like a girl save for a tardily-cast-off suit of Mike's, somewhat oceanic in flow and fit, the hum had become celebrative and distinctly a thing of Christmas.

Constraint in the mellowing halo of a Christmas eve supper where holly and a Yule-log blazed and the winter wind frostily rattled the checker-paned windows of the sitting-room in jealous spleen, fled to join the Doctor's rheumatism.

By the time the grandfather's clock struck seven through a haze of holly, the Doctor had poked the Yule-log into a frenzied shower of gold; apples and nuts were steadily disappearing from a basket by the Doctor's chair and the Doctor himself was relating an original Christmas tale of adventure, born of uncommon inspiration and excitement, to a huddled group with circular eyes and contented stomachs. But Muggs—inimitable workman—his small face partially obscured by the biggest apple in the basket, had not yet spoken, and Jim, the shy, sullen little boy to whom Roger had taken a fancy because he was lame, had met the Doctor's eyes but once, and then with a rush of color.

Now, whether it was the scheming excitement of a busy day or the warmth of a busy log or the rambling yarn of a busy Doctor, who may say? Certainly Roger fell asleep at a fictional crisis and remained asleep for all that Jim furtively nudged him.

"There!" said the Doctor as the clock struck eight, "that's all. To bath and beds, every one of you! Annie's had a lamp on the kitchen table this half hour ready to light you up the stairs. My! My! My!—but there's a busy day ahead. Roger! Well, of all ungrateful listeners! Roger!"

But in the end, the Doctor carried Roger up to bed, preceded by Annie with the lamp. And while Annie was turning back quilts and smoothing pillows and fumbling at windows, with the freedom of long service she soundly berated the Doctor for postponing the bed-time hour with his Christmas twaddle.

"And Mister Muggs there," she said severely, "has had one apple too many, I'm thinkin', and the last one as big as his head. He'll need a pill before morning. The child's packed himself that hard and round ye fear to touch him." And then because Muggs was such a very little boy Annie was minded to assist with his bath, and laid kindly hands upon an indefinite outer garment which began immediately beneath his arm-pits and ended at his shoe-tops in singular fringe.

"An', ma'am," she explained to Aunt Ellen a little later, "I had to let him go in to his bath by himself. No more had I touched his bushel-basket of rags—an' they were hitched over his shoulders with school straps and somebody's shirtwaist underneath—than he let out a terrific shriek (ye must have heard him) an' all the boys come runnin' and crowdin' round him and starin' so frightened at me, an' his brother yelled at him to keep quiet or something or somebody'd get him, and he kept quiet that sudden I could fairly see the child swell. He's unnatural still and unnatural full, ma'am, an' the Doctor better leave his pills handy."

Bathed and freshly night-gowned, the Doctor's guests tumbled, a little noisily into bed. Only Jim lay silent and wakeful. Once he nudged his bed-fellow.

"Luke," he whispered, "d'ye think I'd orta tell 'em?"

"Aw," said Luke sleepily, "dry up, Jim! Gosh, ain't the bed soft!"

Jim sighed.

Christmas came to the old farmhouse with the distant echo of village bells at midnight but, long before that, Christmas, in a fur cap and great-coat had swept up the driveway with a jingle of sleigh-bells, behind old Polly, the Doctor's mare, his sleigh packed high with bundles. By the light of a late

moon, flinging festal silver on the snow, it might be seen that Christmas resembled a somewhat guilty looking old gentleman with a grizzled beard.

"I'll catch old Scratch!" he admitted, suddenly overcome by the bulbous appearance of the sleigh, "but Ellen may say what she will. She couldn't have thought of everything!"

No call for pills came that night from Muggs, asleep in a crib that had seen much service. He was awake however long before daylight, trembling with excitement.

"Mike, oh Mike!" he called hoarsely. "Wake up. It's Christmas mornin'."

Mike, in a big bed with Marty Fay, sat up.

"Don't you dare open your mouth to-day!" he cried in blood-thirsty accents, "or Mom Murphy'll git ye surer'n scat. Ain't I schemed enuff to git ye here? Huh? Wanta be sent home—huh?" Muggs ducked beneath the blankets with a shivering wail.

### III The Log at Dawn

In the still, cold corridors of a farmhouse, with frost-jungles clouding every window pane and a zero-dark outside, the cry of "Merry Christmas!" is most at home. Let noses be ever so cold and blanketed bodies ever so warm, the cry fills the dawn with electric energy. The Doctor began it. He knew by the instant response that he had started something that he could not stop. Almost in no time, it seemed, Roger was leading a wild, bare-footed scamper down the stairs—for Roger knew—and the Doctor, hastily bath-robed and slippered, was on behind with a lamp. But here was no cyclonic invasion of a dark, cold sitting-room. Old Annie and Asher knew boys! A log blazed brightly in the fireplace and the lamp was lit. If the room was over-warm, it proved simply that Annie had seen boys of another generation rushing down of a Christmas morning, scantily clad.

And the King of Christmas trees blazed in candle-glory from wall to wall, tinselled boughs sagging with the weight of its Christmas freight. It could

not have been bigger—it could not have glittered more. It had as many arms as an Octopus and its shaggy evergreen head, starred gorgeously with iridescence, brushed the old-fashioned paper on the ceiling. A great, lovable Christmas giant guarding a cargo of Christmas gifts!

Muggs emitted one blood-curdling shriek of delight, clapped his hand over his mouth and began to swell about the cheeks. Then he stepped on the hem of his night-gown and fell sprawling at Annie's feet.

"Dear me," said Annie vexedly, though she righted him with kindly hands, "I can't for the life of me make out what ails that child. He acts so mortal queer at times, an' he's ready to swell up over nothing at all."

With the advent of Aunt Ellen, Christmas packages began to lose twine and paper, and what the packages lost the sitting-room speedily gained in disorder. For here were warm suits and overcoats, shoes and stockings and sweaters and caps, skates and horns and whistles and drums, home-made pop-corn and candy, oranges—ah! well, sensible gifts in plenty, and foolish gifts that were wiser than Solomon for they included a boy's heart as well as his body.

In a lull all eyes turned to Muggs. His pockets were crammed with pop-corn and candy. One arm was quite as full of toys as he could pack it—the other had begun the day's conveyance of food from hand to mouth, but he was regarding a very small, warm suit of clothes and substantial boots with dangerously quivering lips. Nor could one misinterpret his disapproval. For a moment the startled Doctor fancied he heard Mike hiss the astonishing words "Mom Murphy!" but by the time he had wheeled about, Muggs, with circular eyes of terror, had begun to swell.

"That child," said Annie, "has something on his mind. Don't tell me! I know it."

The inevitable blare of racket came all too soon. Horns and whistles and drums united in a deafening blast, and if thanks did not come easily to the lips of boys, noise did. Nor could Muggs at any time thereafter be separated from a shoulder drum upon which he had beaten with insane and single-minded concentration even after the din was past and a hungry hint of breakfast in the air. Lacking one outlet of expression he had seized upon

another. He drummed his way fiercely upstairs, to dress, and he drummed his way down to breakfast, a ridiculous self-consciousness in his small face whenever he glanced at his new suit of clothes. Small as it was it engulfed him utterly.

"Jim!" said the Doctor suddenly. "You're not limping!"

Jim hung his head and glanced at his shining new shoes.

"No, sir!" he said and gulped.

"Bless me," said the Doctor, adjusting his spectacles, "I thought you were lame and if I hadn't forgotten it last night you'd have had no skates this morning."

"I didn't have no heel on one shoe," blurted Jim in confusion, and Roger, in relief, hoorayed himself into hoarseness.

But Jim, like Muggs, was something of a mystery, and after a time the Doctor, with a sigh, abandoned his effort to break through the boy's sullen shyness. Still Jim was the first at the chopping block when Annie wanted wood, and when the task took on something of the charm of Tom Sawyer's fence by reason of a winter wren, so tame from overfeeding that he perched himself now and then upon the handle of the ax, Jim fell back with resentment and resigned the ax to Marty Fay who spat upon his hands, doubled up his fists, sparred, in an excess of good spirits, with an invisible antagonist, and thereafter made the chips fly so fast that the little wren departed.

Already there were great Christmas bunches of oats upon glistening trees and fences, but, while Asher was carrying double portions of food to cattle and horses, to Toby, the cat, and Rover, the dog, the Doctor went about, with an eager pack of boys at his heels, distributing further Christmas largess for his feathered friends—suet and crumbs and seed. For there were chickadees in the clump of red cedars by the barn, and juncos and nuthatches, white-throated sparrows and winter wrens, all so frank in their overtures to the Doctor that the boys with one accord closed threateningly around Muggs to keep him from drumming the birds into flight. Jim fastened a great chunk of suet to a tree-trunk and very soon a red-breasted nuthatch was busy with his

Christmas breakfast. Altogether Roger's bang-up Christmas began with terrific bustle, with Annie, from whose kitchen already floated odors that set the insatiable Muggs to sniffing, by far the busiest of them all.

The grandfather's clock struck ten. It found the old farmhouse deserted save for Annie in the kitchen and Aunt Ellen in her rocking chair by the sitting-room window. The Doctor was guiding his guests to the Deacon's pond.

New skates, new sweaters, and a pond as smooth as glass! What wonder then that Roger's trembling fingers bungled his straps, and Jim, kneeling, fastened them on with nimble fingers.

"Ain't ye never skated?"

"No—I—I been lame. Oh, hurry, Jim! See, Mike's flyin' down the pond like wind!"

Jim's eyes softened.

"I'll teach ye," he said.

As for the Doctor he had disinterred an ancient pair of skates from the attic, and presently he began to perform pedal convolutions of such startling design and eccentricity that the boys gathered about him and cheered until, seating himself unexpectedly in the center of a particularly wide and airy flourish, he flatly told the boys to run about their business.

Now Muggs, though he carried upon his shoulder a ridiculous pair of elfin skates, was much too small a boy, his brother thought, to embark upon the ice, wherefore he stood like a sentinel upon the shore and drummed and ate incessantly, until an orange catapulted from an overcrowded pocket, when he pursued it with a roar.

The peal of the village town-clock striking twelve came all too soon, but homing was no task with a turkey at the end. Muggs, still wrapped in mysterious silence, knew the very spot where Christmas odors began to permeate the frosty air and redoubled the speed in his drumming arm, but when after a vigorous scrubbing his glistening eye fell upon the holly-bright table and an enormous turkey by the Doctor's plate, only a frosty menace in

Mike's eye, it seemed, restrained another blood-curdling shriek of delight. There was paralyzing apology in his eyes as Mike's lips formed the soundless threat—"Mom Murphy!"

"He's holdin' himself in," said Annie, "Mister Muggs, give me the drum! Ye'll not crowd into the chair with that upon your shoulder!"

It seemed that Mister Muggs would. He began to swell. He began to drum. He carried his point and crammed himself and his drum into his chair at the table. He did not speak. Neither, from that time on, did he permit any lapse in his industry. What Muggs did, from drum to drum-sticks, he did well.

Muggs ate turkey and mashed turnips. Muggs ate potatoes, cranberry sauce, boiled onions, and quite a little celery. He glinted ahead at a pie on the sideboard, seemed to make hurried structural calculations, and pushed his plate again toward the turkey. Aunt Ellen looked at the Doctor and the Doctor looked at Muggs.

"If the child eats any more," said Annie bluntly from the kitchen door, "he must have a pill. 'Tis enough for him to drum away the peace of the Christmas day without stuffin' himself that hard and round ye fear for his buttons. An' to my mind, if he'd talk more and eat less, he'd not be in such danger o' burstin'."

Mike looked slightly agitated.

"Muggs," said the Doctor firmly, "it comes to this. More turkey—one pill. No turkey—no pill."

Muggs exhibited a capacity for instant decision. With stubby forefinger rigid, he shoved his plate a little closer to the turkey.

## IV The Log at Twilight

There was a straw-ride in the farm sleigh after dinner, a story or two by the Yule log when the twilight closed in and Annie had lit the Christmas candles on the tree, and then as the boys were romping in a game of Roger's the

Doctor slipped away to his study for a quiet hour with a book. His lamp was barely lighted and the book upon his knee when the door opened and Jim stood before him, his face so white and strained that the Doctor laid aside his book, thinking instantly, of course, that here again was too much turkey.

Jim hung his head, one toe burrowing in the carpet.

"Doctor John!" he burst forth hoarsely.

"Yes?"

Jim gulped.

"I—I been in jail!"

The Doctor looked once at Jim's face, quivering in an agony of shame, and hastily wiped his glasses. In the quiet came the laughter of romping boys.

"Why," said the Doctor very gently, "did you tell me?"

Something in the kindly voice opened the flood-gates of a boy's sore heart. Jim's mouth quivered piteously, then he broke down and hid his face behind his elbow, sobbing wildly.

"I wanta be square," he cried passionately, "I wanta be square like you've been to us, an'—an Luke said ye might not want a jail-bird here for Christmas. I—stole—coal—for mom—"

It was the old tale, one boy caught, paying for the petty thievery of the score who ran away. The Doctor heard the mumbled tale to the end and cleared his throat.

"And so," he said slowly, "you wanted to be square. That's the finest thing I've heard this Christmas day. Wanted to be square. Well, well!" His hand was on Jim's shoulder now. "Jim, I wonder if you could come back to me next Christmas and tell me you'd been absolutely straight—"

"Here!" said Jim in a choking whisper, his eyes blazing through his tears, "again—for Christmas!"

Somewhere on a snowy page a Christmas angel wrote: "One boy saved by the spirit of a country Christmas!"

"Here," repeated the Doctor, "again—for Christmas." He opened the door. "Run along, now, Jim," he said kindly, "or the boys will miss you."

Jim's final words were very queer.

"Doctor John," he blurted, "I—I'm a goin' to send poor little Muggs."

The Doctor was devoutly hoping that Muggs had never been in jail for stealing food or drums, when Muggs himself appeared clinging desperately to the hand of Mike. He seemed on the verge of a lachrymose explosion.

Mike's face was very red but it was also very hopeful.

"Jim said to tell ye," he mumbled. "She ain't never had no Christmas an' the minister he said the order was all boys an'—an' she cried, so Mom said bring her anyway in my ol' suit—you'd never know, an'—an'—an'—Oh, my gosh!" finished Mike tragically, "Muggs is a girl. Her—her name's C-c-c-c-clara!"

The Doctor jumped. So did Muggs. The lachrymose explosion came and the drum slipped down from the shoulder of Muggs with a clatter.

"Don't wanta go home!" came the heartbroken wail, "don't wanta go home. Mom Murphy'll git me."

"I—I tol' her," explained Mike uncomfortably, "that she mustn't open her mouth once—jus' act deaf an' dumb or you'd guess maybe an' send her home an' Mom Murphy'd git her. An'—an'—she must take a drum like a boy—"

Literal Muggs! Heaven alone knew by what other blood-thirsty threats than Mom Murphy Mike had encompassed the stony silence and frenzied drumming of the little sister who had never had a Christmas.

"But why," burst forth the despairing Doctor. "In heaven's name—why—Muggs?"

"She makes such awful faces," said Mike apologetically. "Mom don't know what makes her that way." And then as Muggs was at the climax of one of the spasms that had won her her name, the Doctor suddenly lifted her in gentle arms and tossed her to the ceiling.

"Poor, poor little kiddy!" he said huskily. "What a price she's paid for her Christmas."

But Muggs had forgotten the price. Though it had been a hard day the Doctor's eyes were kind and twinkly. Muggs buried her flushed and tearful little face on his shoulder with a sigh of content. He saw now that one knot of ribbon on the tousled, sunny curls would have told the story, then he glanced at the bagging suit and opened the door. Muggs went forth upon the Doctor's shoulder.

"Asher," cried the Doctor, "hitch old Polly to the sleigh and telephone Sam Remsen that he can oblige me for once and open his store."

"Ye—ye ain't goin' to send her home, are ye?" faltered Mike.

"I'm going," cried the Doctor, "to buy Clara Muggs a dress and a doll. It's her night."

The boys cheered.

# Joel's Talk with Santa Claus



By Eugene Field – 1912

Illustrations by Florence Storer

One Christmas Eve Joel Baker was in a most unhappy mood. He was lonesome and miserable; the chimes making merry Christmas music outside disturbed rather than soothed him, the jingle of the sleigh-bells fretted him, and the shrill whistling of the wind around the corners of the house and up and down the chimney seemed to grate harshly on his ears.

"Humph," said Joel, wearily, "Christmas is nothin' to me; there was a time when it meant a great deal, but that was long ago—fifty years is a long stretch to look back over. There is nothin' in Christmas now, nothin' for me at least; it is so long since Santa Claus remembered me that I venture to say he has forgotten that there ever was such a person as Joel Baker in all the world. It used to be different; Santa Claus used to think a great deal of me when I was a boy. Ah! Christmas nowadays ain't what it was in the good old time—no, not what it used to be."

As Joel was absorbed in his distressing thoughts he became aware very suddenly that somebody was entering or trying to enter the room. First came a draught of cold air, then a scraping, grating sound, then a strange shuffling, and then,—yes, then, all at once, Joel saw a pair of fat legs and a still fatter body dangle down the chimney, followed presently by a long white beard, above which appeared a jolly red nose and two bright twinkling eyes, while over the head and forehead was drawn a fur cap, white with snowflakes.

"Ha, ha," chuckled the fat, jolly stranger, emerging from the chimney and standing well to one side of the hearth-stone; "ha, ha, they don't have the big, wide chimneys they used to build, but they can't keep Santa Claus out—no, they can't keep Santa Claus out! Ha, ha, ha. Though the chimney were no bigger than a gas pipe, Santa Claus would slide down it!"

It didn't require a second glance to assure Joel that the new-comer was indeed Santa Claus. Joel knew the good old saint—oh, yes—and he had seen him once before, and, although that was when Joel was a little boy, he had never forgotten how Santa Claus looked.

Nor had Santa Claus forgotten Joel, although Joel thought he had; for now Santa Claus looked kindly at Joel and smiled and said: "Merry Christmas to you, Joel!"

"Thank you, old Santa Claus," replied Joel, "but I don't believe it's going to be a very merry Christmas. It's been so long since I've had a merry Christmas that I don't believe I'd know how to act if I had one."

"Let's see," said Santa Claus, "it must be going on fifty years since I saw you last—yes, you were eight years old the last time I slipped down the chimney of the old homestead and filled your stocking. Do you remember it?"

"I remember it well," answered Joel. "I had made up my mind to lie awake and see Santa Claus; I had heard tell of you, but I'd never seen you, and Brother Otis and I concluded we'd lie awake and watch for you to come."

Santa Claus shook his head reproachfully.

"That was very wrong," said he, "for I'm so scarey that if I'd known you boys were awake I'd never have come down the chimney at all, and then you'd have had no presents."

"But Otis couldn't keep awake," explained Joel. "We talked about everythin' we could think of, till father called out to us that if we didn't stop talking he'd have to send one of us up into the attic to sleep with the hired man. So in less than five minutes Otis was sound asleep and no pinching could wake him up. But I was bound to see Santa Claus and I don't believe anything would've put me to sleep. I heard the big clock in the sitting-room strike eleven, and I had begun wonderin' if you never were going to come, when all of a sudden I heard the tinkle of the bells around your reindeers' necks. Then I heard the reindeers prancin' on the roof and the sound of your sleigh-runners cuttin' through the crust and slippin' over the shingles. I was kind o' scared and I covered my head up with the sheet and quilts—only I left a little hole so I could peek out and see what was goin' on. As soon as I saw you I got over bein' scared—for you were jolly and smilin' like, and you chuckled as you went around to each stockin' and filled it up."

"Yes, I can remember the night," said Santa Claus. "I brought you a sled, didn't I?"

"Yes, and you brought Otis one, too," replied Joel. "Mine was red and had 'Yankee Doodle' painted in black letters on the side; Otis's was black and had 'Snow Queen' in gilt letters."

"I remember those sleds distinctly," said Santa Claus, "for I made them specially for you boys."

"You set the sleds up against the wall," continued Joel, "and then you filled the stockin's."

"There were six of 'em, as I recollect?" said Santa Claus.

"Let me see," queried Joel. "There was mine, and Otis's, and Elvira's, and Thankful's, and Susan Prickett's—Susan was our help, you know. No, there were only five, and, as I remember, they were the biggest we could beg or borrow of Aunt Dorcas, who weighed nigh unto two hundred pounds. Otis and I didn't like Susan Prickett, and we were hopin' you'd put a cold potato in her stockin'."

"But Susan was a good girl," remonstrated Santa Claus. "You know I put cold potatoes only in the stockin's of boys and girls who are bad and don't believe in Santa Claus."

"At any rate," said Joel, "you filled all the stockin's with candy and pop-corn and nuts and raisins, and I can remember you said you were afraid you'd run out of pop-corn balls before you got around. Then you left each of us a book. Elvira got the best one, which was 'The Garland of Frien'ship,' and had poems in it about the bleeding of hearts, and so forth. Father wasn't expectin' anything, but you left him a new pair of mittens, and mother got a new fur boa to wear to meetin'."

"Of course," said Santa Claus, "I never forgot father and mother."

"Well, it was as much as I could do to lay still," continued Joel, "for I'd been longin' for a sled, an' the sight of that red sled with 'Yankee Doodle' painted on it jest made me wild. But, somehow or other, I began to get powerful sleepy all at once, and I couldn't keep my eyes open. The next thing I knew Otis was nudgin' me in the ribs. 'Git up, Joel,' says he; 'it's Chris'mas an' Santa Claus has been here.' 'Merry Chris'mas! Merry Chris'mas!' we cried as we tumbled out o' bed. Then Elvira an' Thankful came in, not more 'n half dressed, and Susan came in, too, an' we just made Rome howl with 'Merry Chris'mas! Merry Chris'mas!' to each other. 'Ef you children don't make less noise in there,' cried father, 'I'll hev to send you all back to bed.' The idea of askin' boys an' girls to keep quiet on Chris'mas mornin' when they've got new sleds an' 'Garlands of Frien'ship'!"

Santa Claus chuckled; his rosy cheeks fairly beamed joy.

"Otis an' I didn't want any breakfast," said Joel. "We made up our minds that a stockin'ful of candy and pop-corn and raisins would stay us for a while. I

do believe there wasn't buckwheat cakes enough in the township to keep us indoors that mornin'; buckwheat cakes don't size up much 'longside of a red sled with 'Yankee Doodle' painted onto it and a black sled named 'Snow Queen.' We didn't care how cold it was—so much the better for slidin' downhill! All the boys had new sleds—Lafe Dawson, Bill Holbrook, Gum Adams, Rube Playford, Leander Merrick, Ezra Purple—all on 'em had new sleds excep' Martin Peavey, and he said he calculated Santa Claus had skipped him this year 'cause his father had broke his leg haulin' logs from the Pelham woods and had been kep' indoors six weeks. But Martin had his ol' sled, and he didn't hev to ask any odds of any of us, neither."

"I brought Martin a sled the next Christmas," said Santa Claus.

"Like as not—but did you ever slide downhill, Santa Claus? I don't mean such hills as they hev out here in this new country, but one of them old-fashioned New England hills that was made 'specially for boys to slide down, full of bumpers an' thank-ye-marms, and about ten times longer comin' up than it is goin' down! The wind blew in our faces and almos' took our breath away. 'Merry Chris'mas to ye, little boys!' it seemed to say, and it untied our mufflers an' whirled the snow in our faces, jist as if it was a boy, too, an' wanted to play with us. An ol' crow came flappin' over us from the cornfield beyond the meadow. He said: 'Caw, caw,' when he saw my new sled—I s'pose he'd never seen a red one before. Otis had a hard time with his sled—the black one—an' he wondered why it wouldn't go as fast as mine would. 'Hev you scraped the paint off'n the runners?' asked Wralsey Goodnow. 'Course I hev,' said Otis; 'broke my own knife an' Lute Ingraham's a-doin' it, but it don't seem to make no dif'rence—the darned ol' thing won't go!' Then, what did Simon Buzzell say but that, like's not, it was because Otis's sled's name was 'Snow Queen.' 'Never did see a girl sled that was worth a cent, anyway,' sez Simon. Well, now, that jest about broke Otis up in business. 'It ain't a girl sled,' sez he, 'and its name ain't "Snow Queen"! I'm a-goin' to call it "Dan'l Webster," or "Ol'ver Optic," or "Sheriff Robbins," or after some other big man!' An' the boys plagued him so much about that pesky girl sled that he scratched off the name, an', as I remember, it did go better after that!

"About the only thing," continued Joel, "that marred the harmony of the occasion, as the editor of the Hampshire County Phoenix used to say, was the ashes that Deacon Morris Frisbie sprinkled out in front of his house. He said he wasn't going to have folks breakin' their necks jest on account of a lot of frivolous boys that was goin' to the gallows as fas' as they could! Oh,

how we hated him! and we'd have snowballed him, too, if we hadn't been afraid of the constable that lived next door. But the ashes didn't bother us much, and every time we slid side-saddle we'd give the ashes a kick, and that sort of scattered 'em."

The bare thought of this made Santa Claus laugh.



"Goin' on about nine o'clock," said Joel, "the girls come along—Sister Elvira an' Thankful, Prudence Tucker, Belle Yocum, Sophrone Holbrook, Sis Hubbard, an' Marthy Sawyer. Marthy's brother Increase wanted her to ride on his sled, but Marthy allowed that a red sled was her choice every time. 'I don't see how I'm goin' to hold on,' said Marthy. 'Seems as if I would hev my hands full keepin' my things from blowin' away.' 'Don't worry about yourself, Marthy,' sez I, 'for if you'll look after your things, I kind o' calc'late

I'll manage not to lose you on the way.' Dear Marthy—seems as if I could see you now, with your tangled hair a-blowin' in the wind, your eyes all bright and sparklin', an' your cheeks as red as apples. Seems, too, as if I could hear you laughin' and callin', jist as you did as I toiled up the old New England hill that Chris'mas mornin'—a-callin': 'Joel, Joel, Joel—ain't ye ever comin', Joel?' But the hill is long and steep, Marthy, an' Joel ain't the boy he used to be; he's old, an' gray, an' feeble, but there's love an' faith in his heart, an' they kind o' keep him totterin' tow'rd the voice he hears a-callin': 'Joel, Joel, Joel!'"

"I know—I see it all," murmured Santa Claus very softly.

"Oh, that was so long ago," sighed Joel; "so very long ago! And I've had no Chris'mas since—only once, when our little one—Marthy's an' mine—you remember him, Santa Claus?"

"Yes," said Santa Claus, "a toddling little boy with blue eyes—"

"Like his mother," interrupted Joel; "an' he was like her, too—so gentle an' lovin', only we called him Joel, for that was my father's name and it kind o' run in the fam'ly. He wa'n't more'n three years old when you came with your Chris'mas presents for him, Santa Claus. We had told him about you, and he used to go to the chimney every night and make a little prayer about what he wanted you to bring him. And you brought 'em, too—a stick-horse, an' a picture-book, an' some blocks, an' a drum—they're on the shelf in the closet there, and his little Chris'mas stockin' with 'em—I've saved 'em all, an' I've taken 'em down an' held 'em in my hands, oh, so many times!"

"But when I came again," said Santa Claus—

"His little bed was empty, an' I was alone. It killed his mother—Marthy was so tender-hearted; she kind o' drooped an' pined after that. So now they've been asleep side by side in the buryin'-ground these thirty years.

"That's why I'm so sad-like whenever Chris'mas comes," said Joel, after a pause. "The thinkin' of long ago makes me bitter almost. It's so different now from what it used to be."

"No, Joel, oh, no," said Santa Claus. "'Tis the same world, and human nature is the same and always will be. But Christmas is for the little folks, and you, who are old and grizzled now, must know it and love it only through the gladness it brings the little ones."

"True," groaned Joel; "but how may I know and feel this gladness when I have no little stocking hanging in my chimney corner—no child to please me with his prattle? See, I am alone."

"No, you're not alone, Joel," said Santa Claus. "There are children in this great city who would love and bless you for your goodness if you but touched their hearts. Make them happy, Joel; send by me this night some gift to the little boy in the old house yonder—he is poor and sick; a simple toy will fill his Christmas with gladness."

"His little sister, too—take her some presents," said Joel; "make them happy for me, Santa Claus—you are right—make them happy for me."

How sweetly Joel slept! When he awoke, the sunlight streamed in through the window and seemed to bid him a merry Christmas. How contented and happy Joel felt! It must have been the talk with Santa Claus that did it all; he had never known a sweeter sense of peace. A little girl came out of the house over the way. She had a new doll in her arms, and she sang a merry little song and she laughed with joy as she skipped along the street. Ay, and at the window sat the little sick boy, and the toy Santa Claus left him seemed to have brought him strength and health, for his eyes sparkled and his cheeks glowed, and it was plain to see his heart was full of happiness.

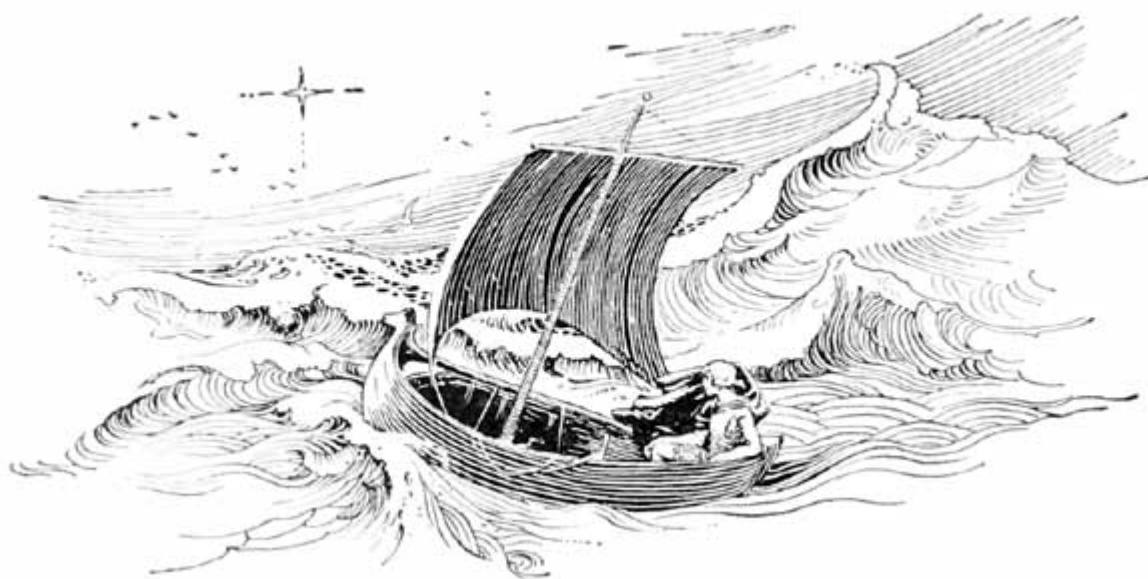
And, oh! how the chimes did ring out, and how joyfully they sang their Christmas carol that morning! They sang of Bethlehem and the manger and the Babe; they sang of love and charity, till all the Christmas air seemed full of angel voices.

Carol of the Christmas morn—  
Carol of the Christ-child born—  
Carol to the list'ning sky  
Till it echoes back again  
"Glory be to God on high,  
Peace on earth, good will tow'rd men!"

So all this music—the carol of the chimes, the sound of children's voices, the smile of the poor little boy over the way—all this sweet music crept into Joel's heart that Christmas morning; yes, and with these sweet, holy influences came others so subtle and divine that in its silent communion with them, Joel's heart cried out amen and amen to the glory of the Christmas time.



# The Symbol and the Saint



By Eugene Field – 1912

Illustrations by Florence Storer

Once upon a time a young man made ready for a voyage. His name was Norss; broad were his shoulders, his cheeks were ruddy, his hair was fair and long, his body betokened strength, and good-nature shone from his blue eyes and lurked about the corners of his mouth.

"Where are you going?" asked his neighbor Jans, the forge-master.

"I am going sailing for a wife," said Norss.

"For a wife, indeed!" cried Jans. "And why go you to seek her in foreign lands? Are not our maidens good enough and fair enough, that you must need search for a wife elsewhere? For shame, Norss! for shame!"

But Norss said: "A spirit came to me in my dreams last night and said, 'Launch the boat and set sail to-morrow. Have no fear; for I will guide you to the bride that awaits you.' Then, standing there, all white and beautiful, the spirit held forth a symbol—such as I had never before seen—in the figure of a cross, and the spirit said: 'By this symbol shall she be known to you.'"

"If this be so, you must need go," said Jans. "But are you well victualled? Come to my cabin, and let me give you venison and bear's meat."

Norss shook his head. "The spirit will provide," said he. "I have no fear, and I shall take no care, trusting in the spirit."

So Norss pushed his boat down the beach into the sea, and leaped into the boat, and unfurled the sail to the wind. Jans stood wondering on the beach, and watched the boat speed out of sight.

On, on, many days on sailed Norss—so many leagues that he thought he must have compassed the earth. In all this time he knew no hunger nor thirst; it was as the spirit had told him in his dream—no cares nor dangers beset him. By day the dolphins and the other creatures of the sea gambolled about his boat; by night a beauteous Star seemed to direct his course; and when he slept and dreamed, he saw ever the spirit clad in white, and holding forth to him the symbol in the similitude of a cross.

At last he came to a strange country—a country so very different from his own that he could scarcely trust his senses. Instead of the rugged mountains of the North, he saw a gentle landscape of velvety green; the trees were not pines and firs, but cypresses, cedars, and palms; instead of the cold, crisp air of his native land, he scented the perfumed zephyrs of the Orient; and the

wind that filled the sail of his boat and smote his tanned cheeks was heavy and hot with the odor of cinnamon and spices. The waters were calm and blue—very different from the white and angry waves of Norss's native fiord.

As if guided by an unseen hand, the boat pointed straight for the beach of this strangely beautiful land; and ere its prow cleaved the shallower waters, Norss saw a maiden standing on the shore, shading her eyes with her right hand, and gazing intently at him. She was the most beautiful maiden he had ever looked upon. As Norss was fair, so was this maiden dark; her black hair fell loosely about her shoulders in charming contrast with the white raiment in which her slender, graceful form was clad. Around her neck she wore a golden chain, and therefrom was suspended a small symbol, which Norss did not immediately recognize.



"Hast thou come sailing out of the North into the East?" asked the maiden.

"Yes," said Norss.

"And thou art Norss?" she asked.

"I am Norss; and I come seeking my bride," he answered.

"I am she," said the maiden. "My name is Faia. An angel came to me in my dreams last night, and the angel said: 'Stand upon the beach to-day, and

Norss shall come out of the North to bear thee home a bride.' So, coming here, I found thee sailing to our shore."

Remembering then the spirit's words, Norss said: "What symbol have you, Faia, that I may know how truly you have spoken?"

"No symbol have I but this," said Faia, holding out the symbol that was attached to the golden chain about her neck. Norss looked upon it, and lo! it was the symbol of his dreams,—a tiny wooden cross.

Then Norss clasped Faia in his arms and kissed her, and entering into the boat they sailed away into the North. In all their voyage neither care nor danger beset them; for as it had been told to them in their dreams, so it came to pass. By day the dolphins and the other creatures of the sea gambolled about them; by night the winds and the waves sang them to sleep; and, strangely enough, the Star which before had led Norss into the East, now shone bright and beautiful in the Northern sky!

When Norss and his bride reached their home, Jans, the forge-master, and the other neighbors made great joy, and all said that Faia was more beautiful than any other maiden in the land. So merry was Jans that he built a huge fire in his forge, and the flames thereof filled the whole Northern sky with rays of light that danced up, up, up to the Star, singing glad songs the while. So Norss and Faia were wed, and they went to live in the cabin in the fir grove.

To these two was born in good time a son, whom they named Claus. On the night that he was born wondrous things came to pass. To the cabin in the fir grove came all the quaint, weird spirits,—the fairies, the elves, the trolls, the pixies, the fadas, the crions, the goblins, the kobolds, the moss-people, the gnomes, the dwarfs, the water-sprites, the courils, the bogles, the brownies, the nixies, the trows, the stille-volk,—all came to the cabin in the fir grove, and capered about and sang the strange, beautiful songs of the Mist-Land. And the flames of old Jans's forge leaped up higher than ever into the Northern sky, carrying the joyous tidings to the Star, and full of music was that happy night.

Even in infancy Claus did marvellous things. With his baby hands he wrought into pretty figures the willows that were given him to play with. As he grew older, he fashioned, with the knife old Jans had made for him, many curious toys,—carts, horses, dogs, lambs, houses, trees, cats, and birds, all of wood and very like to nature. His mother taught him how to make dolls

too,—dolls of every kind, condition, temper, and color; proud dolls, homely dolls, boy dolls, lady dolls, wax dolls, rubber dolls, paper dolls, worsted dolls, rag dolls,—dolls of every description and without end. So Claus became at once quite as popular with the little girls as with the little boys of his native village; for he was so generous that he gave away all these pretty things as fast as he made them.

Claus seemed to know by instinct every language. As he grew older he would ramble off into the woods and talk with the trees, the rocks, and the beasts of the greenwood; or he would sit on the cliffs overlooking the fiord, and listen to the stories that the waves of the sea loved to tell him; then, too, he knew the haunts of the elves and the stille-volk, and many a pretty tale he learned from these little people. When night came, old Jans told him the quaint legends of the North, and his mother sang to him the lullabies she had heard when a little child herself in the far-distant East. And every night his mother held out to him the symbol in the similitude of the cross, and bade him kiss it ere he went to sleep.

So Claus grew to manhood, increasing each day in knowledge and in wisdom. His works increased too; and his liberality dispensed everywhere the beauteous things which his fancy conceived and his skill executed. Jans, being now a very old man, and having no son of his own, gave to Claus his forge and workshop, and taught him those secret arts which he in youth had learned from cunning masters. Right joyous now was Claus; and many, many times the Northern sky glowed with the flames that danced singing from the forge while Claus moulded his pretty toys. Every color of the rainbow were these flames; for they reflected the bright colors of the beauteous things strewn round that wonderful workshop. Just as of old he had dispensed to all children alike the homelier toys of his youth, so now he gave to all children alike these more beautiful and more curious gifts. So little children everywhere loved Claus, because he gave them pretty toys, and their parents loved him because he made their little ones so happy.



For he was so generous that he gave away all these pretty things  
as fast as he made them.

But now Norss and Faia were come to old age. After long years of love and  
happiness, they knew that death could not be far distant. And one day Faia  
said to Norss: "Neither you nor I, dear love, fear death; but if we could

choose, would we not choose to live always in this our son Claus, who has been so sweet a joy to us?"

"Ay, ay," said Norss; "but how is that possible?"

"We shall see," said Faia.

That night Norss dreamed that a spirit came to him, and that the spirit said to him: "Norss, thou shalt surely live forever in thy son Claus, if thou wilt but acknowledge the symbol."

Then when the morning was come Norss told his dream to Faia, his wife; and Faia said:

"The same dream had I,—an angel appearing to me and speaking these very words."

"But what of the symbol?" cried Norss.

"I have it here, about my neck," said Faia.

So saying, Faia drew from her bosom the symbol of wood,—a tiny cross suspended about her neck by the golden chain. And as she stood there holding the symbol out to Norss, he—he thought of the time when first he saw her on the far-distant Orient shore, standing beneath the Star in all her maidenly glory, shading her beauteous eyes with one hand, and with the other clasping the cross,—the holy talisman of her faith.

"Faia, Faia!" cried Norss, "it is the same,—the same you wore when I fetched you a bride from the East!"

"It is the same," said Faia, "yet see how my kisses and my prayers have worn it away; for many, many times in these years, dear Norss, have I pressed it to my lips and breathed your name upon it. See now—see what a beauteous light its shadow makes upon your aged face!"

The sunbeams, indeed, streaming through the window at that moment, cast the shadow of the symbol on old Norss's brow. Norss felt a glorious warmth suffuse him, his heart leaped with joy, and he stretched out his arms and fell about Faia's neck, and kissed the symbol and acknowledged it. Then likewise did Faia; and suddenly the place was filled with a wondrous brightness and with strange music, and never thereafter were Norss and Faia beholden of men.

Until late that night Claus toiled at his forge; for it was a busy season with him, and he had many, many curious and beauteous things to make for the little children in the country round about. The colored flames leaped singing from his forge, so that the Northern sky seemed to be lighted by a thousand rainbows; but above all this voiceful glory beamed the Star, bright, beautiful, serene.

Coming late to the cabin in the fir grove, Claus wondered that no sign of his father or of his mother was to be seen. "Father—mother!" he cried, but he received no answer. Just then the Star cast its golden gleam through the latticed window, and this strange, holy light fell and rested upon the symbol of the cross that lay upon the floor. Seeing it, Claus stooped and picked it up, and kissing it reverently, he cried: "Dear talisman, be thou my inspiration evermore; and wheresoever thy blessed influence is felt, there also let my works be known henceforth forever!"

No sooner had he said these words than Claus felt the gift of immortality bestowed upon him; and in that moment, too, there came to him a knowledge that his parents' prayer had been answered, and that Norss and Faia would live in him through all time.

And lo! to that place and in that hour came all the people of Mist-Land and of Dream-Land to declare allegiance to him: yes, the elves, the fairies, the pixies,—all came to Claus, prepared to do his bidding. Joyously they capered about him, and merrily they sang.

"Now haste ye all," cried Claus,—"haste ye all to your homes and bring to my workshop the best ye have. Search, little hill-people, deep in the bowels of the earth for finest gold and choicest jewels; fetch me, O mermaids, from the bottom of the sea the treasures hidden there,—the shells of rainbow tints, the smooth, bright pebbles, and the strange ocean flowers; go, pixies, and other water-sprites, to your secret lakes, and bring me pearls! Speed! speed you all! for many pretty things have we to make for the little ones of earth we love!"



But to the kobolds and the brownies Claus said: "Fly to every house on earth where the cross is known; loiter unseen in the corners, and watch and hear the children through the day. Keep a strict account of good and bad, and every night bring back to me the names of good and bad that I may know them."

The kobolds and the brownies laughed gleefully, and sped away on noiseless wings; and so, too, did the other fairies and elves.

There came also to Claus the beasts of the forest and the birds of the air, and bade him be their master. And up danced the Four Winds, and they said: "May we not serve you, too?"

The Snow King came stealing along in his feathery chariot. "Oho!" he cried, "I shall speed over all the world and tell them you are coming. In town and country, on the mountain-tops and in the valleys,—wheresoever the cross is raised,—there will I herald your approach, and thither will I strew you a pathway of feathery white. Oho! oho!" So, singing softly, the Snow King stole upon his way.

But of all the beasts that begged to do him service, Claus liked the reindeer best. "You shall go with me in my travels; for henceforth I shall bear my treasures not only to the children of the North, but to the children in every land whither the Star points me and where the cross is lifted up!" So said Claus to the reindeer, and the reindeer neighed joyously and stamped their hoofs impatiently, as though they longed to start immediately.

Oh, many, many times has Claus whirled away from his far Northern home in his sledge drawn by the reindeer, and thousands upon thousands of beautiful gifts—all of his own making—has he borne to the children of every land; for he loves them all alike, and they all alike love him, I trow. So truly do they love him that they call him Santa Claus, and I am sure that he must be a saint; for he has lived these many hundred years, and we, who know that he was born of Faith and Love, believe that he will live forever.



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