

A Brother Like That

A friend of mine named Paul received a new car from his brother as a pre-Christmas present. On Christmas Eve, when Paul came out of his office, a street urchin was walking around the shiny new car, admiring it.

“Is this your car, mister?” he asked.

Paul nodded. “My brother gave it to me for Christmas.”

The boy looked astounded. “You mean your brother gave it to you, and it didn’t cost you anything? Gosh, I wish.....”

He hesitated, and Paul knew what he was going to wish. He was going to wish he had a brother like that. But what the lad said jarred Paul all the way down to his heels.

“I wish,” the boy went on, “that I could be a brother like that.”

Paul looked at the boy in astonishment, then impulsively added, “Would you like a ride in my new car?”

“Oh, yes, I’d love that!”

After a short ride the urchin turned, and with his eyes aglow said, “Mister, would you mind driving in front of my house?”

Paul smiled a little. He thought he knew what the lad wanted. He wanted to show his neighbors that he could ride home in a big automobile. But Paul was wrong again.

“Will you stop right where those steps are?” the boy asked. He ran up the steps. Then in a little while, Paul heard him coming back, but he was not coming fast. He was carrying his little polio-crippled brother. He sat down on the bottom step, then sort of squeezed up right against him and pointed to the car.

“There she is, Buddy, just like I told you upstairs. His brother gave it to him for Christmas and it didn’t cost him a cent, and someday I’m gonna give you one just like it; then you can see for yourself all the pretty things in the Christmas windows that I’ve been trying to tell you about.”

Paul got out and lifted the little lad into the front seat of his car. The shining-eyed older brother climbed in beside him and the three of them began a memorable holiday ride.

That Christmas Eve, Paul learned what Jesus meant when He said, *“It is more blessed to give.....”*

The Man Who Missed Christmas

by J. Edgar Park

It was Christmas Eve; and, as usual, George Mason was the last to leave the office. He walked over to a massive safe, spun the dials, swung the heavy door open. Making sure the door would not close behind him, he stepped inside.

A square of white cardboard was taped just above the topmost row of strongboxes. On the card a few words were written. George Mason stared at those words, remembering....

Exactly one year ago he had entered this self-same vault. And then, behind his back, slowly, noiselessly, the ponderous door swung shut. He was trapped—entombed in the sudden and terrifying dark.

He hurled himself at the unyielding door, his hoarse cry sounding like an explosion. Through his mind flashed all the stories he had heard of men found suffocated in time vaults. No clock controlled this mechanism; the safe would remain locked until it was opened from the outside. Tomorrow morning.

Then realization hit him. No one would come tomorrow—tomorrow was Christmas.

Once more he flung himself at the door, shouting wildly, until he sank on his knees exhausted. Silence came, high-pitched, singing silence that seemed deafening. More than thirty-six hours would pass before anyone came—thirty-six hours in a steel box three feet wide, eight feet long, seven feet high. Would the oxygen last? Perspiring and breathing heavily, he felt his way around the floor. Then, in the far right-hand corner, just above the floor, he found a small circular opening. Quickly he thrust his finger into it and felt, faint but unmistakable, a cool current of air.

The tension release was so sudden that he burst into tears. But at last he sat up. Surely he would not have to stay trapped for the full thirty-six hours. Somebody would miss him. But who? He was unmarried and lived alone. The maid who cleaned his apartment was just a servant; he had always treated her as such. He had been invited to spend Christmas Eve with his brother's family; but the children got on his nerves and expected presents.

A friend had asked him to go to a home for elderly people on Christmas Day and play the piano—George Mason was a good musician. But he had made some excuse or other; he had intended to sit at home, listening to some new recordings he was giving himself.

George Mason dug his nails into the palms of his hands until the pain balanced the misery in his mind. Nobody would come and let him out, nobody, nobody, nobody...

Miserably the whole of Christmas Day went by, and the succeeding night.

On the morning after Christmas the head clerk came into the office at the usual time, opened the safe, then went on into his private office.

No one saw George Mason stagger out into the corridor, run to the water cooler, and drink great gulps of water. No one paid any attention to him as he left and took a taxi home.

Then he shaved, changed his wrinkled clothes, ate breakfast and returned to his office where his employees greeted him casually.

That day he met several acquaintances and talked to his own brother. Grimly, the truth closed in on George Mason. He had vanished from human society during the great festival of brotherhood; no one had missed him at all.

Reluctantly, George Mason began to think about the true meaning of Christmas. Was it possible that he had been blind all these years with selfishness, indifference, pride? Was not giving, after all, the essence of Christmas because it marked the time God gave His son to the world?

All through the year that followed, with little hesitant deeds of kindness, with small, unnoticed acts of unselfishness, George Mason tried to prepare himself....

Now, once more, it was Christmas Eve.

Slowly he backed out of the safe, closed it. He touched its grim steel face lightly, almost affectionately, and left the office.

There he goes now in his black overcoat and hat, the same George Mason as a year ago. Or it is? He walks a few blocks, then flags a taxi, anxious not to be late. His nephews are expecting him to help them trim the tree. Afterwards, he is taking his brother and his sister-in-law to a Christmas play. Why is he so happy? Why does this jostling against others, laden as he is with bundles, exhilarate and delight him?

Perhaps the card has something to do with it, the card he taped inside his office safe last New Years' Day. On the card is written, in George Mason's own hand:

“To love people, to be indispensable somewhere, that is the purpose of life. That is the secret of happiness.”

Waiting.....Waiting for Christmas

by Elizabeth English

Herman and I finally locked our store and dragged ourselves home. It was 11 p.m. Christmas Eve. We'd sold almost all of our toys; and all of the layaway, except one package, had been picked up. But the person who had put a dollar down on that package never appeared.

Early Christmas morning our 12 year old son, Tom, Herman and I were out under the tree opening up gifts. But there was something humdrum about this Christmas. Tom was grown up, and I missed his childish exuberance of past years. As soon as breakfast was over, he left to visit friends and Herman disappeared into the bedroom, mumbling, "I'm going back to sleep."

So there I was alone. It was nearly 9 a.m. Sleet mixed with snow cut the air outside. "Sure glad I don't have to go out on a day like today," I thought to myself. And then it began—something I'd never experienced before. A strange, persistent urge. "Go to the store," it seemed to say. "That's crazy," I said to myself, "no one opens shop on Christmas day." For an hour I fought that strange feeling. Finally, I could stand it no longer. I got dressed. I put on my wool coat, placed my hat on my head, then my galoshes, scarf and gloves. Once outside, the wind cut right through me and sleet stung my cheeks. I felt ridiculous. I had no business being out in the bitter chill.

There was the store just ahead. "But, what in the world?" I wondered. In front of the store stood two little boys—huddled together, poorly dressed, and half frozen. One was about nine, the other six.

"Here she comes!" yelled the older one. "See, I told you she would come," he said. The younger one's face was wet with tears, but when he saw me his eyes opened wide and his sobbing stopped.

"What are you two children doing out here?" I scolded, hurrying them into the store.

"We've been waiting for you," replied the older. "My little brother Jimmy didn't get any Christmas. We want to buy some skates. That's what he wants."

I looked at the three dollars in his hand and at their expectant faces. Then I looked around the store. "I'm sorry" I said, "but we have no ska...." Then my eye caught sight of the layaway shelf with its lone package. Could it be? I walked over and unwrapped the package. Miracles of miracles, there was a pair of skates!

Jimmy reached for them. "Lord," I said silently, "let them be his size." And miracle added upon miracle. They were his size. When the older boy finished tying the laces and saw that the skates fit perfectly, he stood up and presented the dollars to me.

“No, I’m not going to take your money,” I told him. “I want you to have these skates and use your money to get some gloves for your hands.” What I saw in Jimmy’s eyes was like a blessing. It was pure joy, and it was beautiful. My low spirits rose.

As I locked the door, I turned to the older brother and said, “How lucky that I happened to come along when I did. How did you boys know I would come?”

I wasn’t prepared for his reply. His gaze was steady, and he answered me softly. “I knew you would come. I asked Jesus to send you.”

The tingles in my spine weren’t from the cold. I knew God had planned this. As we waved good-bye, I returned home to a brighter Christmas than I had left.

Christmas Day in the Morning

Pearl S. Buck

He woke up suddenly and completely! It was four o'clock, the hour at which his father had always called him to get up and help with the milking. Strange how the habits of his youth clung to him still! Fifty years ago, and his father had been dead for thirty years, and yet he waked at four o'clock in the morning. He had trained himself to turn over and go to sleep, but this morning it was Christmas, he did not try to sleep.

Why did he feel so awake tonight? He slipped back in time, as he did so easily nowadays. He was fifteen years old and still on his father's farm. He love his father. He had not know it until one day a few days before Christmas, when he had overheard what his father was saying to his mother.

"Mary, I hate to call Rob in the mornings. He's growing so fast and he needs his sleep. If you could just see how he sleeps when I go in to wake him up! I wish I could manage alone."

"Well, you can't, Adam." His mother's voice was brisk, "Besides, he isn't a child anymore. It's time he took his turn."

"Yes," his father said slowly. "But I sure do hate to wake him."

When he heard these words, something in him woke: his father loved him! He had never thought of it before, taking for granted the tie of their blood. Neither his father nor his mother talked about loving their children—they had no time for such things. There was always so much to do on the farm.

Now that he knew his father loved him, there would be no loitering in the mornings and having to be called again. He got up after that, stumbling blind with sleep, and pulled on his clothes, his eyes tight shut, but he got up.

And then on the night before Christmas, that year when he was fifteen, he lay for a few minutes thinking about the next day. They were poor, and most of the excitement was in the turkey they had raised themselves and the mince pies his mother made. His sister sewed presents and his mother and father always bought something he needed, not only a warm jacket, maybe, but something more, such as a book. And he saved and bought them each something, too.

He wished, that Christmas he was fifteen, he had a better present for his father. As usual he had gone to the ten-cent store and bought a tie. It had seemed nice enough until he lay thinking the night before Christmas. He looked out of his attic window, the stars were bright.

"Dad," he had once asked when he was a little boy, "what is a stable?"

"It's just a barn," his father had replied, "like ours."

Then Jesus had been born in a barn, and to a barn the shepherds had come...

The thought struck him like a silver dagger. Why should he not give his father a special gift too, out there in the barn? He could get up early, earlier than four o'clock and he could creep into the barn and get all the milking done. He'd do it alone, milk and clean up, and then when his father went in to start the milking he'd see it all done. And he would know who had done it. He laughed to himself as he gazed at the stars. It was what he would do, and he mustn't sleep too soundly.

He must have awakened twenty times, scratching a match each time to look at his old watch—midnight, and half past one, and then two o'clock.

At a quarter to three he got up and put on his clothes. He crept downstairs, careful of the creaky boards, and let himself out. The cows looked at him, sleepy and surprised. It was early for them, too.

He had never milked all alone before, but it seemed almost easy. He kept thinking about his father's surprise. His father would come in and get him, saying that he would get things started while Rob was getting dressed. He'd go to the barn, open the door, and then he'd go to get the two big empty milk cans. But they wouldn't be waiting or empty; they'd be standing in the milkhouse filled.

"What the—," he could hear his father exclaiming.

He smiled and milked steadily, two strong streams rushing into the pail, frothing and fragrant.

The task went more easily than he had ever known it to go before. Milking for once was not a chore. It was something else, a gift to his father who loved him. He finished, the two milk cans were full, and he covered them and closed the milkhouse door carefully, making sure of the latch. Back in his room he had only a minute to pull off his clothes in the darkness and jump into bed, for he heard his father up. He put the covers over his head to silence his quick breathing. The door opened.

"Rob!" His father called. "We have to get up, son, even if it is Christmas."

"Aw-right," he said sleepily.

The door closed and he lay still, laughing to himself. In just a few minutes his father would know. His dancing heart was ready to jump from his body. The minutes were endless—ten, fifteen, he did not know how many—then he heard his father's footsteps again. The door opened and he lay still.

"Rob!"

"Yes, Dad—"

His father was laughing a queer sobbing sort of laugh.

“Thought you’d fool me, did you? His father was standing beside his bed, feeling for him, pulling away the cover.

“It’s for Christmas, Dad!”

He found his father and clutched him in a great hug. He felt his father’s arms go around him. It was dark and they could not see each other’s faces.

“Son, I thank you. Nobody ever did a nicer thing—”

“Oh, Dad, I want you to know—I do want to be good.” The words broke from him of their own will. He did not know what to do. His heart was bursting with love. He got up and pulled on his clothes again and they went down to the Christmas tree. Oh, what a Christmas, and how his heart had nearly burst again with shyness and pride as his father told his mother and made the younger children listen about how he, Rob, had got up all by himself.

“The best Christmas gift I ever had, and I’ll remember it, son, every year on Christmas morning, so long as I live.” They had both remembered it, and now that his father was dead, he remembered it alone: that blessed Christmas dawn when alone with the cows in the barn, he had made his first gift of true love.

This Christmas he wanted to write a card to his wife and tell how much he loved her, it had been a long time since he had really told her, although he loved her in a very special way, much more than he ever had when they were young. He had been fortunate that she loved him. Ah, that was the true joy of life, the ability to love! Love was still alive in him, it still was.

It occurred to him suddenly that it was alive because long ago it had been born in him when he knew his father loved him. That was it: Love alone could awaken love. And he could give the gift again and again. This morning, this blessed Christmas morning, he would give it to his beloved wife. He could write it down in a letter for her to read and keep forever. He went to his desk and began his love letter to his wife: My dearest love.....

Such a happy, happy Christmas!

Emma's Christmas Wish

by Sallyann F. Murphey

Outside, snow tumbled down, piling against gates and doorways, obliterating the road, and filling the old farmhouse with opalescent light. Inside, all was quiet—except for the whisper of voices upstairs: “Rosie, please... We *must* have Christmas, and how can we do that without the Christmas book?”

“But Dad told us we couldn't this year. No Christmas, no cookies, no carols, no...anything...” The seven-year-old's bottom lip began to quiver.

The owner of the first voice sighed. She was an attractive thirteen-year-old, with a mane of tawny curls and bright green eyes, which now gazed compassionately at her small sister.

“That's not what he said,” Emma corrected her gently. “What he said was that Mom won't be coming home.”

The past few weeks had been hard on both girls. In early November their mother, Jan, had taken to her bed. Just before Thanksgiving, she'd been whisked off to a hospital a hundred miles away for what Dad mysteriously called “tests.” They hadn't seen her since.

“Rosie's too young to visit,” Ben Metcalfe had explained, “and I'm relying on you, Emma, to look after her while I'm gone.” Then yesterday he'd delivered the bad news: Their mother was very sick and might not be back for months.

“I think Dad's wrong,” Emma said now. “I'm convinced that we can get Mom home.”

Her sister looked at her with huge eyes.

“Last night, I dreamed we were having Christmas like always, except we were doing the work—not Mom. We did everything just the way she likes it. Then, on Christmas Eve, we heard a voice saying what good children we'd been. It was her, Rosie—and she told us that our work had made her well. I'm sure that if we can pull Christmas together, Mom'll be here to enjoy it.”

The little girl nodded solemnly. “OK. Where do we begin?”

“Well, let's start by finding the book.”

As the sisters searched through dusty attic boxes, Emma tried to cheer Rosie along. “Remember last year—when Mom was making gingerbread?” she reminisced. “The air was this wonderful mix of smells: pine needles, spices, warm sugar...”

“...and don't forget Mom's scent,” Rosie added.

Emma smiled. It was their mother's only indulgence—a carryover from her big city beginnings as a career woman in a business suit. These days, Jan Metcalfe dressed in sneakers and jeans, but she couldn't give up that daily dab of perfume.

"I can just see her," Emma mused, "dancing between bubbling pots and all those bowls, mixing and stirring, checking her recipes again and again..."

"Those recipes...." Rosie echoed. "Emma!" she burst out, "I bet the scrapbook's in the kitchen!"

The girls flew downstairs.

The family scrapbook, or album, had been started six generations before, when their great-great-great-great-grandmother Marianne first wrote in the ledger she had brought with her from France.

She did this in 1835, when the family was living in the log cabin that once stood where the farmhouse stood today. The circumstances were a matter of record because Marianne had included a diary entry about her new home, preceding some instructions for wheat bread. Since then, all Metcalfe wives had taken their turn, contributing favorite recipes and crafts and short paragraphs about their lives. Their mother added to it often and, as the girls now discovered, kept it in a kitchen drawer.

They settled down to read it, passing over yellowed pages until they came to their mom's distinctive scrawl. Then Emma found what she'd hoped for—Jan's "Countdown to Christmas: A Guide to Holiday Plans."

"Here it is," she said. "A blueprint we can follow."

The moment they finished school, the girls began working through their mother's list. Step one was to "give everything a thorough cleaning," and they went at it with a will. In the evenings, they gravitated to the kitchen where they used the album to put together their Christmas menus.

Some dishes, they learned, were decided on generations back. Roast beef and Yorkshire pudding, for instance, had been the main meal at Christmas since Nana Jessie arrived from Britain after World War II. The little crocks of rumtopf (fruits preserved in liquor) that were prepared each summer for use as Christmas gifts were a custom that their great-great-grandmother Anna had brought with her from Germany in 1889. She had also given the family their treasured recipe for christollen bread. The onion soup they still ate on Christmas Eve had been invented by Great-Grandma Kathleen during the Depression, when that was all the food they had.

"I'm glad she did," Rosie exclaimed. "Can we have it again this year?"

"Of course!" Emma assured her. "Remember, for this to work we have to stick to Mom's plan."

“I know, but we’ve also got to make macaroons, vanilla fudge, marzipan, Turkish delight, coconut ice, and peppermint creams,” Rosie declared. “And don’t forget the sugar cookies, shortbread, and Nana Jessie’s Battenberg cake.”

“Rosie, we’ve got only three weeks!” Emma reminded her. “And we need time for the gingerbread village.”

“You’re not going to try that?” Rosie was incredulous.

“Why not? Mom makes one every year,” Emma replied.

For the next few days, the kitchen came alive with the sounds of clinking bowls, crashing pans, and bursts of helpless giggles. Emma was a good cook—she had won a fistful of ribbons at the county fair—but the girls still had their share of disasters. Pastry burned, sponge cake sank, and the christollen bread almost blew the oven door off.

“Watch out!” Rosie shrieked. “It’s going to explode.” Both girls stared at the balloon of dough that hissed and heaved against the oven window.

Emma scratched her head. “I followed the instructions.” She went over to the book and rechecked the recipe. “See.....exactly as it says.”

“Not quite,” Rosie pointed out, peering over. “You’re supposed to split it into six loaves.”

Throughout it all, Ben came and went, too tired to notice the strange fragrances or a sprinkling of flour. The man had exhausted himself juggling work, home, and the 200-mile round-trip to the hospital each day. The doctors had discovered what was wrong—Hantavirus, they said, an illness new to America—but they had no medicines to offer. His wife’s body had to fight this off on its own, and all that Ben could do was watch, consumed by his own worrying.

Then, one afternoon he came home to find the girls garlanding the stairs.

“What are you two up to?” he asked mildly amused.

Rosie looked guilty, and Emma looked resigned.

“Dad, I know what you said,” she began, “but we thought we should go ahead with Christmas, in case Mom’s home in time. We’ve done most of the work already. We haven’t made a mess.”

“I can see that,” he nodded, glancing around. The windows glittered, the floors shone, and a freshly made holly wreath hung above the mantelpiece. “You’ve been busy,” he murmured.

“And that’s not all,” Rosie burst out. “We’ve made the Christmas food, too.”

She took him by the hand and led him to the kitchen, where Emma opened the pantry door. Her father stood there, speechless. Across the countertop and along the shelves were boxes, baskets,

jars, and plates, all filled with seasonal goodies. The sisters had outdone themselves. There were cookies and candies, plates of fudge, and carefully wrapped cakes—and in the center of it all, a wobbly gingerbread village which lovingly echoed their mother’s design. Ben reached out and touched a lopsided roof. His eyes were damp.

“You must have worked very hard,” he said in a strangled voice.

“Just wait till you see the freezer,” Emma replied.

A teasing smile flashed across her face, and Ben’s heart lurched: She was so like her mom. He had assumed that he was being strong—shouldering the situation all on his own—but now he realized his children had shown the true courage by never giving up hope.

“I have been a fool,” he whispered, beckoning to his daughters with both arms open wide.

The following evening, Ben called them into the living room. “I’ve got a surprise for you,” he announced. There, standing in its traditional corner, was the tallest, bushiest blue spruce they had ever seen. It was the girl’s turn to be speechless.

“Well—don’t just stand there,” Ben said. “Let’s decorate.”

As they worked, he reported on his visit to the hospital.

“I told Mom about your efforts, and she spoke for the first time in days.”

“She did!” Emma exclaimed. “What did she say?”

“Good children...” Ben reached up to fill in a blank spot. “She said what good children you’ve been.” He turned away too quickly to notice Emma’s shocked look. “I was thinking that, if she continues to improve, the hospital might let you visit for the holidays...”

Emma’s eyes hardened and she changed the subject.

“By the way—are you visiting her on Christmas Eve?”

“I thought I should. Why?”

“Well, I was hoping you’d have time for a small celebration before you leave,” she explained.

“Not a problem,” he said, intrigued.

“Good!” Emma looked pleased. “One more thing: Do you have anything you could do away from home that day?” Ben’s eyes twinkled.

“I could probably find something. What time am I expected back?” he inquired.

“Oh, about five would be fine,” she replied airily, skipping away before he could ask more questions.

At 5:30 p.m. on Christmas Eve, Ben Metcalfe found himself knocking on his own front door. He had a key, of course, but presumed that he should announce his arrival. Emma let him in. She was not the tousle-haired teenager he’d seen that morning, but a young lady dressed in a skirt, with tawny curls piled carefully on top of her head. Rosie stood behind her, shiny as a new penny, in the dress that Jan had made for her that fall.

“Well, look at you two,” Ben said appreciatively.

“Hungry?” Emma asked.

“Starved,” he admitted.

“Then let’s eat!” Rosie declared.

The three of them crossed the big hall to the dining room door. Inside, the room was bathed in light. There were candles everywhere—in the windows, along the mantelpiece, and lined up on the table. Their reflections leaped and flickered in the gleaming wood, bouncing off silverware and making the crystal sparkle.

“This is beautiful,” their father gasped.

He pulled out his chair, then stopped to survey the array of food in front of him.

“Em, how have you managed this?” Ben blurted out. “You can’t have learned all these recipes just by watching your mother?”

“Of course not!” she laughed. “I didn’t have to. She wrote everything down in the family album. We used her ‘Countdown’ as our guide and then tried some of the other stuff. In fact, there’s a dish here from every woman in the family. The wheat bread is from Great-Great-Great-Great-Grandma Marianne, and the herringsla’ is Great-Great-Great-Grandma Constance’s recipe. The onion soup comes from Great-Grandma Kathleen’s kitchen, and the potatoes are Mom’s idea. Great-Great-Grandma Anna provided us with the rumtopf for dessert, or you can have Nana Jessie’s lemon curd tarts.”

“You talk about them as if you know them,” Ben remarked.

“I do. They’ve each told me their stories in their own words—and none of this Christmas would have been possible without their help.”

For a moment, it felt as if there were five shadowy figures around them, smiling down at the table.

“Em,” Ben said gravely. “I’m very proud of you....”

After the meal was finished and Rosie was in bed, Ben headed back to the hospital.

“I’ll be home late,” he called out. “Don’t wait up!”

At the kitchen table, Emma opened the family Album. The very last entry in Jan’s “Countdown” read: “Prepare sweet rolls for baking in the morning.”

Emma could not imagine a Christmas that didn’t begin with this delicious breakfast and was looking forward to finishing her list. “Then I’ll be done,” she thought, “and Mom will come home.” She flicked through Jan’s pages searching for the recipe. It wasn’t there. She scanned the entire book. There were no sweet rolls to be found. A lump formed in her throat. She could only guess that this was the one occasion when her mother carried the instructions in her head.

Emma slumped back in her chair, defeated.

“Who was I kidding?” she said bitterly: “It was just a stupid dream....”

The sunshine was streaming through her window the following morning when her father woke her.

“Merry Christmas!” Ben declared. “Come down and have breakfast.”

Emma reluctantly complied, knowing already what a disappointment the day would be. She put her robe on and crept downstairs. As her foot hit the bottom step, she stopped. What was that smell—the sweet medley of cinnamon and fresh yeast? Could it be...? She ran into the living room. There, on the coffee table, were cups and jugs and a large plate of sweet rolls. Emma pointed.

“How did you....? She sounded outraged.

Ben was smiling—no, grinning—for the first time in weeks.

“I’ve always made the breakfast,” he explained. “It was the one Christmas job that your mom would let me do.”

“Only because he wouldn’t give me the recipe,” said a voice from behind her.

Emma stiffened and almost didn’t dare to look. She turned slowly to find a pale but upright Jan standing by the door.

“Merry Christmas, my girls.” Jan held her arms out. Emma and Rosie flung themselves at her.

“You made me well,” their mom whispered, between kisses and tears.

Eventually, she let them over to the tree, where Ben stood with a scroll of paper wrapped in red ribbon. He gave it to Emma. “After all you’ve done, Em, I thought that you should record the recipe in the family book.”

As four sets of arms went around each other, Emma closed her eyes and drank in the fragrance of pine, warm sugar, wood smoke—and the faint whiff of perfume....

A String of Blue Beads

By Fulton Oursler

Peter Richards was the loneliest man in town on the day Jean Grace opened his door. You may have seen something in the newspapers about the incident at the time it happened, although neither his name nor hers was publicized, nor was the full story told as I tell it here.

Pete's shop had come down to him from his grandfather. The little Christmas front window was strewn With a disarray of old-fashioned things; bracelets and locket worn in days before the Civil War; gold rings and silver boxes; images of jade and ivory, porcelain figurines.

On this winter's afternoon a child was standing there, her forehead against the glass, earnest and enormous eyes studying each discarded treasure, as if she were looking for something quite special. Finally, she straightened up with a satisfied air and entered the store.

The shadowy interior of Pete Richards' establishment was even more cluttered than his show window. Shelves were stacked with jewel caskets, dueling pistols, clocks, lamps, and the floor was heaped with andirons and mandolins and things hard to find a name for. Behind the counter stood Pete himself, a man not more than 30 but with hair already turning gray. There was a bleak air about him as he looked at the small customer who flattened her ungloved hands on the counter. "Mister," she began, "would you please let me look at that string of blue beads in the window?" Pete parted the draperies and lifted out a necklace.

The turquoise stones gleamed brightly against the pallor of his palm, as he spread the ornament before her. "They're just perfect," said the child, to herself. "Will you wrap them up pretty for me, please?" Pete studied her with a stony air. "Are you buying these for someone?" "They're for my big sister. She takes care of me. You see, this will be the first Christmas since Mother died. I've been searching for the most wonderful Christmas present for my sister." "How much money do you have?" asked Pete warily. She had been busily untying the knots in a handkerchief and now she poured out a handful of pennies on the counter. "I emptied my bank," she explained simply. Pete Richards looked at her thoughtfully. Then he carefully drew back the necklace.

The price tag was visible to him but not to her. How could he tell her? The trusting look of her blue eyes smote him like the pain of an old wound. "Just a minute," he said and turned toward the back of tile store. Over his shoulder he called: "What's your name?" He was very busy about something. "Jean Grace." When Pete returned to where Jean Grace waited, a package lay in his hand, wrapped in scarlet paper and tied with a bow of green ribbon. "There you are," he said shortly. "Don't lose it on the way home." She smiled over her shoulder as she ran out the door. Through the window he watched her go, while desolation flooded his thoughts. Something about Jean Grace and her string of beads had stirred him to the depths of a grief that would not stay buried.

The child's hair was wheat yellow, her eyes sea-blue, and once upon a time not long before, Pete had been in love with a girl with hair of that same yellow and with large eyes just as blue. And the turquoise necklace was to have been hers. But there had come a rainy night—a truck skidding on a slippery road—and the life was crushed out of his dream. Since then, Pete Richards had lived

too much with his grief in solitude. He was politely attentive to customers, but after business hours his world seemed irrevocably empty. He was trying to forget in a self-pitying haze that deepened day by day.

The blue eyes of Jean Grace jolted him into acute remembrance of what he had lost, The pain of it made him recoil from the exuberance of holiday shoppers. During the next ten days trade was brisk; chattering women swarming in, fingering trinkets, trying to bargain. When the last customer had gone, late on Christmas Eve, he sighed with relief. It was over for another year. But for Pete Richards the night was not quite over. The door opened and a young woman hurried in. With an explicable start, he realized that she looked familiar, yet he could not remember when or where he had seen her before. Her hair was golden yellow and her large eyes were blue.

Without speaking, she drew from her purse a package loosely unwrapped in its red paper a bow of green ribbon with it. Presently the string of blue beads lay gleaming again before him. "Did this come from your shop?" she asked. Pete raised his eyes to hers and answered softly: "Yes, it did." "Are the stones real?" "Yes. Not the finest quality—but real." "Can you remember who it was you sold them to?" "She was a small girl. Her name was Jean. She bought them for her older sister's Christmas present." "How much are they worth?" "The price," he told her solemnly, "is always a confidential matter between the seller and the customer." "But Jean has never had more than a few pennies of spending money. How could she pay for them?" Pete was folding the gay paper into its creases, rewrapping the little package just as neatly as before. "She paid the biggest price anyone can ever pay," he said. "She gave all she had."

There was a silence then that filled the little curio shop. In some faraway steeple, a bell began to ring.

The sound of the distant chiming, the little package lying on the counter, the question in the eyes of the girl and the strange feeling of renewal struggling unreasonable in the heart of the man, all had come to be because of the life of a child. "But why did you do it?" He held out the gift in his hand. "It's already Christmas morning," he said. "And it's my misfortune that I have no one to give anything to. Will you let me see you home and wish you a Merry Christmas at your door?" And so, to the sound of many bells and in the midst of happy people, Pete Richards and a girl whose name he had yet to learn, walked out into the beginning of the great day that brings hope into the world for us all.

The Dime

Bobby was getting cold sitting out in his back yard in the snow. Bobby didn't wear boots; he didn't like them and anyway he didn't own any. The thin sneakers he wore had few holes in them and they did a poor job of keeping out the cold. Bobby had been in his backyard for about an hour already. And, try as he might, he could not come up with an idea for his mother's Christmas gift.

He shook his head as he thought, "This is useless, even if I do come up with an idea, I don't have any money to spend."

Ever since his father had passed away three years ago, the family of five had struggled. It wasn't because his mother didn't care, or try, there just never seemed to be enough. She worked nights at the hospital, but the small wage that she was earning could only be stretched so far. What the family lacked in money and material things, they more than made up for in love and family unity.

Bobby had two older and one younger sister, who ran the household in their mother's absence. All three of his sisters had already made beautiful gifts for their mother. Somehow it just wasn't fair. Here it was Christmas Eve already, and he had nothing.

Wiping a tear from his eye, Bobby kicked the snow and started to walk down to the street where the shops and stores were. It wasn't easy being six without a father, especially when he needed a man to talk to. Bobby walked from shop to shop, looking into each decorated window. Everything seemed so beautiful and so out of reach.

It was starting to get dark and Bobby reluctantly turned to walk home when suddenly his eyes caught the glimmer of the setting sun's rays reflecting off of something along the curb. He reached down and discovered a shiny dime. Never before has anyone felt so wealthy as Bobby felt at that moment.

As he held his new-found treasure, a warmth spread throughout his entire body and he walked into the first store he saw. His excitement quickly turned cold when the salesperson told him that he couldn't buy anything with only a dime. He saw a flower shop and went inside to wait in line.

When the shop owner asked if he could help him, Bobby presented the dime and asked if he could buy one flower for his mother's Christmas gift. The shop owner looked at Bobby and his ten-cent offering. Then he put his hand on Bobby's shoulder and said to him, "You just wait here and I'll see what I can do for you."

As Bobby waited he looked at the beautiful flowers and even though he was a boy, he could see why mothers and girls liked flowers. The sound of the door closing as the last customer left jolted Bobby back to reality.

All alone in the shop, Bobby began to feel alone and afraid. Suddenly the shop owner came out and moved to the counter. There, before Bobby's eyes, lay twelve long stem, red roses, with leaves of green and tiny white flowers all tied together with a big silver bow.

Bobby's heart sank as the owner picked them up and placed them gently into a long white box. "That will be ten cents young man." the shop owner said reaching out his hand for the dime. Slowly, Bobby moved his hand to give the man his dime.

Could this be true? No one else would give him a thing for his dime!

Sensing the boy's reluctance, the shop owner added, "I just happened to have some roses on sale for ten cents a dozen. Would you like them?"

This time Bobby did not hesitate, and when the man placed the long box into his hands, he knew it was true. Walking out the door that the owner was holding for Bobby, he heard the shop keeper say, "Merry Christmas, son."

As he returned inside, the shopkeeper's wife walked out. "Who were you talking to back there and where are the roses you were fixing?"

Staring out the window, and blinking the tears from his own eyes, he replied, "A strange thing happened to me this morning. While I was setting up things to open the shop, I thought I heard a voice telling me to set aside a dozen of my best roses for a special gift. I wasn't sure at the time whether I had lost my mind or what, but I set them aside anyway. Then just a few minutes ago, a little boy came into the shop and wanted to buy a flower for his mother with one small dime.

"When I looked at him, I saw myself, many years ago. I too, was a poor boy with nothing to buy my mother a Christmas gift. A bearded man, whom I never knew, stopped me on the street and told me that he wanted to give me ten dollars.

"When I saw that little boy tonight, I knew who that voice was, and I put together a dozen of my very best roses." The shop owner and his wife hugged each other tightly, and as they stepped out into the bitter cold air, they somehow didn't feel cold at all.

May this story instill the spirit of CHRISTmas in you enough to pass this act along.

Rudolf—That Amazing Reindeer

On a December night in Chicago several years ago, a little girl climbed onto her father's lap and asked a question. It was a simple question asked in a child's curiosity, yet it had a heart-rending effect on Robert May.

"Daddy," four-year-old Barbara asked, "Why isn't my mommy just like everybody else's mommy?"

Bob May stole a glance across his shabby two-room apartment. On a couch lay his young wife, Evelyn, racked with cancer. For two years she had been bed ridden; for two years all Bob's income and smaller savings had gone to pay for treatments and medicines.

The terrible ordeal had shattered two adult lives. Now Bob suddenly realized the happiness of his growing daughter was also in jeopardy. As he ran his fingers through Barbara's hair, he prayed for some satisfactory answer to her question.

Bob May knew only too well what it meant to be "different." As a child he had been weak and delicate. With the innocent cruelty of children, his playmates had continually goaded the stunted, skinny lad to tears. Later, at Dartmouth from which he was graduated in 1926, Bob May was so small that he was always being mistaken for someone's little brother.

Nor was his adult life much happier. Unlike many of his classmates who floated from college into plush jobs, Bob became a lowly copywriter for Montgomery Ward, the big Chicago mail-order house. Now at 33 Bob was deep in debt, depressed, and sad.

Although Bob didn't know it at the time, the answer he gave the tousled haired child on his lap was to bring him to fame and fortune. It was also to bring joy to countless thousands of children like his own Barbara. On that December night in the shabby Chicago apartment, Bob cradled his little girl's head against his shoulder and began to tell a story:

Once upon a time there was a reindeer named Rudolph, the only reindeer in the world that had a big red nose. Naturally, people called him Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer." As Bob went on to tell about Rudolph, he tried desperately to communicate to Barbara the knowledge that even though some creatures of God are strange and different they often enjoy the miraculous power to make others happy.

"Rudolph," Bob explained, "Was terribly embarrassed by his unique nose. Other reindeer laughed at him; his mother, father and sister were mortified, too. Even Rudolph wallowed in self-pity."

"Why was I born with such a terrible nose?" he cried.

"Well," continued Bob, "One Christmas Eve Santa Claus got his team of husky reindeer—Dasher, Dancer, Prancer, and Vixen—ready for their yearly trip around the world. The entire reindeer community assembled to cheer these great heroes on their way. But a terrible fog

engulfed the earth that evening, and Santa knew that the mist was so thick he wouldn't be able to find the chimneys.

"Suddenly, Rudolph appeared—his red nose glowing brighter than ever. Santa sensed at once that here was the answer to his perplexing problem. He led Rudolph to the front of the sleigh, fastened the harness, and climbed in. They were off! Rudolph guided Santa to every chimney that night. Rain and fog, snow and sleet, nothing bothered Rudolph for his bright nose penetrated the mist like a beacon.

"And so it was that Rudolph became the most famous and beloved of all the reindeer. The huge red nose he once hid in shame was now the envy of every buck and doe in the reindeer world. Santa Claus told everyone that Rudolph had saved the day; and from that Christmas, Rudolph has been living serenely happy."

Little Barbara laughed with glee when her father finished. Every night she begged him to repeat the tale until finally Bob could rattle it off in his sleep. Then at Christmas time he decided to make the story into a poem like "The Night Before Christmas" and prepared it in book form with crude pictures for Barbara's personal gift.

Night after night Bob worked on the verses after Barbara had gone to bed for he was determined his daughter should have a worthwhile gift, even though he could not afford to buy one.

Then as Bob was about to put the finishing touches on Rudolph, tragedy struck. Evelyn May died. Bob, his hopes crushed, turned to Barbara as his chief comfort. Yet, despite his grief, he sat at his desk in the quiet, now lonely, apartment and worked on Rudolph with tears in his eyes.

Shortly after Barbara had cried with joy over his handmade gift on Christmas morning, Bob was asked to an employee's holiday party at Montgomery Ward. He didn't want to go, but his office associates insisted. When Bob finally agreed, he took with him the poem and read it to the crowd. At first the noisy throng listened in laughter and gaiety. Then they became silent and at the end broke into spontaneous applause. That was in 1938.

By Christmas 1947, some 6,000,000 copies of the booklet had been given away or sold, making Rudolph, one of the most widely distributed books in the world. The demand of Rudolph—sponsored products increased so much in variety and number that educators and historians predicted Rudolph would come to occupy a permanent niche in the Christmas legend.

Through the years of unhappiness, the tragedy of his wife's death, and his ultimate success with Rudolph, Bob May has captured a sense of serenity. As each Christmas rolls around, he recalls with thankfulness the night when his daughter Barbara's question inspired him to write the story.

Ancient America Views the First Christmas

Book of Mormon

I looked and beheld the...city of Nazareth; and in the city of Nazareth I beheld a virgin, and she was exceedingly fair and white. And (the) angel...said unto me: Behold, the virgin whom thou seest is the mother of the Son of God, after the manner of the flesh.

And...I beheld that she was carried away in the Spirit; and after she had been carried away in the Spirit for the space of a time.. I...beheld the virgin again, bearing a child in her arms. And the angel said unto me: Behold the Lamb of God, yea, even the Son of the Eternal Father! (Nephi, about 600 BC, 1 Nephi 11:13-21)

And he...said unto me...For behold, the time cometh, and is not far distant, that with power, the Lord Omnipotent who reigneth, who was, and is from all eternity to all eternity, shall come down from heaven among the children of men, and shall dwell in a tabernacle of clay, and shall go forth amongst men, working mighty miracles...

And he shall be called Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Father of heaven and earth, the Creator of all things from the beginning; and his mother shall be called Mary.

And lo, he cometh unto his own, that salvation might come unto the children of men even through faith on his name. (King Benjamin, about 124 BC, Mosiah 3:3-9)

For behold, the time is not far distant that the Redeemer liveth and cometh among his people...And behold, he shall be born of Mary, at Jerusalem which is the land of our forefathers, she being a virgin, a precious and chosen vessel, who shall be overshadowed and conceive by the power of the Holy Ghost, and bring forth a son, yea, even the Son of God. (Alma, about 83 BC, Alma 7:7, 10)

And behold, this will I give unto you for a sign at the time of his coming; for behold, there shall be great lights in heaven, insomuch that in the night before he cometh there shall be no darkness, insomuch that it shall appear unto man as if it was day.

Therefore, there shall be one day and a night and a day, as if it were one day and there were no night; and... ye shall know of the rising of the sun and also of its setting; therefore they shall know of a surety that there shall be two days and a night; nevertheless the night shall not be darkened; and it shall be the night before he is born.

And behold, there shall a new star arise, such an one as ye never have beheld...(Samuel the Lamanite; about 6 BC, Helaman 14:3-5)

And it came to pass that in the commencement of ninety and second year, behold, the prophecies of the prophets began to be fulfilled more fully; for there began to be greater signs and greater miracles wrought among the people.

And they began to rejoice over their brethren, saying: Behold the time is past, and the words of Samuel are not fulfilled; therefore, your joy and your faith concerning this thing hath been in vain.

And it came to pass that they did make a great uproar throughout the land; and the people who believed began to be very sorrowful, lest by any means those things which had been spoken might not come to pass.

But behold, they did watch steadfastly for that day and that night and that day which should be as one day as if there were no night, that they might know that their faith had not been vain.

Now it came to pass that there was a day set apart by the unbelievers, that all those who believed in those traditions should be put to death except the sign should come to pass, which had been given by Samuel the prophet.

Now it came to pass that when Nephi, the son of Nephi, saw this wickedness of his people, his heart was exceedingly sorrowful.

And it came to pass that he went out and bowed himself down upon the earth, and cried mightily to his God in behalf of his people, yea, those who were about to be destroyed because of their faith in the tradition of their fathers.

And it came to pass that he cried mightily unto the Lord all the day; and behold, the voice of the Lord came unto him, saying: Lift up your head and be of good cheer; for behold, the time is at hand, and on this night shall the sign be given, and on the morrow come I into the world, to show unto the world that I will fulfil all that which I have caused to be spoken by the mouth of my holy prophets.

Behold, I come unto my own, to fulfil all things which I have made known unto the children of men from the foundation of the world, and to do the will, both of the Father and of the Son—of the Father because of me, and of the Son because of my flesh. And behold, the time is at hand, and this night shall the sign be given.

And it came to pass that the words which came unto Nephi were fulfilled, according as they had been spoken; for behold, at the going down of the sun there was no darkness; and the people began to be astonished because there was no darkness when the night came.

And there were many, who had not believed the words of the prophets, who fell to the earth and became as if they were dead, for they knew that the great plan of destruction which they had laid for those who believed in the words of the prophets had been frustrated; for the sign which had been given was already at hand.

And they began to know that the Son of God must shortly appear; yea, in fine, all the people upon the face of the whole earth from the west to the east, both in the land north and in the land south, were so exceedingly astonished that they fell to the earth.

For they knew that the prophets had testified of these things for many years, and that the sign which had been given was already at hand; and they began to fear because of their iniquity and their unbelief.

And it came to pass that there was no darkness in all that night, but it was as light as though it was mid-day. And it came to pass that the sun did rise in the morning again, according to its proper order; and they knew that it was the day that the Lord should be born, because of the sign which had been given.

And it came to pass, yea, all things, every whit, according to the words of the prophets.

And it came to pass also that a new star did appear, according to the word. (Nephi, at the time of Christ's birth, 3 Nephi 1:4-21)

Silent Night, Holy Night

As told by Walter Cronkite

The 1900's, the final century of the recent millennium, brought unprecedented possibilities and promise.

The children of these hundred years would see more improvement in the human condition than ever before in the world's history.

Advances in medicine, science, and industry would all but eradicate disease, extend human life, open a dialogue among the peoples of the earth, and lift them into the vast reaches of space.

But these hardly seemed like possibilities as the Christmas of 1914 drew near.

The nations of Europe were at war. Anxious to expand and defend their borders, they summoned their best and brightest to the battlefield. Young men answered by the millions.

A nineteen-year-old German boy left his job in London to enlist in the German army. English boys working and studying in Hamburg and Paris returned to London, put on their uniforms, and went back to fire upon former friends.

Secretary of War, Lord Kirchener, expanded the British army overnight by allowing schoolmates to enlist together.

The tragedy of these battalions was no more evident than at Somme, France. Hundreds of villages on both sides lost almost all their young men in a single battle. The little paybook that every British soldier carried included a last will and testament. Thousands of these booklets were collected from the bodies of young boys, many reading simply, "I leave everything to my mother."

With hardly a backward glance, the promise of youth was poured into the blind and futile aggression known as the Great War, World War 1.

The new century brought a new kind of warfare. Field commanders quickly realized that digging in was the only way to survive the sweep of machine-gun fire.

The German army had marched across Belgium before being stopped at Flanders Field. Some sixty yards away, British, French and Belgian troops languished in trenches infested with rats and lice; pelted with freezing rain and shrapnel. As temperatures dropped, disease took hold. Snipers picked off any who raised their heads above the earthen wall. The war was but four months old, each side losing thousands a day, both to bullets and that silent, common enemy: influenza.

Between the opposing trenches was an area about the width of a football field: No Man's Land. Littered with barbed wire and frozen corpses, it was a sobering reminder of what the future

might bring. Soldiers who survived later recalled their dead brothers being gathered up and stacked like cords of wood. By war's end, over ten million would be lost.

Not surprisingly, given the circumstances, most of the soldiers were religious; and many were Christian. On Sundays, communion was passed in trenches on both sides, often to the sound of church bells ringing in nearby villages. The occasional hymn was sung, and youthful voices were heard across enemy lines.

By December, the war slowed and hopes for a quick resolution faded away. As the soldiers contemplated their desperate situation, nights grew long and hearts yearned for peace.

December twenty-third. A group of German soldiers quietly moved to the ruins of a bombed-out monastery. There, they held their Christmas service.

Later on that night, a few Christmas trees, Tannenbaums as they were called, began to appear along the German fortifications, their tiny candles flickering in the night.

Across the way, British soldiers took an interest in those lights as they sang together the carols of their youth. Word spread, and heads peeked cautiously over sandbags at the now thousands of Tannenbaums glowing like Christmas stars.

Two British officers ventured over to the German line and, against orders, arranged a Christmas truce. But the negotiation was a mere formality by then. Up and down the trenches men from both sides already had begun crossing the line to join the celebration.

Lieutenant Sir Edward Hulse "assaulted" the enemy with music. In a letter to his mother he wrote, "We are going to give the enemy every conceivable song...from carols to Tipperary."

The Germans responded with a Christmas concert of their own. It was not long before the cold air rang with everything from "Good King Wenceslas" to "Auld Lang Syne."

For the next two days, those tidings continued to spring from the hearts of common men who shared the common bond of Christmas.

Further down the line, a German violinist stood atop his parapet, framed against the skeletons of bare trees and shattered fortifications. Delicately perched in this desolate landscape, his cold fingers conveyed the poignant beauty of Handel's *Largo*.

Whatever the spirit of Christmas had been before that hour, it was now, above all, the spirit of hope, of peace.

A British war correspondent reported that later the soldiers heard a clear voice singing the beloved French carol, "O Holy Night." The singer: Victor Granier of the Paris Opera. The night watch must have lifted their eyes toward the heavens as they heard his plaintive call.

Christmas Day dawned over the muddy fields, and both sides cautiously picked their way through the barbed wire. Side by side they buried their dead.

A German officer known only as Thomas gave Lieutenant Hulse a Christmas gift, a Victoria cross and letter which had belonged to an English captain. Lieutenant Hulse responded by giving the German officer his silk scarf. One German retrieved a photograph of himself in uniform and asked his former enemies to post it to his sister in Liverpool.

Men who had shot at each other only days before gathered in a sacred service for their fallen brothers. Prayers were offered, and the twenty-third Psalm was read:

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.

He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.

He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.

Nineteen-year-old Arthur Pelham-Burn, who hoped to study for the ministry after the war ended, remembered: "The Germans formed up on one side, the English on the other, the officers standing in front, every head bared. Yes, I think it is a sight one will never see again."

As the Christmas of 1914 drew to a close, soldiers who had sung together, played together, and prayed together, returned to their trenches. They must have felt reluctant to let the common ground between them become No Man's Land again. But as the darkness fell around them, a lone voice floated across the few yards of earth on which they had stood together. In the true spirit of Christmas, one voice, then another, joined in. Soon, the whole world seemed to be singing. And, for a brief moment, the sound of peace was a carol every soul knew by heart.

Silent night! Holy night!

All is calm, all is bright

Round you virgin mother and child.

Holy infant, so tender and mild,

Sleep in heavenly peace;

Sleep in heavenly peace.

Silent night! Holy night!

Shepherds quake at the sight!

Glories stream from heaven afar;

Heav'nly hosts sing Alleluia!

Christ, the Savior, is born!

Christ, the Savior is born!

Silent night! Holy night!

Son of God, love's pure light

Radiant beams from thy holy face,

With the dawn of redeeming grace,

Jesus, Lord, at thy birth;

Jesus, Lord, at thy birth.

And that's the way it was, one silent night almost a hundred years ago; and that's the way it can be as each of us embrace the message of that silent, holy night.

Big Wheel Truckstop

In September 1960, I woke up one morning with six hungry babies and just 75 cents in my pocket. Their father was gone. The boys ranged from three months to seven years; their sister was two. Their Dad had never been much more than a presence they feared. Whenever they heard his tires crunch on the gravel driveway they would scramble to hide under their beds. He did manage to leave \$15 a week to buy groceries.

Now that he had decided to leave, there would be no more beatings, but no food either. If there was a welfare system in effect in southern Indiana at that time, I certainly knew nothing about it. I scrubbed the kids until they looked brand new and then put on my best homemade dress. I loaded them into the rusty old 51 Chevy and drove off to find a job.

The seven of us went to every factory, store and restaurant in our small town. No luck. The kids stayed crammed into the car and tried to be quiet while I tried to convince whomever would listen that I was willing to learn or do anything. I had to have a job.. Still no luck.

The last place we went to, just a few miles out of town, was an old Root Beer Barrel drive-in that had been converted to a truck stop. It was called the Big Wheel.

An old lady named Granny owned the place and she peeked out of the window from time to time at all those kids. She needed someone on the graveyard shift, 11 at night until seven in the morning. She paid 65 cents an hour and I could start that night. I raced home and called the teenager down the street that baby-sat for people. I bargained with her to come and sleep on my sofa for a dollar a night. She could arrive with her pajamas on and the kids would already be asleep. This seemed like a good arrangement to her, so we made a deal.

That night when the little ones and I knelt to say our prayers we all thanked God for finding Mommy a job. And so I started at the Big Wheel. When I got home in the mornings I woke the baby-sitter up and sent her home with one dollar of my tip money – fully half of what I averaged every night.

As the weeks went by, heating bills added a strain to my meager wage. The tires on the old Chevy had the consistency of penny balloons and began to leak. I had to fill them with air on the way to work and again every morning before I could go home. One bleak fall morning, I dragged myself to the car to go home and found four tires in the back seat. New tires! There was no note, no nothing, just those beautiful brand new tires. Had angels taken up residence in Indiana? I wondered.

I made a deal with the local service station. In exchange for his mounting the new tires, I would clean up his office. I remember it took me a lot longer to scrub his floor than it did for him to do the tires.

I was now working six nights instead of five and it still wasn't enough. Christmas was coming and I knew there would be no money for toys for the kids. I found a can of red paint and started repairing and painting some old toys. Then I hid them in the basement so there would be

something for Santa to deliver on Christmas morning. Clothes were a worry too. I was sewing patches on top of patches on the boys pants and soon they would be too far gone to repair.

On Christmas Eve the usual customers were drinking coffee in the Big Wheel. These were the truckers, Les, Frank, and Jim, and a state trooper named Joe. A few musicians were hanging around after a gig at the Legion and were dropping nickels in the pinball machine. The regulars all just sat around and talked through the wee hours of the morning and then left to get home before the sun came up.

When it was time for me to go home at seven o'clock on Christmas morning I hurried to the car. I was hoping the kids wouldn't wake up before I managed to get home and get the presents from the basement and place them under the tree. (We had cut down a small cedar tree by the side of the road down by the dump.) It was still dark and I couldn't see much, but there appeared to be some dark shadows in the car – or was that just a trick of the night? Something certainly looked different, but it was hard to tell what.

When I reached the car I peered warily into one of the side windows. Then my jaw dropped in amazement. My old battered Chevy was filled full to the top with boxes of all shapes and sizes. I quickly opened the driver's side door, scrambled inside and knelt in the front facing the back seat.

Reaching back, I pulled off the lid of the top box. Inside was whole case of little blue jeans, sizes 2-10! I looked inside another box: It was full of shirts to go with the jeans. Then I peeked inside some of the other boxes: There was candy and nuts and bananas and bags of groceries. There was an enormous ham for baking, and canned vegetables and potatoes. There was pudding and Jell-O and cookies, pie filling and flour. There was a whole bag of laundry supplies and cleaning items. And there were five toy trucks and one beautiful little doll.

As I drove back through empty streets as the sun slowly rose on the most amazing Christmas Day of my life, I was sobbing with gratitude. And I will never forget the joy on the faces of my little ones that precious morning.

Yes, there were angels in Indiana that long-ago December. And they all hung out at the Big Wheel truck stop.

A Visit From St. Nicholas

by Clement Clark Moore

'Twas the night before Christmas, when all through the house

Not a creature was stirring, not even a mouse;

The stockings were hung by the chimney with care,

In hopes 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 winters nap

When out on the lawn there arose such a clatter,

I sprang from my 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 luster 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 and Vixen!

On, Comet, on Cupid! on, Donder and Blitzen!
To the top of the porch! To the top of the wall!
Now dash away! dash away! dash away all!”
As dry leaves that before the wild hurricane fly,
When they meet with an obstacle, mount to the sky,
So up to the housetop the coursers they flew,
With a sleigh full of toys, and St. Nicholas, too.
And then, in a twinkling, I heard on the roof
The prancing and pawing of each little 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 covered with ashes and soot;
A bundle of toys he had flung on his back,
And he looked like a peddler 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 like a bow,
And the beard on his chin was as white as the snow.
The stump of a pipe he held tight in his teeth,
And the smoke it encircled his head like a wreath.
He had a broad face and a little round belly
That shook, when he laughed, like a bowlful of jelly.

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 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,
“Happy Christmas to all, and to all a good night.”

The Gospel According to St Luke

Chapter 2

Heavenly messengers herald the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem—He is circumcised, and Simeon and Anna prophesy of His mission—At twelve years of age, He goes about His Father's business.

1 And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Cæsar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed.

2 (And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.)

3 And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city.

4 And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judæa, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David:)

5 To be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child.

6 And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered.

7 And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn.

8 And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night.

9 And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid.

10 And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.

11 For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.

12 And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.

13 And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying,

14 Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.

15 And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us.

16 And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger.

17 And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child.

18 And all they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds.

19 But Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart.

20 And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them.

21 And when eight days were accomplished for the circumcising of the child, his name was called Jesus, which was so named of the angel before he was conceived in the womb.

22 And when the days of her purification according to the law of Moses were accomplished, they brought him to Jerusalem, to present him to the Lord;

23 (As it is written in the law of the Lord, Every male that openeth the womb shall be called holy to the Lord;)

24 And to offer a sacrifice according to that which is said in the law of the Lord, A pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons.

25 And, behold, there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon; and the same man was just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel: and the Holy Ghost was upon him.

26 And it was revealed unto him by the Holy Ghost, that he should not see death, before he had seen the Lord's Christ.

27 And he came by the Spirit into the temple: and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him after the custom of the law,

28 Then took he him up in his arms, and blessed God, and said,

29 Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word:

30 For mine eyes have seen thy salvation,

31 Which thou hast prepared before the face of all people;

32 A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel.

33 And Joseph and his mother marvelled at those things which were spoken of him.

34 And Simeon blessed them, and said unto Mary his mother, Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against;

35 (Yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also,) that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.

36 And there was one Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Aser: she was of a great age, and had lived with an husband seven years from her virginity;

37 And she was a widow of about fourscore and four years, which departed not from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day.

38 And she coming in that instant gave thanks likewise unto the Lord, and spake of him to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem.

39 And when they had performed all things according to the law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own city Nazareth.

40 And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom: and the grace of God was upon him.

41 Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the feast of the passover.

42 And when he was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem after the custom of the feast.

43 And when they had fulfilled the days, as they returned, the child Jesus tarried behind in Jerusalem; and Joseph and his mother knew not of it.

44 But they, supposing him to have been in the company, went a day's journey; and they sought him among their kinsfolk and acquaintance.

45 And when they found him not, they turned back again to Jerusalem, seeking him.

46 And it came to pass, that after three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions.

47 And all that heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers.

48 And when they saw him, they were amazed: and his mother said unto him, Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us? behold, thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing.

49 And he said unto them, How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?

50 And they understood not the saying which he spake unto them.

51 And he went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them: but his mother kept all these sayings in her heart.

52 And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man.

The Other Wise Man

by Henry Van Dyke

The other wise man's name was Artaban. He was one of the Magi and he lived in Persia. He was a man of great wealth, great learning, and great faith. With his learned companions he had searched the scriptures as to the time that the Savior should be born. They knew that a new star would appear and it was agreed between them that Artaban would watch from Persia and the others would observe the sky from Babylon.

On the night he believed the sign was to be given, Artaban went out on this roof to watch the night sky. "If the star appears, they will wait for me ten days, then we will all set out for Jerusalem. I have made ready for the journey by selling all of my possessions and have bought three jewels—a sapphire, a ruby, and a pearl. I intend to present them as my tribute to the king."

As he watched an azure spark was born out of the darkness, rounding itself with splendor into a crimson sphere. Artaban bowed his head. "It is the sign," he said. "The King is coming, and I will go to meet him."

The swiftest of Artaban's horses had been waiting saddled and bridled in her stall, pawing the ground impatiently. She shared the eagerness of her master's purpose.

As Artaban placed himself upon her back, he said, "God bless us both from falling and our souls from death."

They began their journey. Each day his faithful horse measured off the allotted proportion of the distance, and at nightfall on the tenth day, they approached the outskirts of Babylon. In a little island of desert palm trees, Artaban's horse scented difficulty and slackened her pace. Then she stood still, quivering in every muscle.

Artaban dismounted. The dim starlight revealed the form of a man lying in the roadway. His skin bore the mark of a deadly fever. The chill of death was in his lean hand. As Artaban turned to go, a sigh came from the sick man's lips.

Artaban felt sorry that he could not stay to minister to this dying stranger, but this was the hour toward which his entire life had been directed. He could not forfeit the reward of his years of study and faith to do a single deed of human mercy. But then, how could he leave his fellow man alone to die?

"God of truth and mercy," prayed Artaban, "direct me in the path of wisdom which only thou knowest." Then he knew that he could not go on. The Magi were physicians as well as astronomers. He took off his robe and began his work of healing. Several hours later the patient regained consciousness. Artaban gave him all that was left of his bread and wine. He left a potion of healing herbs and instructions for his care.

Though Artaban rode with the greatest haste the rest of the way, it was after dawn that he arrived at the designated meeting place. His friends were nowhere to be seen. Finally his eyes caught a piece of parchment arranged to attract his attention. It said, "We have waited till past midnight, and can delay no longer. We go to find the King. Follow us across the desert."

Artaban sat down in despair and covered his face with his hands. "How can I cross the desert with no food and with a spent horse? I must return to Babylon, sell my sapphire and buy camels and

provisions for the journey. I may never overtake my friends. Only the merciful God knows whether or not I shall lose my purpose because I tarried to show mercy."

Several days later when Artaban arrived at Bethlehem, the streets were deserted. It was rumored that Herod was sending soldiers, presumably to enforce some new tax, and the men of the city had taken their flocks into the hills beyond his reach.

The door of one dwelling was open, and Artaban could hear a mother singing a lullaby to her child. He entered and introduced himself. The woman told him that it was now the third day since the three wise men had appeared in Bethlehem. They had found Joseph and Mary and the young child, and had laid their gifts at His feet. Then they had gone as mysteriously as they had come. Joseph had taken his wife and babe that same night and had secretly fled. It was whispered that they were going far away into Egypt.

As Artaban listened, the baby reached up its dimpled hand and touched his cheek and smiled. His heart warmed at the touch. Then suddenly, outside there arose a wild confusion of sounds. Women were shrieking. Then a desperate cry was heard, "The soldiers of Herod are killing the children."

Artaban went to the doorway. A band of soldiers came hurrying down the street. The captain approached the door to thrust Artaban aside, but Artaban did not stir. His face was as calm as though he were still watching the stars. Finally his out-stretched hand revealed the giant ruby. He said, "I am waiting to give this jewel to the prudent captain who will go on his way and leave this house alone."

The captain, amazed at the splendor of the gem, took it and said to his men, "March on, there are no children here."

Then Artaban prayed, "Oh, God, forgive me my sin, I have spent for men that which was meant for God. Shall I ever be worthy to see the face of the King?"

But the voice of the woman, weeping for joy in the shadows behind him said softly, "Thou hast saved the life of my little one. May the Lord bless thee and keep thee and give thee peace."

Artaban, still following the King, went on into Egypt seeking everywhere for traces of the little family that had fled before him. For many years we follow Artaban in his search. We see

him at the pyramids. We see him in Alexandria taking counsel with a Hebrew rabbi who told him to seek the King not among the rich but among the poor.

He passed through countries where famine lay heavy upon the land, and the poor were crying for bread. He made his dwelling in plague-stricken cities. He visited the oppressed and the afflicted in prisons. He searched the crowded slave-markets. Though he found no one to worship, he found many to serve. As the years passed he fed the hungry, clothed the naked, healed the sick and comforted the captive.

Thirty-three years had now passed away since Artaban began his search. His hair was white as snow. He knew his life's end was near, but he was still desperate with hope that he would find the King. He had come for the last time to Jerusalem.

It was the season of the Passover and the city was thronged with strangers. Artaban inquired where they were going. One answered, "We are going to the execution on Golgotha outside the city walls. Two robbers are going to be crucified, and with them another called Jesus of Nazareth, a man

who has done many wonderful works among the people. He claims to be the Son of God and the priests and elders have said that he must die. Pilate sent him to the cross."

How strangely these familiar words fell upon the tired heart of Artaban. They had led him for a lifetime over land and sea. And now they came to him like a message of despair. The King had been denied and cast out. Perhaps he was already dying. Could he be the same one for whom the star had appeared thirty-three long years ago?

Artaban's heart beat loudly within him. He thought, "It may be that I shall yet find the King and be able to ransom him from death by giving my treasure to his enemies."

But as Artaban started toward Calvary, he saw a troop of soldiers coming down the street, dragging a sobbing young woman. As Artaban paused, she broke away from her tormentors and threw herself at his feet, her arms clasped around his knees.

"Have pity on me," she cried. "And save me. My father was also of the Magi, but he is dead. I am to be sold as a slave to pay his debts."

Artaban trembled as he again felt the conflict arising in his soul. It was the same he had experienced in the palm grove of Babylon and in the cottage at Bethlehem. Twice the gift which he had consecrated to the King had been drawn from his hand to the service of humanity. Would he now fail again? One thing was clear, he must rescue this helpless child from evil.

He took the pearl and laid it in the hand of the girl and said, "Daughter, this is the ransom. It is the last of my treasures which I had hoped to keep for the King."

While he spoke, the darkness of the sky thickened and the shuddering tremors of an earthquake ran through the ground. The houses rocked. The soldiers fled in terror. Artaban

sank beside a protecting wall. What had he to fear? What had he to hope for? He had given away the last of his tribute to the King. The quest was over and he had failed. What else mattered?

The earthquake quivered beneath him. A heavy tile, shaken from a roof, fell and struck him. He lay breathless and pale. Then there came a still small voice through the twilight. It was like distant music. The rescued girl leaned over him and heard him say, "Not so, my Lord; for when saw I thee hungered and fed thee. Or thirsty and gave thee drink? When saw I thee sick or in prison and came unto thee? Thirty-three years have I looked for thee; but I have never seen thy face, nor ministered unto thee, my King."

The sweet voice came again, "Verily I say unto thee, that inasmuch as thou hast done it unto done of the least of these my brethren, thou hast done it unto me."

A calm radiance of wonder and joy lighted the face of Artaban as one long, last breath exhaled gently from his lips. His journey was ended. His treasure accepted. The Other Wise Man had found the King.