

The Night Before Christmas and Other Popular Stories For Children

Various

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Title: The Night Before Christmas and Other Popular Stories For Children

Author: Various

Release Date: August 18, 2004 [EBook #13213]

Language: English

Character set encoding: ASCII

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[Transcriber's Note: The Table of Contents was added by the transcriber.]

THE NIGHT BEFORE CHRISTMAS

AND OTHER POPULAR STORIES FOR CHILDREN

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CHICAGO

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THE NIGHT BEFORE CHRISTMAS.

'Twas the night before Christmas, and all through the house,
Not a creature was stirring, not even a mouse.
The stockings were hung by the chimney with care,
In the hope that St. Nicholas soon would be there.
The children were nestled all snug in their beds,
While visions of sugar-plums danced in their heads.
And mamma in her kerchief, and I in my cap,
Had just settled our brains for a long winter's nap;

When out on the lawn there arose such a clatter,
I sprang from the bed to see what was the matter.
Away to the window I flew like a flash,

Tore open the shutters and threw up the sash.
The moon on the breast of the new-fallen snow
Gave the lustre of midday to objects below--
When what to my wondering eyes should appear
But a miniature sleigh and eight tiny reindeer.

With a little old driver so lively and quick,
I knew in a moment it must be St. Nick.
More rapid than eagles his coursers they came,
And he whistled and shouted and called them by name--
"Now, Dasher! Now, Dancer! Now, Prancer! Now, Vixen!
On, Comet! On, Cupid! On, Dunder and Blixen!
To the top of the porch, to the top of the wall!
Now, dash away! Dash away! Dash away! All!"

As dry leaves before the wild hurricane fly,
When they meet with an obstacle, mount to the sky,
So up to the house-top the coursers they flew
With the sleigh full of toys, and St. Nicholas, too.
And then in a twinkling I heard on the roof
The prancing and pawing of each tiny hoof.
As I drew in my head, and was turning around,
Down the chimney St. Nicholas came with a bound.

He was dressed all in fur from his head to his foot,
And his clothes were all tarnished with ashes and soot;
A bundle of toys he had flung on his back,
And he looked like a pedlar just opening his pack.
His eyes--how they twinkled! His dimples, how merry!
His cheeks were like roses, his nose like a cherry;
His droll little mouth was drawn up in a bow,
And the beard on his chin was as white as the snow.

[Illustration: THE REINDEER AND THE SLEIGH]

The stump of a pipe he held tight in his teeth,
And the smoke, it encircled his head like a wreath.
He was chubby and plump, a right jolly old elf,
And I laughed when I saw him, in spite of myself.
A wink of his eye, and a twist of his head,
Soon gave me to know I had nothing to dread.

He spoke not a word, but went straight to his work,
And filled all the stockings--then turned with a jerk,
And laying his finger aside of his nose,
And giving a nod, up the chimney he rose.
He sprang to his sleigh, to his team gave a whistle,
And away they all flew, like the down of a thistle;
But I heard him exclaim ere he drove out of sight,
"Merry Christmas to all, and to all a good-night!"

THE NIGHT AFTER CHRISTMAS.

'Twas the night after Christmas, and all through the house
Not a creature was stirring--excepting a mouse.

The stockings were flung in haste over the chair,
For hopes of St. Nicholas were no longer there.
The children were restlessly tossing in bed,
For the pie and the candy were heavy as lead;
While mamma in her kerchief, and I in my gown,
Had just made up our minds that we would not lie down,
When out on the lawn there arose such a clatter,
I sprang from my chair to see what was the matter.
Away to the window I went with a dash,
Flung open the shutter, and threw up the sash.
The moon on the breast of the new-fallen snow,
Gave the lustre of noon-day to objects below.

When what to my long anxious eyes should appear
But a horse and a sleigh, both old-fashioned and queer;
With a little old driver, so solemn and slow,
I knew at a glance it must be Dr Brough.
I drew in my head, and was turning around,
When upstairs came the Doctor, with scarcely a sound,
He wore a thick overcoat, made long ago,
And the beard on his chin was white with the snow.
He spoke a few words, and went straight to his work;
He felt all the pulses,--then turned with a jerk,

And laying his finger aside of his nose,
With a nod of his head to the chimney he goes:--
"A spoonful of oil, ma'am, if you have it handy;
No nuts and no raisins, no pies and no candy.
These tender young stomachs cannot well digest
All the sweets that they get; toys and books are the best.
But I know my advice will not find many friends,
For the custom of Christmas the other way tends.
The fathers and mothers, and Santa Claus, too,
Are exceedingly blind. Well, a good-night to you!"
And I heard him exclaim, as he drove out of sight:
These feasting and candies make Doctors' bills right!"

SANTA CLAUS DOES NOT FORGET.

Bertie was a very good boy. He was kind, obedient, truthful, and unselfish. He had, however, one great fault,--he always forgot.

No matter how important the errand, his answer always was, "I forgot." When he was sent with a note to the dress-maker his mother would find the note in his pocket at night. If he was sent to the store in a great hurry, to get something for tea, he would return late, without the article, but with his usual answer.

His father and mother talked the matter over, and decided that something must be done to make the little boy remember.

Christmas was near, and Bertie was busy making out a list of things which Santa Claus was to bring him.

"Santa Claus may forget some of those things," said his mother.

[Illustration: CHRISTMAS FROLICS]

"He cannot," replied Bertie; "for I shall write sled, and skates, and drum, and violin, and all the things on this paper. Then when Santa

Claus goes to my stocking he will find the list. He can see it and put the things in as fast as he reads."

Christmas morning came, and Bertie was up at dawn to see what was in his stocking. His mother kept away from him as long as she could, for she knew what Santa Claus had done.

Finally she heard him coming with slow steps to her room. Slowly he opened the door and came towards her. He held in his hand a list very much longer than the one he had made out. He put it in his mother's hand, while tears of disappointment fell from his eyes.

"See what Santa Claus left for me; but I think he might have given me one thing besides."

His mother opened the roll. It was a list of all the errands Bertie had been asked to do for six months. At the end of all was written, in staring capitals, "I FORGOT."

Bertie wept for an hour. Then his mother told him they were all going to grandpa's. For the first time he would see a Christmas-tree. Perhaps something might be growing there for him.

It was very strange to Bertie, but on grandpa's tree he found everything he had written on his list. Was he cured of his bad habit? Not all at once; but when his mother saw that he was particularly heedless she would say, "Remember, Santa Claus does not forget."

M. A. HALEY

THE FAIRY CHRISTMAS.

It was Christmas Day, and Toddy and Tita were alone. Papa and mamma had gone out West to see their big boy who was ill. They had promised to be home for Christmas, but a big snow had blocked the railroad track, and nurse was afraid the train would be delayed until the day after Christmas. What a dull Christmas for two little girls, all alone in the great city house, with only the servants! They felt so lonely that nurse let them play in the big drawing-room instead of in the nursery, so they arranged all the chairs in a row, and pretended it was a snowed-up train. Tita was the conductor, and Toddy was the passengers. Just as they were in the midst of it, they heard music in the street, and, running to the window, they saw a little boy outside, singing and beating a tambourine.

"Why," said Tita, "his feet are all bare!"

"Dess he hanged up bofe stockin's an' his shoes, too," said Toddy.

"Let's open the window and ask him."

But the great window was too high to reach, so they took papa's cane and pushed it tip. The little boy smiled, but they could not hear what he said, so they told him to come in, and ran to open the big front door. He was a little frightened at first, but the carpet felt warm to his poor bare feet.

He told them that his name was Guido, and that he had come from Italy, which is a much warmer country than ours, and that he was very poor, so poor that he had no shoes, and had to go singing from house to house for a few pennies to get some dinner. And he was _so_ hungry.

"Poor little boy!" said Tita. "Our mamma is away, and we're having a pretty sad Christmas, but we'll try to make it nice for _you._"

So they played games, and Guido sang to them. Then the folding doors rolled back, and there was the dining-room and the table all set, and Thomas, the black waiter, smiling, just as if it had been a big dinner party instead of two very little girls. Nurse said: "Well, I never!" when she saw Guido, but she felt so sorry for the lonely little girls that she let him come to the table. And _such_ a dinner as he ate! He had never had one like it before. "It is a fairy tale," he said.

Just as dessert came on, the door opened and in rushed mamma and papa; the train had gotten in, after all. They were so glad to see their darlings happy instead of moping that they gave them each some extra kisses. You may be sure little Guido never went hungry and barefoot after that. Long afterward he would say: "That was a fairy Christmas!"

That night, after Tita had said her prayers, she said:

"Mamma, I know something. Whenever you feel sad and lonely, if you will just find somebody sadder and lonelier than yourself and cheer them up, it will make you all right."

And I think that that was the very best kind of a Christmas lesson of love. Don't you?

ETHELDRED B. BARRY.

THE BALL GAME.

Did you ever know a boy
Make believe he had a toy?
That's the way
Babies play;
Babies who are young and small
Make believe they play at ball!

CHRISTMAS DAY.

"Boys," said Mrs. Howard one morning, looking up from a letter she was reading, "I have had a letter from your grandmamma. She writes that she is returning to England shortly."

The boys went on with their breakfast without showing any great amount of interest in this piece of news, for they had never seen their grandmother, and therefore could not very well be expected to show any affection for her.

Now Mrs. Howard, the mother of two of the boys and aunt to the third little fellow, was a widow and very poor, and often found it a hard task to provide for her "three boys," as she called them, for, having adopted her little orphan nephew, she always treated him as her own son. She had sometimes thought it strange that old Mrs. Howard should not have offered to provide for Leslie herself but she had never done so, and at last Mrs. Howard had ceased to expect it. But now, right at the end of her letter, Grandmamma Howard wrote:--

"I have been thinking that perhaps it would come a little hard on you to support not only your own two boys, but poor Alice's son, and so, on my return to England, I propose, if you are willing, to adopt one of them, for I am a lonely old woman and shall be glad of a young face about me again."

After thinking the matter over, Mrs. Howard decided she would say nothing about their grandmother's intention to the boys, as she thought that it was just possible she might change her mind again.

Time passed on, and winter set in, and full of the delights of skating, the boys forgot all about the expected arrival of their grandmother.

During the Christmas holidays the boys one morning started off to Broome Meadow for a good day's skating on the pond there. They carried their dinner with them, and were told to be sure and be home before dark.

As they ran along the frosty road they came suddenly upon a poor old woman, so suddenly that Leslie ran right up against her before he could stop himself. The old woman grumbled about "lazy, selfish boys, only thinking of their own pleasure, and not caring what happened to a poor old woman!"

But Leslie stopped at once and apologized, in his polite little way, for his carelessness.

"I _am_ sorry," he said. "I hope I did not hurt you; and you have such heavy parcels to carry too. Won't you let me help you?"

"Oh! come on, Leslie," said his cousins; "we shall never get to the pond at this rate!"

"Yes, go on," said the old woman sharply; "your skating is of a great deal more importance than an old woman, eh?"

But Leslie's only answer was to take the parcels and trudge merrily along beside his companion.

On the way to her cottage the old woman asked him all sorts of

questions about himself and his cousins, and then, having reached her cottage, dismissed him with scarcely a "thank you" for the trouble he had taken. But Leslie did not take it much to heart.

He raced along, trying his hardest to overtake his cousins before they reached the pond, and was soon skimming about with the rest of them.

Squire Leaholme, in whose grounds the boys were skating, afterwards came down to the pond to watch the fun, and, being a kind-hearted old gentleman, offered to give a prize of a new pair of skates to the boy who should win the greatest number of races.

As it was getting late, it was arranged that the racing should come off on the following day, and the Squire invited all the boys who took part in it, to come up to his house to a substantial tea, after the fun was over.

How delighted Leslie was, for he was a first-rate skater, and he did so want a new pair of skates!

But the Squire's skates were not to be won by him, for on the following day as he and his cousins were on their way to the pond, they came across the queer old woman whom they had met on the previous day.

She was sitting on the ground, and seemed to be in great pain. The boys stopped to ask what ailed her, and she told them that she had slipped and twisted her foot, and was afraid that her ankle was sprained, for she could not bear to put it to the ground.

[Illustration: FROM THE CHRISTMAS TREE.]

"You musn't sit here in the cold," said Leslie; "come, try and get up, and I will help you home."

"Oh! Leslie," cried both his cousins, "don't go. You will be late for the races, and lose your chance of the prize."

Poor Leslie! He turned first red, then white, and then said, in a husky tone of voice--

"Never mind--you go on without me."

"You're a good laddie," said the old woman. "Will you be very sorry to miss the fun?"

Leslie muttered something about not minding much, and then the brave little fellow set himself to help the poor old woman home, as gently and tenderly as he could.

She would not let him come in with her, but told him to run off as quickly as he could, and perhaps after all, he would not be too late for the skating. But Leslie could not bear to leave her alone and in pain, so he decided to run home and fetch his Aunt.

When Mrs. Howard arrived at the cottage, you can think how surprised she was to find that Leslie's "poor old woman" was none other than Grandmamma Howard herself, who wishing to find out the real characters of her grandsons, had chosen to come in this disguise to the little

village where they lived.

You will easily guess which of the three boys Grandmamma chose to be her little companion. And oh! what a lovely Grandmamma she was, as not only Leslie, but his cousins too, found out. She always seemed to know exactly what a boy wanted, and still better, to give it to him.

Walter and Stanley often felt terribly ashamed of the selfish manner in which they had behaved, and wished they were more like Leslie.

But Grandmamma told them that it was "never too late to mend," and they took her advice, and I am quite sure that at the present moment if they were to meet a poor old woman in distress by the roadside, they would not pass her by, as they once did Grandmamma Howard.

ANNA MORRISON.

THE DOLLS' CHRISTMAS PARTY.

It was the week before Christmas, and the dolls in the toy-shop played together all night. The biggest one was from Paris.

One night she said, "We ought to have a party before Santa Claus carries us away to the little girls. I can dance, and I will show you how."

"I can dance myself if you will pull the string," said a "Jim Crow" doll.

"What shall we have for supper?" piped a little boy-doll in a Jersey suit. He was always thinking about eating.

"Oh, dear," cried the French lady, "I don't know what we shall do for supper!"

"I can get the supper," added a big rag doll. The other dolls had never liked her very well, but they thanked her now. She had taken lessons at a cooking-school, and knew how to make cake and candy. She gave French names to everything she made, and this made it taste better. Old Mother Hubbard was there, and she said the rag doll did not know how to cook anything.

They danced in one of the great shop-windows. They opened a toy piano, and a singing-doll played "Comin' through the Rye," The dolls did not find that a good tune to dance by; but the lady did not know any other, although she was the most costly doll in the shop. Then they wound up a music-box, and danced by that. This did very well for some tunes; but they had to walk around when it played "Hail Columbia," and wait for something else.

The "Jim Crow" doll had to dance by himself, for he could do nothing but a "break-down." He would not dance at all unless some one pulled his string. A toy monkey did this; but he would not stop when the dancer was tired.

They had supper on one of the counters. The rag doll placed some boxes for tables. The supper was of candy, for there was nothing in the shop to eat but sugar hearts and eggs. The dolls like candy better than anything else, and the supper was splendid. Patsy McQuirk said he could not eat candy. He wanted to know what kind of a supper it was without any potatoes. He got very angry, put his hands into his pockets, and smoked his pipe. It was very uncivil for him to do so in company. The smoke made the little ladies sick, and they all tried to climb into a "horn of plenty" to get out of the way.

Mother Hubbard and the two black waiters tried to sing "I love Little Pussy;" but the tall one in a brigand hat opened his mouth wide, that the small dollies were afraid they might fall into it. The clown raised both arms in wonder, and Jack in the Box sprang up as high as he could to look down into the fellow's throat.

All the baby-dolls in caps and long dresses had been put to bed. They woke up when the others were at supper, and began to cry. The big doll brought them some candy, and that kept them quiet for some time.

The next morning a little girl found the toy piano open. She was sure the dolls had been playing on it. The grown-up people thought it had been left open the night before; but they do not understand dolls as well as little people do.

VIOLA ROSEBOROUGH

GRANDMA'S CHRISTMAS GIFTS.

Grandma Burns sat knitting busily in the sun one bright morning the week before Christmas. The snow lay deep, and the hard crust glistened like silver. All at once she heard little sighs of grief outside her door. When she opened it there sat Peter and Jimmy Rice, two very poor little boys, with their faces in their hands; and they were crying.

"My patience!" cried grandma. "What can be the matter with two bright little boys this sunny morning?"

"We don't have no good times," sighed little Peter.

"We can't slide. We haven't any sleds," whimpered Jimmy.

"Why, of course boys can't have a good time without sleds," said grandma, cheerily. "Let us look about and see if we can't find something." And grandma's cap-border bobbed behind barrels and boxes in the shed and all among the cobwebs in the garret; but nothing could be found suitable.

"Hum! I do believe this would do for little Pete;" and the dear old lady drew a large, pressed-tin pan off the top shelf in the pantry. A long, smooth butter-tray was found for Jimmy. Grandma shook her cap-border with laughter to see them skim over the hard crust in their queer sleds. And the boys shouted and swung their hands as they flew past the window.

"I do expect they'll wear 'em about through," murmured grandma; "but boys must slide,--that's certain."

And the pan was scoured as bright as a new silver dollar and the red paint was all gone off the wooden tray when Peter and Jimmy brought their sleds back.

Grandma knitted faster than ever all that day, and her face was bright with smiles. She was planning something. She went to see Job Easter that night. He promised to make two small sleds for the pair of socks she was knitting.

When the sleds were finished she dyed them red and drew a yellow horse upon each one. Grandma called them horses, but no one would have suspected it. Then the night before Christmas she drew on her great socks over her shoes to keep her from slipping, put on her hood and cloak, and dragged the little sleds over to Peter and Timmy's house.

She hitched them to the door-latch, and went home laughing all the way.

MAMA'S HAPPY CHRISTMAS.

It had seemed to the little Wendell children that they would have a very sad Christmas. Mama had been very ill, and papa had been so anxious about mama that he could not think of anything else.

When Christmas Day came, however, mama was so much better that she could lie on the lounge. The children all brought their stockings into her room to open them.

"You children all seem as happy as if you had had your usual Christmas tree," said mama, as they sat around her.

"Why, I never had such a happy Christmas before," said sweet little Agnes. "And it's just because you are well again."

"Now I think you must all run out for the rest of the day," said the nurse, "because your mama wants to see you all again this evening."

"I wish we could get up something expressly for mama's amusement," said Agnes, when they had gone into the nursery.

"How would you like to have some tableaux in here?" asked their French governess, Miss Marcelle.

"Oh, yes," they all cried, "it would be fun, mama loves tableaux."

So all day long they were busy arranging five tableaux for the evening. The tableaux were to be in the room which had folding-doors opening into Mrs. Wendell's sitting-room.

[Illustration: MAMA'S HAPPY CHRISTMAS]

At the proper time Miss Marcelle stepped outside the folding-doors

and made a pretty little speech. She said that some young ladies and a young gentleman had asked permission to show some tableaux to Mrs. Wendell if she would like to see them. Mrs. Wendell replied that she would be charmed.

Then mademoiselle announced the tableaux; opening the doors wide for each one. This is a list of the tableaux: First, The Sleeping Beauty; second, Little Red Riding Hood; third, The Fairy Queen; fourth, Old Mother Hubbard; fifth, The Lord High Admiral.

Miss Marcelle had arranged everything so nicely, and Celeste, the French maid, helped so much with the dressing, that the pictures all went off without a single mistake.

[Illustration: LITTLE RED RIDING HOOD]

[Illustration: THE LORD HIGH ADMIRAL]

Mama was delighted. She said she must kiss those dear young ladies, and that delightful young man who had given her such a charming surprise.

So all the children came in rosy and smiling.

"Why, didn't you know us?" asked the little Lord Admiral.

"I know this," said mama, "I am like Agnes; I _never_ had such a happy Christmas before."

MIRIAM T. BARNARD.

THE CHRISTMAS CAROL OF THE BIRDS.

Do you know, when we are having such good times at Christmas, what sweet music they have in Norway, that cold country across the sea? One day in the year the simple peasants who live there make the birds very happy, so that they sing, of their own free-will, a glad, joyous carol on Christmas morning.

And this is why they sing on that morning more than on any other. After the birds have found shelter from the north wind on Christmas-eve, and the night is still and bright with stars, or even if the storm be ever so severe, the good people bring out sheaves of corn and wheat from their storehouses. Tying them on slender poles, they raise them from every spire, barn, gatepost, and gable; then, when the Christmas sun rises over the hills, every spire and gable bursts forth into joyous song.

You can well believe that these songs of the birds make the people of Norway very happy. They echo, with all their hearts, their living, grateful anthem, "Glory to God in the highest, on earth peace, good-will to men!"

MRS. G. HALL.

A TURKEY FOR ONE.

Lura's Uncle Roy is in Japan. He used to take Christmas dinner at Lura's home. Now he could only write her papa to say a box of gifts had been sent, and one was for his little girl.

The little girl clapped her hands, crying, "Oh, mamma! don't you think it is the chain and locket dear uncle said he would sometime give me?"

"No," replied her papa, reading on. "Your uncle says it is a turkey for one."

"But we do not need turkeys from Japan," remarked the little daughter, soberly.

Her papa smiled, and handed the open letter to her mamma.

"Read it aloud, every bit," begged Lura, seeing her mamma was smiling, too.

But her mamma folded the letter and said nothing.

On Christmas eve the box, which had just arrived, was opened, and every one in the house was made glad with a present. Lura's was a papier-mache turkey, nearly as large as the one brought home at the same time by the market-boy.

Next morning, while the fowl in the kitchen was being roasted, Lura placed hers before a window and watched people admire it as they passed. All its imitation feathers, and even more its red wattles, seemed to wish every man and woman, boy and girl, a Merry Christmas.

Lura had not spoken of the jewelry since her uncle's letter was read. It is not nice for one who receives a gift to wish it was different. Lura was not that kind of a child.

When dinner was nearly over, her papa said to her, "My dear, you have had as much of my turkey as you wanted; if you please, I will now try some of yours."

"Mine is what Uncle Roy calls a turkey for one," laughed Lura. She turned in her chair towards where her bird had been strutting on the window-sill, and added, in surprise, "Why, what has become of him?"

At that moment the servant brought in a huge platter. When room had been made for it on the table it was set down in front of Lura's papa, and on the dish was her turkey.

"Oh, what fun!" gayly exclaimed the child. "Did uncle tell you to pretend to serve it?"

"I have not finished what he directs me to do," her papa said, with a flourish of the carving-knife.

"But, papa--oh, please!" Her hand was on his arm. "You would not spoil

my beautiful bird from Japan!

A hidden spring was touched with the point of the knife. The breast opened, and disclosed the fowl filled with choice toys and other things. The first taken out was a tiny box; inside was a gold chain and locket; the locket held Uncle Roy's picture.

It was a turkey for one,--for only Uncle Roy's niece. But all the family shared the amusement.

LAVINIA S. GOODWIN.

LITTLE CHRISTMAS CAROLLERS.

We are a band of carollers,
We march through frost and snow,
But care not for the weather
As on our way we go.

At every hall or cottage
That stands upon our way,
We stop to give the people
Best wishes for the day.

We pray a merry Christmas,
Made bright by Christmas cheer,
With peace, and hope, and gladness
And all they may hold dear.

And for all those that happen
To pass us on our way
We have a smile, and wish them
A merry Christmas-day.

L.A. FRANCE

[Illustration: CHRISTMAS CAROLLERS]

WHAT HAPPENED CHRISTMAS EVE.

It was Christmas Eve and the frost fairies were busy getting ready for Christmas Day. First of all they spread the loveliest white snow carpet over the rough, bare ground; then they hung the bushes and trees with icicles that flashed like diamonds in the moonlight. Later on, they planned to draw beautiful frost pictures on the window panes, to surprise the little children in the morning.

The stars shone brightly and the moon sent floods of light in every nook and corner. How could any one think of sleeping when there was such a glory outside!

Jessie and Fred had gone to bed very early so they might be the first to shout "Merry Christmas!" but their eyes would not stay shut.

"Oh dear! it must be 'most morning," said Fred; "let us creep softly down stairs and maybe we'll catch Santa Claus before he rides off."

Hand in hand they tiptoed to the dining-room and peeped out the big window;--surely, surely, that was something climbing up the roof of cousin Nellie's house; it must be old Santa. Fred gave a chuckle of delight; to be sure the reindeer were very queer looking objects, and the sleigh such a funny shape, but the children were satisfied.

The old fir tree, whose high branches almost touched the roof, knew all about those shadows, but it was so old no one could ever understand a word of the many tales it told.

"There's something scratching on the door," whispered Jessie; but it was only a mouse, who had sniffed the delightful odors of the Christmas goodies and was trying his best to find a way into the pantry and test them with his sharp teeth.

"Come," said Jessie, "we'll turn to icicles if we stay here much, longer"; so up-stairs they quickly scampered.

Papa had been to town on an errand, so it was quite late when he came home. As he was hunting in his pockets for his key, he heard a pitiful cry, and looking down he saw a big, white cat carrying a tiny kitten in her mouth.

"Poor thing," said papa, "you shall come inside till morning."

Santa Claus had been there with the nicest wagon for Fred and a warm, seal-skin cap that lay right in the middle of it. When papa left the room, puss and her kitty were curled up comfortably on the rug singing their sleepy song.

The sun was shining brightly in the dining-room window when Jessie and Fred made their appearance; then Fred just laughed with delight, for right in the crown of his new cap lay the cutest white kitten, with big, blue eyes and wee pink nose, while standins close by as if to guard her darling from danger, was good old mother puss.

"I never had a live Christmas present before," said Fred, "now I know Santa Claus read the letter I threw up the chimney because I told him to bring me a kitten and here it is."

Papa smiled and looked at mamma, and then everybody said "Merry Christmas" at once.

OLIVER HERFOLD.

SUSY'S CHRISTMAS PRESENT.

"Tell us a story, nursie; please do", begged two little golden-haired

girls, as they snuggled on the soft rug before the fire. "Did you ever have just what you wished for at Christmas, when you were a little girl?"

"Yes, I did once. I was the oldest, and had two brothers and three little sisters. We did not have a beautiful home like this. We lived in a little cottage. It was pretty, though, in the summer time, when the roses and pinks were in bloom. My father was dead, and mother worked for the rich people around the village. There was plenty to do about holiday times.

"It was the day before Christmas. Mother was at the house of a very rich and kind lady. She was going to have a grand party in the evening.

"Mother told me, when she went away, to mind the children, and perhaps I might have a nice Christmas present. I knew we should have plenty of candy and cake, and other nice things, from Mrs. Reid's. We often had pretty clothes, too, that Mamie and Robbie Reid had outgrown.

"I had been wishing for a muff; but I knew Mother could not afford to buy me one. It was hard enough even to get shoes for us all. I thought I should have to be satisfied with mittens.

"It was quite dark, and we all sat around the fire. I had rocked Tilly to sleep and put her to bed. Willie and Joe were playing cat's-cradle. The rest of us were making believe we were rich and could have all we wanted for Christmas.

"All at once there was a heavy step on the porch, and a knock at the door. I opened it, with Margie and Amy clinging to my dress. A boy shoved a big box into the room and shouted, 'A merry Christmas to you!' He then ran out at the gate.

"The box had all our names on the cover, and the children were wild to see what was inside.

"'Wait till mother comes,' I said; and pretty soon we heard her at the gate. She seemed surprised, and said Santa Claus had remembered us early.

"Mother advised us to go to bed and wait until morning to see our presents. It was pretty hard; but we had some oranges and candy, and I put the boys to bed. Margie and I wondered and guessed what was in the box; but at last we fell asleep.

"You may be sure we were up early in the morning. There were dolls and toys for the little ones, with hoods and mittens, and for me a lovely squirrel muff, lined with blue, with a soft little boa for my neck. I was a happy girl that Christmas, I can tell you.

"And now, my dears, you must go to bed, or Santa Claus will not be able to find your stockings."

"Oh! I hope I shall have what I want to-morrow!" said Gracie.

"And I, too," echoed Helen. "And your story was very nice, nursie."

"Good-night, and call us early in the morning."

SANTA CLAUS'S LETTER.

Christmas was coming. Jamie and Ted had already begun to write long letters to Santa Claus. But one thing was rather queer: both boys asked him for the same things.

Each little letter ended with,--"Just like Brother's."

They agreed to ask for only one sled. They would rather ride together. Now was not this very sweet and loving?

One night, after they had gone to bed, Jamie said, "Ted, if Santa Claus brings us skates, Jim can teach us how to use them."

"Oh, yes; and if we get fur mittens it will be such fun to make a fort."

"And a snow-man," Jamie answered.

Ted went oh: "I'll always ride the sled down a hill, and you can ride it up."

"I guess you won't," Jamie said, speaking loudly.

"Why not?" Ted asked.

"Because it'll be as much my sled as yours."

"Yes, of course," Ted replied; "but I chose it first."

"You are a selfish boy!" said Jamie.

"Well, then, so are you!"

"I don't care. I won't sleep with you. I'll ask mamma if I can't have the first pick; I'm the biggest," roared Jamie, bounding out of bed.

"You're a big, cross cry baby," Ted shouted, jumping out after his brother.

Away ran Jamie to mamma, with Ted at his heels. Both were angry. Both talked at once.

Mamma was grieved. Her dear little boys had never been so unkind to each other before. She kissed their hot faces and stroked their pretty hair. She told them how their naughty words hurt her. She showed them how displeased God was to see two little brothers quarrel.

That night they went to sleep in each other's arms, full of love and forgiveness.

Christmas morning came at last. Very early the boys crept out of bed, just to "feel" their stockings.

Papa heard them, and, remembering that he was once a boy lighted the gas.

Each little red stocking was full from toe to top. Boxes and paper parcels were piled around them. Such shouting! Such a good time! It seemed as if all their letters had been answered.

Suddenly Jamie cried, "O Ted, here's a letter!"

They put their little heads together, and with papa's help spelled this out:--

"My dear Boys,--No sled this year. It quarrelled so I was afraid to bring it. I dropped it off the load about a week ago. Get ready for it next year. Merry Christmas! SANTA CLAUS."

A RAGGED CHRISTMAS FEAST.

On Christmas day there is a great feast in Dublin. This, you know, is the chief city of Ireland. The feast is made for the children. There are in that city a great many little ones who are very very poor. There are kind people there, also, who look after these poor children. They have what they call "ragged schools," where many of them are taught to read, and to sew, and other useful things.

Dr. Nelaton is a famous minister in Dublin, and every year he, with other good people, gets up this great feast for the children. About eight hundred of them came last year. Some of these were only half-clad, and all were very ragged. They were seated at long, narrow tables, which were covered with a white cloth, The children from the ragged schools wore aprons in bright colors, to hide their rags. Each school had a color of its own. These aprons were only lent them for the day, and the children felt very fine in them. But there were two long rows without any aprons. These were little ones who had been picked up along the streets. Each ragged scholar had permission to bring all the children he could find. And, oh, how ragged and dirty these two rows were!

But they brightened up, just like the children with aprons, when they saw the feast. A huge mug of steaming tea and an immense bun to each child! Rarely did they have such a treat as this. And how they did eat! Each child had all he wanted. It would have done you good to see their poor, pinched faces beam with delight. During the meal a large throng of orphan children in the gallery sung some sweet songs. Then, after the feast, there were small gifts, and little speeches and prayers, and more songs. The little ragged ones seemed like new beings in this atmosphere of love. Such a glad day as that Christmas was a rare event in their sad lives. Children who live in happy homes know little about the sufferings of the poor. Perhaps, if they knew more, such little ones would try harder, by gifts and kind acts, to carry sunshine to sorrowful hearts.

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