

Advance Information



A CHRISTMAS CAROL

By Josiah Gilbert Holland
in McCreel's Herald

*There's a song in the air!
There's a star in the sky!
There's a mother's deep prayer
And a baby's low cry!
And the star rains its fire while the Beautiful sing,
For the manger of Bethlehem cradles a king.*

*There's a tumult of joy
O'er the wonderful birth,
For the Virgin's sweet boy
Is the Lord of the earth.
Ay! the star rains its fire and the Beautiful sing,
For the manger of Bethlehem cradles a king.*

*In the light of that star
Lie the eyes imperish'd,
And that song from of yore
Has swept over the world.
Every hearth is aflame and the Beautiful sing,
In the homes of the nations that Jesus is King.*

*We rejoice in the light,
And we echo the song
That comes down through the night
From the heavenly throng.
Ay! we shout to the lovely evangel they bring,
And we greet in His cradle our Saviour and King.*



EVERYONE was happy but Carrie, they said. All four of the others had come in the last two days before Christmas. A heavy snow had fallen and to remind them of old times Father Carson had met Harry and Esther at the station in the old hobble. And Harry and Esther, in turn, had jingled merrily down after Frank and his wife and the new baby. Mr. and Mrs. Carson beamed at the children, home again. A yule log crackled in the fireplace. The old fashioned pantry almost bulged. Harry and Frank had brought a Christmas tree from down by the creek and Esther and Marion, Frank's wife, trimmed it.

Of course, poor Carrie had to be the last one home. She'd wired them that she had to teach up to the last minute and wouldn't arrive until Christmas eve.

"Poor Carrie," they said again. For Frank and Marion were so proud of the new baby, and Harry'd had a promotion. Esther was romantic with a beautiful diamond and a young man's very soulful picture. This was her senior year in college. She'd depended on Carrie for funds as each of the others had, but she couldn't help patronizing Carrie a little in her mind. Poor dear Carrie with her eternally shabby clothes and her same old teaching job.

"Did she ever have a fellow?" Marion asked Frank and Harry as they pulled on heavy overcoats before meeting the train.

Everyone reflected. "Once," Frank recalled, "the year she was in normal school, but he married somebody else."

Esther gazed casually at her ring and shrugged. "Poor dear," she murmured, "she has no idea of how to

handle men. It requires much tact." The boys roared with laughter. "You leave Carrie alone!" they shouted as they crunched out to the sleigh.

Mrs. Carson came from the kitchen, cheeks flushed. "Girls," she said, "Carrie's always been the family backbone. Let's be specially nice to her this Christmas. I don't think we ought to brag to her about our own good fortunes. Don't, above all things, let her see that we feel sorry for her."

The girls agreed. "Especially Esther's engagement. That'll make her more lonesome, poor thing," said Marion.

But Carrie was radiant when she came in. "Merry Christmas, folks!" she called, kissing each of them.

"Why, Carrie!" they gasped. She had a new dress, too.

"Am I not festive?" she said, but mysteriously she would not tell them until supper time. "I've had a talk with the principal. You're all through school now, and I'm going to Europe next year! Oh, I've always wanted



"Merry Christmas!" She called, kissing each of them.

to!" They'd never seen her so happy. Esther and Marion forced condensation from their congratulations. "Poor dear," whispered Esther. "She's having to let these things take the place of the love she's starved for. I'm sure her gayety isn't real." But Carrie didn't hear.

John Grey called. He'd known the family always but they were surprised that he should come on Christmas eve. It took Harry to detect the reason. "I believe he's here to see Carrie," he whispered to the astonished family. Carefully, each slipped away.

"Wouldn't it be wonderful if she could land him—with all his money and—but she can't. She doesn't know how, poor thing, and he's been a bachelor too long to fall for a little drab mouse," they said.

John left at eleven and the family rushed in. "You sly lady," they all shouted, not believing themselves, "How does this happen?"

Carrie smiled and then looked serious. "Oh, John wants me to marry him, but I don't want to marry. I want to go to Europe!"

"What? You turned him down?" Esther and Marion couldn't believe it. Carrie nodded. "I just happened onto him at a convention the first day I'd found for sure that I could go next year. I acted so ridiculously happy that I thought he'd be ashamed of me. Instead, he asked me to marry him, and he's been at it ever since."

Their Carrie with a chance to marry John Grey and turning it down! The family looked at each other in confusion. The phone rang.

"Carrie!" said Father in bewilderment.

Fifteen minutes later, Carrie turned from the phone. "I've just decided to let John go to Europe with me," she said doubtfully, then looking at the clock, "Merry Christmas everybody!"

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Back Home for Christmas

By Noni C. Bailey

UNMINDFUL of the icy air, Mollie shook the great feather bed and turned it over. Her black eyes sparkled as she sang, "Where'er we go, we'll not forget—"

"Mollie! Ain't you ever comin' to help get breakfast? John Henry's got the chores done. I hear him comin' with the milk." Sue, calling from the kitchen, was skimming frozen cream—yellow and thick—from earthenware crocks. "Hurry, Mollie, take up the sausage and put the eggs in the skillet. Set the pies on or Johnnie won't know he's had breakfast. Here he comes, open the door quick. Are you 'most froze, Johnnie?"

"By golly, it is cold, Sue." He deposited the huge pail, pulled off his frozen gloves, laid them on the stove hearth to thaw and stood breaking bits of ice from his mustache. Scraping caked snow from his boots on the edge of the wood-box, he said, "I know, I've got an idea if this keeps you'll have a white Christmas."

"You'd joke if you's gonna be hung. You know tomorrow's Christmas an' I'll spoil everything. Too deep for sleighs now—sh—here comes Ma."

"Ain't breakfast ready yet?" complained Ma. Since Mollie and Sue had grown up, Ma—old at forty-five—had donned her lace cap, retired to her chimney corner to smoke her pipe, knit and piece quilts. Her husband had been shot by bushwhackers; her youngest son had never come back from war; so she brooded and grieved.

Pretending preparations were for their "singin' school crowd" the young folk had invited her brothers and sisters to "spend Christmas with her and cheer her up." "Do you think Uncle Ike," Mollie began; but, at a kick under the table, she turned to Ma, "do you think Uncle Ike will ever come back?"

"Land sakes, no, whatever put that into your head, child? Who'd leave California to come back here an' freeze to death?"

"Well, I reckon most folks wants to go to California some time," commented John Henry, "but I guess the old farm ain't so bad after all, when the crops is fair an' that's most generally. They's still plenty o' firewood and they's apples an' turnips an' 'taters an' a few other things in the cellar. Bossy an' Baldy ain't failed us yet an' they's plenty o' meat in the smoke-house. Oranges an' fresh lettuce is mighty fine, but they don't lay heavy on yer stomach."

"Sour grapes," chided Sue. "You know you'd love to go out there an' see all them purty flowers an' zo swimmin' at Christmas time an' never have to go out in the cold to do the chores." "Danged if I would," responded the loyal one, "the old farm's good enough for me. Christmas ain't no proper time fer swimmin', now, an' I ain't never been hurt doin' chores."

Throughout the meal, the young people continued their banter; then John Henry followed the girls to the kitchen. "They's tracks around the barn," he confided; "don't scare ma, but it might be that half-wit hired man I fired last fall—up to the Lord knows what! You gals keep to the house an' don't let no stranger in." Apprehensive of the worst, they promised.

Presently the sky cleared. Sunshine and melting snow were making roads more impassable throughout the day.



"Ain't Breakfast Ready Yet?" Complained Ma.

That night as they sat around the fire-place, a gust of wind overburdened the snow on the roof and a portion slid to the ground with a thud and the rattle of breaking icicles. The girls screamed. Realizing their nervousness was due to the tracks around the barn, John Henry laughed heartily, set some apples roasting on the hearth, by way of diversion, and cracked black walnuts on the side of a flat-iron. Sue fretted about "all them mince pies"; Ma said it was a shame they'd killed both turkeys, and Mollie declared she was never "so put out in her life."

Suddenly the wind howled angrily. "Golly, Ma, it's gettin' cold again. Bet y' it'll crust the snow over to-night." "Like as not," Ma agreed, and the driving wind continued. John Henry added a log to the fire and began shelling popcorn. Sue nudged her sister. "He means 'make the popcorn balls.'" Mollie began to sing "Al-

though we cross the ocean blue, no friends we'll find one-half so true."

John Henry carried a shovel of glowing coals to the kitchen and started a fire. Going to the door he examined the gun and set it near. "He don't like them tracks, Mollie," Sue confided over the boiling sirup. "I'll bet it is that half-wit." Their eyes grew big and round.

Early to bed and whistling wind brought restful sleep and with morning came sleigh bells. Mollie scratched a peep-hole in the fantastic frost forest on the window pane. "It's Uncle Jimmie and Mary Ann. Meet 'em quick an' tell 'em not to let Ma catch on." "Bet y' we're first ones here," he began, but Sue cautioned him as he gave her a snowy hug.

By the time Uncle Hiram and Aunt Betsy and their Ethelbert and Aunt Emerline and Hannah had arrived, Ma had begun to surmise; but at the next familiar jingle, she actually arose and peered out the window herself. "Fer the land sakes, if it ain't Sister Catherine and Sary Jane and Billy all the way from Pike county. Johnnie, what are you children up to anyhow? Who else is comin'?"

"Depends on the weather, Ma. Reckon you've guessed it's your party." Ma dropped into her chair, speechless, and began puffing vigorously on her pipe. Her eyes told them she was almost happy.

By noon they were there, those brothers and sisters and their children. Some had traveled many miles. Of course, they couldn't expect Ike; but he was often in their thoughts and conversation. "Guess Ike's about forgot what Christmas back home is like," some one ventured.

But Ike had not forgotten. He had long been yearning for a "sight of God's country and some real snow." As soon as he heard of the reunion he decided to eat turkey back home. Ike had gone out West with the forty-niners—hadn't found much gold; but the city had spread out all over his land and he had "got rich in spite of himself."

Down on the farm the dinner table presented a typical feast of the early eighties. "Turkey's done. Where's Johnnie?" said Mary Ann, taking up a hot mince pie. "I'll get 'im." Impulsive Mollie, forgetful of his warning, ran to the barn. No sooner had



In the End All Agreed With the Scotch Proverb.

she stepped inside than she saw the "half-wit" dash out into the corral. She screamed. A moment later she heard an intensified "gosh" and a scuffle in the frozen snow. Grasping a pitchfork, she started to follow when a rough hand caught her and pulled her back. Blindly she fought—like a young tigress—biting and scratching. Through the barn door came John Henry half dragging his victim.

"See, you don't need no help," said the man who held Mollie in his grasp. "Was comin' but this young wildcat gave me too much to do. Reckon you're John Henry and this one o' Samantha's gals, I'm your Uncle Ike—just dropped in for that Christmas dinner. But that varmint you're draggin' in, you'd oughta finished him." "You don't say so! You know who he is?" asked John Henry. "Reckon if you'd took a second look you'd a knowed yourself." With a loud guffaw, he caught the now reviving young man by the arm and said, "George, meet your affectionate brother and acknowledge your hearty welcome home."

"Well, I'll be goned! Thank the Lord I didn't have the gun!" Hugging and shaking his brother alternately, John Henry added, "It's sure one on us, Mollie." He explained how he had been "layin' fer the barn loft boarder" when he heard her scream and caught the man whom he fully expected to be the "half wit." Mollie said she'd "a swore it was him."

After the war George had heard that the family were driven out by Order No. 11. Not knowing where to find them, he went to California hoping to find his uncle and obtain news. His long search ended just as Ike consummated his plans for Christmas; so they decided to make the trip together and "give 'em a big surprise." Arriving aforetime, they slept in the hay and spent a day hunting down by the river. "Our horses are down in the old corn crib," he concluded, "and here we are—a fine looking pair to present at the banquet table."

Disheveled they were—but oh, how welcome!

Ma looked twenty years younger. Uncle Ike told his dreams of remodeling the old home; Ma said she wouldn't have "none o' them new-fangled things" in her house. Ike and George finally decided to stay and help harvest the spring wheat. John Henry conceded he might go back with them and pick some oranges off the trees. So: home and California went round the long table. In the end all agreed with the old Scotch proverb, "East or West, home's best." But many a grandchild heard the tale of the wanderers' unusual welcome home for Christmas.

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The Biggs' Big Christmas

By Martha Banning Thomas

THE Biggs family were holding a consultation. There were nine of them, counting father and mother, and they sat in a somewhat solemn circle before an open fire.

"The whole truth of the matter is," said Father Biggs, "that we have no money to spend on Christmas. The amount I saved has been used to pay for Danny's hospital bills. There is coal to buy this month and new shingles to put on the roof unless we all want to drown when we have rain."

Mother Biggs glanced wistfully around the circle of children. It was hard.

"Oh, well," said Eliza tossing her black, short curls, "Who cares? We're all well now," she looked at Danny who smiled bravely back, "and we can rig up something without money. Don't let's look like a row of tombstones."

This made them laugh—even mother. And next day every Biggs tried valiantly to behave as if stockings were going to be filled on Christmas morning with more gifts than they knew what to do with.

But Danny was particularly troubled. It was because of his sickness that the rest of the family were being deprived of their rightful presents. He felt that it was up to him to do something. He must contrive to get eight gifts by hook or crook.

But how? He thought about it steadily for five hours.

"Danny, you haven't taken your boat in yet from the river," said Mrs. Biggs at noon lunch. "Soon it will be frozen in the water. You'd better run down and drag it up on shore this afternoon. Turn it over. I saved a big piece of old canvas you can cover it with. You'd miss having that row-boat next summer if it got ruined now."

Danny promised he would see about it.

Mrs. Biggs went to the church sewing society at two o'clock. Several other Biggesses disappeared on various errands. Danny walked across the fields to hunt his boat in the little stream which flowed out of the Connecticut river.

It was a cold, raw afternoon. A fine rain drizzled down. Danny stubbed along over the rough ground still thinking, not of his boat, but presents—and how to get some.

As he neared the spot where his row boat was tied his eye lighted up on a large wooden box. It was tilted up on end and frozen in the mud. It was filled with something—small objects seemed to be bursting out of the cracks.

Danny hurried forward. He leaned over the box. He poked a finger inside a large crack. The box was partly ripped apart. Some of the boards were missing. It was water soaked. Danny's finger came in contact with other pasteboard boxes of all sizes. "I wonder what this is and where it came from?" he said aloud.

There was an address in heavy

black paint on the top. Danny read it. It was of some shipping firm in a town in Vermont. Slowly the boy thought it all out. This box must have been washed away in the terrible flood. It had floated two hundred miles down the Connecticut river and had been cast up by the tide on the shore of the small river. It must have been here for some time.

Danny managed to draw out one small box. The colors were faded and blotched. But on lifting the cover Danny discovered a neat array of toilet articles. They were hardly damaged, being for the most part in metal cans and tubes. Talcum powder! Toothpaste! Shaving soap! Cold cream! Vanishing cream! Face powder in gold boxes!

Danny felt weak with excitement. He knew now where his Christmas presents were coming from. He also knew he had a perfect right to take these things, because they were unclaimed, damaged goods—and he was the finder!

He ran home as fast as his legs would carry him. He must let one other person into the secret, to help carry the things home. They must work fast before the rest of the family returned.

He found Eliza looking blue and darning socks beside the fire. In no time they were both scudding down across the fields. They spent a breathless afternoon tugging a clothes basket full of the toilet articles back to the house. Eliza worked like a Trojan. Her hands flew; she had more ideas than you could shake a stick at, and she stopped three times to powder her nose out of a little golden box!

Three times they made trips from the house down to the box beached on the shore. They were worn and completely happy. They hid the treasures in the woodshed . . . and Mrs. Biggs said she had never seen Danny look so dirty in his life. Eliza threw him a glance and burst

into laughter, but they could get nothing out of her. She was mum as an oyster! Christmas morning Danny and Eliza dragged every Biggs out of bed at six o'clock. They came sleepily downstairs, a little cross and shuffling in their slippers.

Danny and Eliza threw open the living room doors. A row of bulging stockings hung from the mantel piece. A bright fire crackled on the hearth. A Christmas tree stood near by heavy with gifts.

Such squeals and grunts! Such laughter! Such an onrush to clasp a nobby stocking to a surprised breast. Presents for every one. Presents every one needed and could use. Dozens and dozens of presents.

"We won't tell a single thing until every one has opened all their gifts," announced Danny, his eyes shining like stars. "I was the one who made you lose your Christmas because I was sick, and now I give it back to you again."

"Now son," said Father Biggs when the last string was untied, the last paper unwrapped, "Tell us how you did it."

So Danny, standing by the fire in his woolen pajamas, with a box of talcum powder in one hand and a cake of soap in the other, related his experiences in finding the box. Eliza helped out when he ran out of breath.

"The very merriest Christmas we have ever had!" said Mother Biggs and kissed Danny on the forehead. At this point several younger Biggesses had to be restrained from a gay, roaucous battle of throwing talcum powder.

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Christmas
Christmas means friendship, the thought of the absent, and at least a momentary forgetting of ourselves.