



Little Hans' Christmas Tree

Translated from the Swedish of Jenny Brown

UP ON the hill, a short distance from the hut stood a lonely pine tree, that father had promised to cut down on Christmas eve. It was so beautiful, where it stood, and stretched its dark green branches over the white snow. Hans walked round and round it and looked at it from all sides. It had grown so even, and was just high enough to find room under the low roof of the hut. In his imagination the little six-year-old saw it in all its beauty, with gilt paper stars, ginger bread hearts, rosy-cheeked apples and lighted candles.

"Poor as I am, Hans," father had said, "you shall have a Christmas tree, and fine it shall be, that I promise you."

And how the little child's heart palpitated with pleasure and expectation! Father had gone into town and was not expected to return before noon. Would he be long in bringing back all the beautiful things he was to buy at the same time he was getting the other Christmas things for mother? Time and again Hans went out on the doorsteps and looked down the long, snowy road. At length father was seen in the distance. Hans started to meet him, and was permitted to carry the package father said was his.

But how tired and pale father looked. He did not feel well, he said, but Hans must not worry over that. It was only a result of the hard labor that he now began to feel. It would soon pass away. And Hans believed that, too. "Mother, father has come," cried Hans, and pushed the door wide open.

The noonday meal was ready. But father could not eat anything, and laid himself down on the wooden bench and complained of pains in his chest. Mother laid aside the bag of rice and the coffee and sugar father had brought home. Father was ill! He had to admit it; he was suffering more pain than he would tell. Mother compelled him to go to bed and prepared a darning saturated with turpentine that she spread on the chest. It was too bad that he should be taken sick, and on Christmas eve, but there was no help for it. In his rejoicing over the beautiful things for the Christmas tree, little Hans for a few moments did not think of father. But when he looked to the bed where father was lying, moaning with pain, Hans did as mother had done. He pushed aside the beautiful Christmas tree things and knelt down by the bed.

"Poor father!" and with his little hands he stroked the bearded cheeks. "Don't worry, my boy; you shall have your Christmas tree. Speak to Neighbor Jerker, and he will help you."

This was all well and good, but father was ill, and the Christmas pleasure spoiled. And such a Christmas that they had expected! Last year they had no means to provide for a Christmas tree or any extra pleasure. "I am going to the doctor," said mother, as she tied the shawl over her head.

"You stay with father, Hans; I will hurry back soon."

The doctor did not live very far away. He did not like to be disturbed on Christmas eve, but he wrote out a prescription after finding out from the

woman what the symptoms were. To visit the sick man was not to be expected of the doctor on Christmas eve. "Give him this every two hours and the pain will soon pass away. It is, well, as it is Christmas eve, I will only charge fifty ore"—he had the right to demand a crown, but he felt charitable, and the poor woman's last silver piece landed in the doctor's pocket. He did not inquire if she had any money left for the medicine, and she did not care to tell him that it was her last piece of money, and that father had spent his last crown for the things to decorate little Hans' Christmas tree. She also had her pride, and she knew what remarks would be made. Poor men's children have no right to pleasures or luxuries. The gingerbread and candies and apples would be considered an awful waste and extravagance. To the doctor's children it would have looked a poor pleasure, but for her own little boy it was a sinful luxury. How different God provided for the people in this world, was the poor woman's thought, as, heavy hearted, she walked home with the prescription in her hand. Had the poor no right to have

about his Christmas tree, and he had promised them that they should see it in all its beauty and splendor on Christmas eve. Now he would affect indifference and pretend that he did not care for a Christmas tree, but would sell it in town, so father could get money for medicine.

Jerker, the eldest of the neighbor's children, cut down the tree. Hans was crying, but stoutly swallowed his tears and made Jerker promise him to tell his mother that Hans had gone to town to buy a Christmas present. The mother was very much surprised. Where could Hans have got the money. She could not understand it. Jerker did not know. He only told her what Hans had told him, and that he would not return before evening, and they must not worry about him.

How cold little Hans felt, and how that little heart of his felt heavy and sorrowful. Young as he was, he had already learned a lesson from life's story—the lesson of self-denial. He felt cold, his coat was short and threadbare, the shoes in poor condition and his mittens full of holes. But he knew that Christmas eve would bring him a new pair of mittens. From his bed in the hut at night he had seen mother knitting a pair of mittens that were too small for father. So, surely, they must be for him.

But with all his sorrow there was a warm glow at his heart. Was he not wealthy? He had sold his Christmas tree for two large silver crowns. Had bought the medicine for father and had a large silver crown left as a Christmas gift for mother. God had helped him. Had not mother said that God watches over little children, and had he not sent a wealthy lady that had given him two large silver crowns for his tree, notwithstanding he had been told it was not worth fifty ore?

A little golden-haired girl had met him in the beautiful richly furnished room where he had brought the tree. It was placed on a table, and the little girl was greatly pleased over the tree. He wondered if the little girl had known why he had sold his tree, and that all of his Christmas pleasure was lost, would she have been just as highly pleased? He followed her with

other child had his tree. He thought of his tree as a living being, and that it felt the separation as much as he.

But now he was home. Father slept and mother was at the hearth preparing the evening meal.

"Hans, where have you been?" inquired mother.

"Into town, mother, and I have a Christmas present for father."

"You? Where did you get it? Have you money, Hans?" inquired the mother in her astonishment as Hans placed the bottle of medicine on the table.

"Where did you get it, boy?"

Hans inclined his head, and smilingly pushed his mother toward the window. He drew away the curtain and pointed to the hill. Mother could look out in the starlight night and at once noticed that the tree was gone. Yes, she saw plainly that little Hans' Christmas tree was not there. She understood it all; she could read it in the big blue eyes that sparkled up toward her. She lifted the child in her arms and pressed him toward her, too deeply moved to find words for her feelings. But she felt so happy, so proud that this was her child, and the poor mother in all her poverty and humility would not have exchanged her lot for a queen's coronet.

"Mother, I have a Christmas present for you also," whispered Hans, and placed the silver crown in her hand.

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Chilkoot Pete—"Frost-bitten toes."

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A Christmas Cross.

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Yet Christmas-tide can clothe the fir In splendors all unguessed, And bring to every suffering heart Its joy, its peace, its rest.

God rest you, then, my gentle friend, And take your cross away, Or clothe it with a radiance new, On this glad Christmas Day. —Willis Boyd Allen, in Youth's Companion.

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She talks that way, 'cause she's old, you know, An' her hair is whiter than whitest snow, An' she thinks that her time is come to go To a Christmas in the skies.

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"Oh, I don't believe the medicine will do me any good, and we will just let it alone."

The mother understood, and she could not keep back her tears. Father had no money left for the medicine. "Don't cry, mother, don't cry," exclaimed little Hans, as he tried to pull the mother down to him by her dress. "Father should not have bought the things for the Christmas tree, then he could have got the medicine. I understand that well enough," remarked little Hans, with a precocious mien.

"No, no, Hans, it would not have helped me," interrupted father from his place in the bed. "But thank you for your kind heart. You shall have your Christmas tree as I promised you."

Little Hans went out of the hut and ran to his tree on the hill. He walked around it, and the tears came in his eyes. But he wiped them away with the back of his hand. No, he must not cry; he must not feel or show any sorrow over the sacrifice that would bring gladness and blessing to the home. He put his hands in his pockets and tried to look glad and free from care when he entered the neighbor's hut. The children had for weeks heard him brag

about his Christmas tree, and he had promised them that they should see it in all its beauty and splendor on Christmas eve. Now he would affect indifference and pretend that he did not care for a Christmas tree, but would sell it in town, so father could get money for medicine.

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Little Hans went out of the hut and ran to his tree on the hill. He walked around it, and the tears came in his eyes. But he wiped them away with the back of his hand. No, he must not cry; he must not feel or show any sorrow over the sacrifice that would bring gladness and blessing to the home. He put his hands in his pockets and tried to look glad and free from care when he entered the neighbor's hut. The children had for weeks heard him brag

about his Christmas tree, and he had promised them that they should see it in all its beauty and splendor on Christmas eve. Now he would affect indifference and pretend that he did not care for a Christmas tree, but would sell it in town, so father could get money for medicine.

Jerker, the eldest of the neighbor's children, cut down the tree. Hans was crying, but stoutly swallowed his tears and made Jerker promise him to tell his mother that Hans had gone to town to buy a Christmas present. The mother was very much surprised. Where could Hans have got the money. She could not understand it. Jerker did not know. He only told her what Hans had told him, and that he would not return before evening, and they must not worry about him.

How cold little Hans felt, and how that little heart of his felt heavy and sorrowful. Young as he was, he had already learned a lesson from life's story—the lesson of self-denial. He felt cold, his coat was short and threadbare, the shoes in poor condition and his mittens full of holes. But he knew that Christmas eve would bring him a new pair of mittens. From his bed in the hut at night he had seen mother knitting a pair of mittens that were too small for father. So, surely, they must be for him.

But with all his sorrow there was a warm glow at his heart. Was he not wealthy? He had sold his Christmas tree for two large silver crowns. Had bought the medicine for father and had a large silver crown left as a Christmas gift for mother. God had helped him. Had not mother said that God watches over little children, and had he not sent a wealthy lady that had given him two large silver crowns for his tree, notwithstanding he had been told it was not worth fifty ore?

A little golden-haired girl had met him in the beautiful richly furnished room where he had brought the tree. It was placed on a table, and the little girl was greatly pleased over the tree. He wondered if the little girl had known why he had sold his tree, and that all of his Christmas pleasure was lost, would she have been just as highly pleased? He followed her with

other child had his tree. He thought of his tree as a living being, and that it felt the separation as much as he.

But now he was home. Father slept and mother was at the hearth preparing the evening meal.

"Hans, where have you been?" inquired mother.

"Into town, mother, and I have a Christmas present for father."

"You? Where did you get it? Have you money, Hans?" inquired the mother in her astonishment as Hans placed the bottle of medicine on the table.

"Where did you get it, boy?"

Hans inclined his head, and smilingly pushed his mother toward the window. He drew away the curtain and pointed to the hill. Mother could look out in the starlight night and at once noticed that the tree was gone. Yes, she saw plainly that little Hans' Christmas tree was not there. She understood it all; she could read it in the big blue eyes that sparkled up toward her. She lifted the child in her arms and pressed him toward her, too deeply moved to find words for her feelings. But she felt so happy, so proud that this was her child, and the poor mother in all her poverty and humility would not have exchanged her lot for a queen's coronet.

"Mother, I have a Christmas present for you also," whispered Hans, and placed the silver crown in her hand.

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