

**KRISTY'S CHRISTMAS
SURPRISE**

**KRISTY'S CHRISTMAS
SURPRISE**

by

Olive Thorne Miller

YESTERDAY'S CLASSICS

ITHACA, NEW YORK

Cover and arrangement © 2021 Yesterday's Classics, LLC.

This edition, first published in 2021 by Yesterday's Classics, an imprint of Yesterday's Classics, LLC, is an unabridged republication of the text originally published as *Kristy's Queer Christmas* by Houghton Mifflin & Co. in 1904. For the complete listing of the books that are published by Yesterday's Classics, please visit www.yesterdaysclassics.com. Yesterday's Classics is the publishing arm of Gateway to the Classics which presents the complete text of hundreds of classic books for children at www.gatewaytotheclassics.com.

ISBN: 978-1-63334-025-1

Yesterday's Classics, LLC
PO Box 339
Ithaca, NY 14851

CONTENTS

I. HOW IT HAPPENED	1
II. CHRISTMAS ON THE PRAIRIE	5
III. A DROLL SANTA CLAUS	19
IV. HOW A BEAR BROUGHT CHRISTMAS	36
V. CHRISTMAS UNDER THE SNOW	46
VI. CAROL'S GOOD WILL	59
VII. OUT OF AN ASH-BARREL	72
VIII. HOW A TOBOGGAN BROUGHT FORTUNE	84
IX. THE TELLTALE TILE	95
X. THE BIRDS' CHRISTMAS TREE	107
XI. HOW THE HORSE TOLD	120
XII. THE CAT'S CHARM	129
XIII. MAY'S HAPPY THOUGHT	142
XIV. THE MAGIC FIGURE	153
XV. CHRISTMAS IN THE ALLEY	165

CHAPTER I

HOW IT HAPPENED

The way Kristy came to have an odd Christmas at all, was this: she had been very ill at her grandmother's, and though she tried her best, and the good doctor tried his best, she could not get well enough to go home for Christmas.

This was a great grief, of course, for all the girls were having fine times in town, Christmas trees and all sorts of festive doings, and Kristy thought so much about it all and felt so bad about it that the doctor began to shake his head again.

So Mamma told Kristy that she might plan anything she liked, to celebrate the day, and if it were possible, she should have her way. This was a capital idea of Mamma's, for it gave Kristy something to think of for several days before she hit upon just such a programme as she should like best. Christmas trees she was tired of, and besides, a tree would be stupid where she was the only young person. At last a happy thought came to her, which almost made her dance with delight. She would have a party, a new kind of a party, and give everybody a surprise. How her guests would like it she did not know, but that she should

KRISTY'S CHRISTMAS SURPRISE

enjoy it she was sure. She told Mamma her plan, first making her promise to keep it secret, at least the surprise part of it, and Mamma approved.

It was to be in Grandma's big, old-fashioned kitchen, with its shining oak ceiling and polished floor. The stove that was used for cooking in these days was to be taken away; the great fireplace nearly across the whole end of the room was to be uncovered. The tall brass "fire-dogs" with their queer heads were to be put in place, and a royal fire of logs built up. There was to be no other light in the room, and here on Christmas eve her party was to assemble to be surprised. After that was over they would be treated to doughnuts, apples, and cider—not another thing.

Mamma consulted with Grandma, and the whole thing was arranged just as Kristy wished. Invitations were sent out, mostly to uncles and aunts and kind neighbors, and hardly a person under twenty years of age.

When Grandma saw this odd list of guests she was surprised, and suggested that quite a nice party could be brought together, even here in the country, of young people. But Kristy laughed and said she didn't want a single girl to giggle and disturb, and added that Grandma would understand when she heard the surprise. The day before Christmas there were great doings in the big kitchen. The stove was carried into the laundry and a big pan of doughnuts, or nut-cakes as they called them, were cooked, while the fire-board was taken away and the fireplace filled with big sticks on a foundation of solid log.

Then Aunt Jeanie came over from her house and

HOW IT HAPPENED

hung the room with evergreen and bittersweet, and laid down a big rug before the fire, on one side of which was placed like a throne the great "sick-chair" out of the attic, covered with a gay chintz comfortable, and furnished with pillows and everything to make it as nice as a bed.

As soon as it grew dark on Christmas eve and Kristy had taken her supper, the company began to arrive, and two uncles came up to Kristy's room to carry down the "Queen of the Evening," as they called her.

She was already dressed in a soft new double-wrapper of light blue merino which Mamma had made for her, and Uncle John brought her a lovely bouquet of rosebuds that had come in a box from the city, and Uncle Will put on her head a delicate wreath of fresh violets from the same box. Then they crossed hands and "made a chair," which they gravely and with great ceremony offered to the "Queen" to ride down on.

Kristy was delighted; this was somebody's surprise to her. So she laughingly seated herself on the four crossed hands, put one arm around each dear uncle's neck, and away they went down the stairs.

The kitchen looked charming, and no one regretted the stately parlor left alone in the cold. The guests were assembled and already seated as Mamma had arranged, in a large half-circle around the fire, Grandma in her usual rocking-chair at one end, and Kristy on her throne at the other.

"Now, Mamma," said Kristy, after greetings were over, "will you please tell the surprise?"

KRISTY'S CHRISTMAS SURPRISE

“Ladies and gentlemen,” said Mamma, standing by Kristy’s chair, “you know this is to be a surprise party, differing from the common kind because you—the guests—are to be surprised instead of your young hostess here. Not to keep you in suspense I will announce that the ruling love of the ‘Queen of the Evening’ is stories; and she requests—nay, demands—of every one present that he or she shall each in turn tell her a story.”

A chorus of “Oh’s” in tones of dismay came from the circle, followed by such remarks as “That’s too bad of the little witch!” and “I never could tell a story in my life!” But Mamma rapped on the fire-dogs for silence and spoke again.

“I hear murmurs; let me explain; the terms are not hard. Each one shall tell of the oddest, most miserable or most agreeable Christmas he ever knew about. I’m sure every one of you can remember some story, long or short, connected with that pleasant time, and as good ‘subjects’ I’m sure you will be glad to gratify our little story-lover.”

That silenced every one, for all were fond of Kristy and glad to make her Christmas as bright as possible. Grandma spoke next. “I think that’s a very cunning plan on the part of my granddaughter, and while you are all collecting your wits, and brushing up your memories of old times, I’ll tell the first story myself. As it is about myself, I have no trouble in recalling it.”

“That’s lovely of you, Grandma,” said Kristy warmly. Grandma smiled across the fireplace, and while Uncle Will stirred up the fire to make a brighter blaze, she brought her knitting out of her pocket and began.

CHAPTER II

**CHRISTMAS ON
THE PRAIRIE**

It was all my own fault, the way we spent our Christmas. I'll say that to begin with. I was a willful girl in those days, and well was I punished for insisting upon having my own way, that strange Christmas day so long ago.

We were all going to my grandmother's to a family gathering, and I teased my father to take us in the big sleigh. The ride was only forty miles, and I thought it would be fine and grand to show off our stylish city vehicle, with prancing horses and plenty of bells.

Yes, I'll confess the whole. I'm afraid I was mean enough to think of the sensation we should make in the little village, and of how our country cousins would stare.

Well, after some demurring, father and mother consented and everything was arranged. A big square basket of good things—which we always carried when we all went together to grandmother's—was packed and fitted under the back seat in a sort of box; Willie's and my presents to our cousins, as well as mother's; mine

KRISTY'S CHRISTMAS SURPRISE

carefully stowed away in a safe corner, and everything was ready to start the night before we were to go.

On that morning, however, the sky was cloudy and it looked like snow. Father came in and said he believed we had better go by rail after all; we could telegraph Uncle James to meet us at the station, for if it should snow we might have trouble with a sleigh.

Mother agreed that it would be best; but I took it upon myself to be so disappointed, and made such a commotion, that at last, in order that I might have a pleasant Christmas, they consented—as it was not certain that it would snow after all—to gratify me.

Great was my pride and delight when we drove off; horses prancing and bells jingling. Mother and I packed into the back seat, with plenty of cloaks and wraps and fur robes to keep us warm, with hot bricks for our feet, and everything snug and nice; and father and Willie in front, just as comfortable; father driving, in his warm fur gloves.

The first ten miles were very pleasant, but as we went on snow began to come down in earnest. I noticed that father grew silent and hurried the horses, and mother looked anxiously at the fast falling flakes.

After an hour or so, it settled into a steady, thick storm. The track was soon covered and we could not hear our horses' feet; in fact, after a while we could not see the horses' ears, much less the road.

Mother grew more worried, but father spoke cheerfully and said the horses would follow the track,

CHRISTMAS ON THE PRAIRIE

and he let them take their own way. The horses hurried on, and we should have been at grandmother's. The short day was nearly over, it began to grow dark, and now even I was no longer held up by my pride. I began to be dreadfully frightened, especially as the road was so uneven, and we constantly ran against things and over things that nearly upset us, so that we knew we were out of the road and of course lost.

Perhaps you don't know what that word means to people traveling on the wide western prairie, where the road is on a level with the rest of the country, and one can go for miles and not see a house or even a fence. The very thought struck terror to all of us. Lost on the terrible prairies, with snow so thick we could not see! I began to cry, but mother consoled me by reminding me that at most we should not starve, for we could eat the contents of the Christmas basket, and the storm could not last forever. But I felt the pangs of remorse, and remembered that it was I alone who had brought the family into this disagreeable if not dangerous position.

By this time it was dark, and we were stealing cautiously along, the horses almost tired out dragging the heavy load through unbroken snow. We kept watch on all sides for a light—any light that would lead us to shelter. It was eight o'clock in the evening before we caught sight of a faint gleam on the right, and father at once turned the horses towards it. A few minutes' floundering and plunging of the poor beasts through drifts almost up to their necks brought us near that welcome light. There seemed to be a house of some sort,—very small,—and father jumped out

KRISTY'S CHRISTMAS SURPRISE

and stumbled about till he found a door, on which he knocked.

In a moment it opened and a frightened-looking face appeared, holding a candle above the head. It was a poor-looking woman's face, but she seemed like an angel to us. Father told her our trouble, and asked her to let us come in and stay all night.

She said she could not turn away a dog on such a night and to what she had we were welcome, but she had little to offer us, and she feared we would not be very comfortable.

"At least," said mother, "you have fire and a roof over you, and we shall be glad of them to-night."

Well, of course we hurried out, and thankful enough I was to leave the sleigh I had entered with such pride. The poor tired horses had to go into a sort of shed where the woman kept her wood, and for a long time father was busy making them as comfortable as he could, rubbing them down and putting on their blankets, while we took off our wraps and looked around the one room of the log cottage in which we were to pass the night, and—though we didn't suspect it then—the next day as well.

The family consisted of a mother and two children, a boy and girl, about Willie's and my age. They were evidently very poor, for there was hardly anything in the house, except a bed with little skimpy pillows, a table, and a few hard chairs. The fire was in a big fireplace, and the one candle stood on the shelf above it. A cupboard on one side held a few dishes, and that was about all.

CHRISTMAS ON THE PRAIRIE

And this was Christmas eve! and at my grandmother's now the aunts and uncles and cousins were having a merry time, a delicious supper, which made my mouth water to think of, so hungry was I, a roaring big fire, plenty of lights, and lots of fun.

“And but for you, willful girl,” something within me kept suggesting, “but for you, you would all be in the midst of it at this moment.”

Nobody spoke of that, however.

Father asked if he could get anything to feed the horses, and the woman brought out a basket of corn. So Billy and Jack had to do without their usual oats, and eat corn out of a pail. They didn't seem to mind, but crunched away as though it were sugar-plums.

It was different with us. We were half-starved, and when we asked about something to eat we found that the terrible little house had nothing but corn-meal and a little salt pork.

How dreadful! I could not bear corn-meal, and I loathed pork, but mother asked her cheerfully to cook a supper for us. So she bustled about and cut some very thin slices and broiled them over the coals, and mixed up some of the meal with water and things, and brushed clean a place on the hearth and baked it there on the hot stones, and by that time I was so ravenous I could eat shoestrings, I thought. So I did make a hearty supper on corn bread. Father ate, too, and so did Willie, but I noticed that mother only nibbled at hers.

Then we began to think of sleeping. The woman

KRISTY'S CHRISTMAS SURPRISE

(Mrs. Burns was her name) insisted upon giving mother and me her own bed, but I saw an odd look go over mother's face as she glanced at it, and she utterly refused. She said we had carriage robes and cushions and shawls, and could make ourselves very comfortable on the floor before the fire. So father and Willie brought the things in, and mother spread up two beds side by side, cushions and robes on the floor, and shawls for covering.

Such a strange night as that was! I lay awake a long time, watching the dancing shadows which the fire threw on the rafters of the little house, holding fast to mother's hand all the while, for I was half-scared out of my wits to be on the floor. I thought of rats and mice and many horrible things I had heard of, and I was sure I should not sleep a wink, especially as that troublesome monitor inside kept suggesting to me that it was my own doing, my own willfulness that had brought this upon the whole family.

I tried to put away the thought—to think of something else; to make excuses for myself; but somehow everything looked different here, and I could not bring back my own satisfaction with myself. Moreover, it seemed as if that little ray of light, that was showing me my real self, was determined to reveal more things. I remembered that I had always wanted to have my own way, and the dreadful monitor reminded me that I didn't much care if I did put other people out of their way, or oblige them to do what they didn't like, to please me, and—and—I couldn't blink the fact that I was apt to be very ugly and cross when I had to give

CHRISTMAS ON THE PRAIRIE

up my own plans; and at last came the word which all this meant: it was selfishness.

It seemed as if that word suddenly burst on me, and I saw it as in letters of fire. It was a disagreeable word. I hated selfish people, and I had often given up friendship for a girl because of this ugly trait; and was it my own, too?

I was startled, but I could not get away from that stern monitor within, which seemed to have taken this dismal occasion to show me my true self.

Hours I lay awake thinking, about myself to be sure, but not in a cheering way. Even now, I remember how, in this wretched plight, brought on by my own selfishness, I had not thought of any one else; nothing of my mother's discomfort, unable to sleep on the floor, unable to eat coarse food, anxious about grandmother's anxiety about us; nothing of father's cares, worry about our comfort, about his horses, about how we could get on tomorrow; nothing about Willie, the gay evening he had expected, the evident disappointment; nothing of the family we were putting to so great inconvenience; nothing of the worry of grandmother and all our relatives at our absence. Nothing—nothing—with shame I confess it—nothing but the sole, individual disappointment of one small, selfish girl. I saw myself, and I didn't like the picture, and with tears of shame I said to myself: "I'll begin to do better to-morrow. I will! I will!" I slept at last, and awoke full of my good resolve. The sun was not shining; that I noticed the first thing, and next I saw the flakes begin to fall. Father

KRISTY'S CHRISTMAS SURPRISE

went out to look at the weather, and reported—alas for our hopes!—a steady fall of snow, fences all covered, no road to be seen, not a chance of our getting away till the people got out and broke the roads with heavy teams,—and it was Christmas morning! I saw mother's quick clasp of the hands, and heard her murmur, "Oh! if I could only let her know where we are!" and I knew she was thinking of grandmother's anxiety. I saw father's face as he came in from attending the horses, and asked Mrs. Burns if she had any more corn, and I was just resigning myself to a great burst of tears, when I remembered the thoughts of last night. "Now, here is a good chance to begin to think of some one else," said the monitor. There was no comfort in thinking of any of us, so I turned to the family of the log house.

The mother looked thin and ill, and was hurrying about to get breakfast, which I could see was a repetition of the supper of last night. I turned to the girl. Her name was Elsie, and she was near my own age. I went over to where she stood near the small window, in awe of her guests.

When I reached her I didn't know what to say, for with the best of intentions I was new at the business. At last I began timidly:

"Elsie, what do you do here on Christmas?"

"I d' know what you mean," said Elsie shyly. "What is Christmas?"

"You don't know that!" I cried in amazement. "I thought everybody in the world knew about Christmas! Why, why—" I stopped. What could I say? How could

CHRISTMAS ON THE PRAIRIE

I begin? "Mother," as a thought struck me, "please tell Elsie what Christmas is; she doesn't know."

Mother turned. "Well, dear, come here and let me tell you, though my daughter is so astonished that I must first tell her that there are hundreds of thousands of children who never heard of Christmas."

Then calling the boy John, who was standing stupidly by the door of the shed, as though about to run away, mother told them the whole story: why we keep it, and what we do to celebrate it. John got interested and forgot to shut his mouth, and Elsie's eyes got bigger and bigger and brighter and brighter; and when mother stopped, she drew a long breath and said: "Oh, how beautiful! how I should like to see Christmas! But I don't suppose I ever shall out here on the prairie," she added in a moment, the light fading out of her face.

At that instant a thought came like a flash to me—I believe it came from the same monitor which had shown me myself in the night; anyway, it came the same way, and I must say I didn't like it a bit. I just hated it. What do you suppose it was?

"You have things enough packed into the sleigh to make this poor family perfectly happy for a long time; things intended for people who already have more than they need. Presents you have prepared for your girl cousins will do nicely for Elsie, those for the boys will just suit John. The mittens you knit for grandmother's old servant will keep Mrs. Burns's hands warm, and the New Testament in big print, that you bought with your own money for grandmother, will be just the thing for

KRISTY'S CHRISTMAS SURPRISE

this dreary little house in long winter evenings. Then, there is the basket; why carry lots of nice things to eat into a house already too full, when these poor souls have nothing—yes, truly nothing—meal and pork.”

I took this new suggestion and went to the window to fight it out with myself. Selfishness said, “What are these to you? and how your cousins will feel!” But, on the other hand—

Well, in a few minutes I went to mother and whispered my thought. Her face brightened. “I am so glad you thought of it, my daughter. It had occurred to me, but I dreaded to propose it, lest you should be disappointed. Now we’ll do it, and our Christmas will not be so very gloomy after all, I’m sure.”

Once settled, we entered into the plan with enthusiasm, we even—if you’ll believe me—planned a Christmas tree, for father (whom, of course, we told at once) said we were close on the edge of an evergreen wood. He took John and Willie, who was delighted with the plan, borrowed Mrs. Burns’s axe, and waded through, I don’t know how deep snow to the grove. Very soon he cut down a nice tree, and the two boys dragged it in, prancing through the snow like a pair of horses, and scattering it on every side. I even heard a laugh from John, at the door.

The tree was quickly set up, and after we had eaten breakfast we went to work on it. Mrs. Burns was interested: said she’d heard of those things, but never saw one; and the children were just wild; I never saw folks so delighted.

CHRISTMAS ON THE PRAIRIE

There wasn't much to trim it with; only, luckily, one of the things in the sleigh was a great big box of bonbons. They are pretty to look at, you know, and we used them to decorate our tree. Do you suppose a Christmas tree was ever before trimmed with bonbons, hearts, and Jacob's ladders, and rings of dancers (you know how to cut them), and all sorts of droll figures which mother cut out of paper, white and pink, which came around the packages?

You'd hardly believe it, but that tree looked really pretty when it came dark, and the firelight fell on it. But before that time we had our Christmas dinner. The table was set out and covered with newspapers that we had (Mrs. Burns hadn't even a tablecloth) and then hidden with sprigs of evergreen that came off in trimming the tree. The things out of the basket made a funny dinner, but wasn't it good! A splendid roast turkey, a big chicken pie, a lovely frosted cake, a plum pudding, and beautiful jelly. Not a bit of bread or potato, not a vegetable nor a piece of butter. Mrs. Burns baked some corn bread, and it looked very strange beside the other things. I tell you the dinner was a wonder in that log house. The children were so surprised and happy they could hardly eat, and I hope they enjoyed what was left after we went away, for it was not half eaten.

Then after dinner was cleared away, father and Willie brought in the box which held our presents. Mother's were really useful. She had a nice merino dress which she was taking to grandmother's Netty, an old servant who lived there when mother was a little girl. It was all made, and just fitted Mrs. Burns. Father had

KRISTY'S CHRISTMAS SURPRISE

a shawl for her, too. I gave the mittens I had knit to Johnnie, and the Testament to Mrs. Burns, and she was delighted with it. I gave Elsie a book I had for Cousin Addie, and mother gave her a cunning little work-box with all the sewing things in it. Willie gave Johnnie a little set of tools he was carrying to Cousin Harry, and I never saw a boy so pleased.

Then we had some boxes of games, and we showed them how to play afterwards.

Everything that was not too big was hung on the tree, and those two children just stood and stared. They couldn't take their eyes off, and Elsie every few minutes drew a long breath, as if she could not contain herself for joy.

I never enjoyed a tree so much in my life, those two children were so perfectly overwhelmed with happiness. Then we sat by the fire and told stories and taught them the games, and ate some of the bon-bons from the tree, though we left most of them till we should be gone, and we gave them the bon-bon boxes, which they thought were too fine to use, and the evening fairly flew. Before we thought of it, it was time to go to bed, and I went right to sleep that night.

The next morning the sun was shining, and before long came a great noise, shouting and yelling, and we saw lots of country people with oxen and heavy sleds breaking the road. Father went out to see them, and he found that we were about three miles from grandmother's, but off the regular road. Then we packed into the sleigh again and went off, and mother left Elsie

CHRISTMAS ON THE PRAIRIE

my old cloak and Johnnie Willie's ulster, that he used only for country drives—we had so many extra wraps for our long ride. Father gave Mrs. Burns some money, too, and when we drove off she stood by the door crying (if you'll believe me), while Elsie and Johnnie shouted "Good-by," and Willie and I waved our handkerchiefs and called back.

Before noon we got to grandmother's and found them very much alarmed about us. Mother told our story and promised to send a fresh Christmas box from home, but nobody would hear of it. Everybody seemed delighted that we had given away their presents, and brought heaps of things that Santa Claus had left for us.

It may seem strange, but I believe that Christmas in the little log house was the very happiest I ever spent, and Willie and mother always said so, too.

"And that's why you've been so nice and generous ever since!" cried Kristy as the story ended.

Everybody laughed, and Grandma even blushed a little, but Kristy added indignantly, "You needn't laugh! You all know it's true!"

"So we do, little girl," said Uncle Will warmly; "the most generous, the nicest, the—"

"There, there!" interrupted Grandma, "that'll do. It's your turn now, Mr. Tom."

Now Uncle Tom pretended to be greatly distressed because he could not tell half so good a story, and Kristy laughed at him and told him he needn't pretend, for

KRISTY'S CHRISTMAS SURPRISE

everybody knew he could make up stories so good that they were printed in the newspapers.

This made Uncle Tom blush, and he said:

“Very well then, Miss Queeny! If I must tell a story, I shall do it in newspaper style. For I can’t talk stories; I can only write them.”

“Do it any way you please,” said Kristy, “only begin! Begin! Sh—! Listen, everybody.”

“Well,” said Uncle Tom, slowly drawing a fresh newspaper from his pocket, “the oddest Christmas I ever heard of was in a negro cabin out in the woods of Ohio, and I’ll read you that.”

“Oh! oh!” came in a chorus from the listeners. “You must tell your story!”

“This is my story,” Uncle Tom admitted at last, “and it’s new, and nobody here has seen it,” and he turned to Kristy.

“Yes, read it, Uncle Tom,” she said. “I know it’ll be nice.”

Uncle Tom turned his back to the fire so that he could see to read, and then began.

CHAPTER III

A DROLL SANTA CLAUS

“BERTIE,” whispered seven-year-old Lily mysteriously, “I know where to find Santa Claus. Barbara told me.”

“Where?” cried Bertie, dropping the block he was about adding to his house.

“Out on the hill,” Lily went on eagerly. “Barbara says that Christmas eve the Christ Child comes down on the hill, with oh! lots and lots of presents, and picks them over and gives them to Santa Claus to take to the children.”

“What hill?” asked Bertie, jumping up from the floor. “The one the moon comes over, Barbara says,” answered Lily. “And I guess it’s that one,”—pointing to the peak of a mountain miles and miles away. “Christmas eve’s this very night,” she went on earnestly. “Let’s you and I go up there and see him and pick out our presents.”

“Well,” said Bertie, always ready to do what Lily suggested.

“We mustn’t let Barbara see us, or she won’t let us go,” said Lily. “But I guess she’ll be glad when we come back with lots of things.”

KRISTY'S CHRISTMAS SURPRISE

"I'll bring her a horse," said Bertie, "'at she can ride."

"And I'll bring her a be-au-ti-ful long dress that'll drag on the ground," said Lily, starting down-stairs. Bertie followed. Barbara had gone to the kitchen for a few moments; Mamma was busy in the parlor with company; and nobody saw the two children creep downstairs, open the front door, and slip out.

"I wonder which way it is!" said Lily, when they had reached the walk. "Oh! I guess that way, 'cause there's the hill," and she turned the way that led from the village toward the woods.

The sun was just down, and away the eager children tramped, too much excited to feel cold, though they had nothing over them, and too much afraid of being overtaken by the nurse to linger. When they reached the woods it looked rather dark, and Bertie was afraid to go in. But Lily said they'd soon be there, she guessed; and the Christ Child would take care of them, 'cause he loved little children.

So hand in hand they entered the dreary wood. It looked much darker inside, and, in fact, the short winter day was about over and night was falling fast. Anxiously the two little wanderers hurried along, not saying much, now running when the ground was smooth, and stumbling along over roots and sticks when it was rough.

"I'm cold, 'n I want my Mamma," burst out Bertie at last.

"So am I cold," said Lily, "and I guess we must be

A DROLL SANTA CLAUS

most there; and then think how nice it'll be!"

"Will it be warm?" asked the anxious little voice.

"Oh! of course, and light," said Lily cheerfully, "and plenty of nice things to eat."

"I want something now," wailed Bertie, the tears rolling down his face.

"Well, don't cry," said Lily, in a soothing, motherly way. "We'll soon be there now." And on they trudged, through swamps half up to their knees, falling over logs, scratching their faces on bushes, hungry, cold, wet, and at last frightened when the snow began to come down thick and fast.

"I want to go home," sobbed Bertie.

"Well," said Lily, "we'll go," and they turned around and began to retrace their steps. But alas! they had not come straight, and they only went farther and farther from home.

The prospect of going home quieted Bertie for a while; but when some time had gone by, and it was almost totally dark, and they could see nothing, and ran against trees and hurt themselves, even Lily's courage began to fail, and the tears ran down her face, though she tried to choke them back. But still they stumbled on.

"Don't cry, Bertie," the brave little creature said after a while. "If we die out here in the woods, maybe the robin redbreasts'll come and cover us up with leaves, as they did the children in the woods in my book."

"I don't want to be covered up with leaves," sobbed

KRISTY'S CHRISTMAS SURPRISE

Bertie, who couldn't see any consolation in that.

Just at that moment they came out from behind a rock, and they saw a light. Lily was ablaze in a minute.

"There it is! There they are!" she cried. "Look, Bertie! That must be the place!" And they hurried on, losing the light now and then, as a tree came in the way, and finding it again in a minute. When they drew near the light they saw that it came from a window, and when they got close to it there was a small house with a door beside the window. Lily knocked. In a moment it was opened by a negro,—old and bent and white-haired,—who gazed at the two weary children as though they were ghosts.

"Please, sir, are you Santa Claus?" asked Lily, with trembling lips and tears on her cheeks.

"Santa Claus!" said the bewildered negro. "Bless yo' heart, who's that? But come in out o' the storm. Yo' must be nigh froze to death. Who's come with yo'?" and he peered out into the darkness.

"No one," said Lily timidly, half afraid of his looks, yet reassured by his good-natured voice. "We came alone, to see Santa Claus. But I'm afraid we missed the way."

"Come alone, this yere cold night, from the village?" he ejaculated in amazement. "Did yo' Ma know?"

"No," said Lily, casting down her eyes. "We didn't tell her."

"Well, come in by the fire," said he, drawing them in and closing the door. "What yo' s'pose yer Ma'll say

A DROLL SANTA CLAUS

when she finds yo' done runned away?"

Bertie burst into loud crying, and Lily sobbed: "Oh! please won't you show us the way back? I didn't think of that."

"Well, well, don't cry," said he. "Yo' must get warm and have a bite to eat, and then I'll see about getting on yo' home. I ain't so young as I was onct, and it's no fool of a tramp through these yere woods after night, I kin tell ye."

It was a droll little place that the children had come into. The whole house consisted of one room, roughly built, evidently by old Philip himself. On one side was a rude lounge-frame, holding some sort of a coarse bed and a blanket or two; on the other a table, made by turning a packing-box on one end. The third side was given up to the rickety old stove, the pipe of which went out through a hole in the side of the shanty, and a rough shelf behind it, on which were a plate or two, as many cups, a package or two of corn-meal, tobacco, and other necessaries, with a lighted tallow candle, stuck into a hollowed-out potato. There were no chairs, but a soap-box by the stove looked as though it was used for that purpose. A saw and sawbuck in the corner by the door and an old coat and hat hanging up completed the furniture of the dwelling.

But, if the house was odd, it was warm, and the two half-frozen children eagerly crowded up to the stove.

"Pore chillen!" said their tender-hearted host. "It's a miracle yo' didn't freeze to death out in them woods."

KRISTY'S CHRISTMAS SURPRISE

“We did most,” said Lily, with quivering lip. “And oh, dear! how can we get home again?”

“Don’t you fret yo’r heart, my little lady,” said old Philip kindly. “I see about that ’ar. ’Pears to me yo’d ’mazin’ly like a hot ’tater, now, wouldn’t yo’, my little man?”

“Yes,” said Bertie, who was more than half afraid of him.

Philip opened the door of his stove, raked away the ashes, and there were two nice potatoes, baked to a lovely brown. He took them out, carefully brushed off the ashes, laid them on the table, brought out a cracked teacup with salt in it, and an old knife, and told the children to come up and eat.

“If I’d a know’d I was gwine to have company to tea,” he said, laughing, “I’d a got up a supper in style. But eat the ’taters and I’ll bake yo’ a oncommon nice hoecake. Yo’ like hoecake?”

“I don’t know,” said Lily, who stood irresolute before the table, not knowing just how to begin such a meal. “How do you eat these? They’re hot.”

“Sure ’nuff,” said Philip. “I done forgot yo’ wasn’t used to my sort o’ eatin’. I jest cut off the end, drop a pinch o’ salt in, and dig out the inside.”

“Oh!” said Lily, hastening to follow his directions for herself. As for Bertie, he had already half eaten his potato without salt.

Philip now brought out a bowl and mixed up some corn-meal in it; then brushing off the hot griddle of

A DROLL SANTA CLAUS

his stove, he poured the mixture on. In a few minutes he turned it over with a knife, and in a short time he handed it in the same way onto a plate and put it on the table. It was brown and smelt good, and the hungry children eagerly devoured it, while Philip made another.

When they had eaten as much as they could, and drank some water out of teacups, Philip gave Lily a seat on the soap-box, while he turned a big stick of wood up on end and sat down on that himself. He then took Bertie, who had got over his fright, onto his lap and proceeded to take off the soaked shoes and stockings and warm the little cold red feet. Lily meantime did the same for hers, which ached with the cold.

“Now tell me how yo’ comed to run away,” said Philip, when they were more comfortable.

“We came out to find the Christ Child,” said Lily. “Barbara says he comes on Christmas eve down on a hill and gives the presents to Santa Claus; and we wanted to pick ours out.”

“Yes, I want a horse ’t I can ride,” said Bertie, who had recovered his spirits, now that he was warm and fed.

“Pore little things!” said Philip compassionately. “Yo’ mus’ have had a dreffle tramp! I’ll see how the weather is.”

So he sat Bertie on the lounge-bed and went to the door. A fierce blast came in as he opened it, with a flurry of snow nearly putting out the light. He shut it quickly, and stood a few moments with a look of perplexity on his face.

KRISTY'S CHRISTMAS SURPRISE

“I’ll tell you what,” he said at length, in answer to Lily’s anxious look, “it’s teetotally umpossible to go through the woods to-night. I wouldn’t ’tempt it in this yere storm myself, let alone toting two chillen. I’ll fix yo’ up as comf’able as I can hyere to-night, an’ soon as it’s light I’ll go to the village an’ tell y’r folks, an’ they’ll come with a sleigh. There’s a wood-road round a little piece down here.”

Bertie’s lip went up for a cry; but Lily took him in her arms in a motherly way, and said: “Never mind, Bertie, dear; it’ll soon be morning, and we’ll go home in a sleigh, maybe. And then it’ll be Christmas, you know.”

They talked a little more, and then Philip fixed a place for them to sleep. He shook up the bed till it was high and round, laid one blanket over it, put the now half-asleep children in it, and covered them up as snug as he could with the other blanket.

“’T ain’t much of a cover to them, I reckon,” said he to himself, “but I kin keep a fire all night, an’ I don’t suspicion they’ll get cold.”

Having fixed them as nicely as he could, shaded his light so it would not shine in their eyes, and replenished his stove, old Philip sat down on his soap-box, and fell to talking to himself, as he often did out there in the woods, for want of other company.

“Pore creeturs!” he said, looking at the sleeping children. “What a marcy that they got sight o’ my light. They’d be done dead by this time. An’ to think the little innocents come out this-a-way to find Santa Claus. Pore things! Little ’nuff Christmas they’ll have, I ’se a thinkin’.

A DROLL SANTA CLAUS

I wonder what they 'r a-doing down to their house. Tearin' round fit to kill, I reckon. They 'r somebody's darlin's I see plain 'nuff. Won't they be powerful glad to see this nigga in the mornin'? Yah! yah!" he laughed softly to himself. "I reckon they never so glad to see this chile afore. Pore things!" he went on after a little, "come out yere to see Santa Claus an' get some presents. Golly!" he exclaimed, as a new thought struck him. "I wonder if I couldn't hunt up somethin' 'r other to make a Christmas mornin' bright. They'll be powerful forlorn when they wakes up."

He was silent some time, scratched his head, whistled a little; and after a while he got up softly and hung their stockings up to dry. "I know what Ize gwine to do," he said. "I'll give 'em some nuts and pop-corn, anyway."

He drew a box from under the foot of the bed, opened it, and took out some beechnuts—delicious little three-cornered things that he had gathered in the woods. From the same box he took two or three ears of small popping-corn. As he attempted to push it back it hit something, and he put in his hand and drew out a stick.

"Golly!" said he again, "if there ain't the very stick fur a hoss fur that boy, that he wants so bad. I didn't 'spect, when I done shoved it in under there fur a walking-stick, what I'd want it fur."

It was a piece of a branch of a tree, and on one end it was bent over so as to make a natural sort of a handle. It would do very well for a horse's head, too. So Philip

KRISTY'S CHRISTMAS SURPRISE

got out his old jack-knife, cut a sort of a mouth for the horse, dug holes in the bark to represent the eyes, made a sort of a bridle of string, whittled the end off smooth, and there was as fine a riding-horse as any boy of five could ask for.

“There,” said Philip, “that’ll do fur the boy; now what kin I find fur the gal?” A long time he puzzled over this, till he remembered some birds’ eggs that had been in his shanty for months. He took down the old coat that hung on the wall, and there they were, very dusty now, but not broken. Carefully he took them down and washed them clean, breaking one or two, but on the whole succeeding very well. Then he strung them on a clean string, and they looked very pretty indeed.

“Little curly head ’ll like that ’ar, I know,” said he, with a grin of pleasure on his black face; “an I’ll learn her the name of every kind.”

Next the droll old Santa Claus proceeded to prepare his pop-corn. He took out from some dark corner a sort of iron saucepan, and put it on the stove while he shelled the corn. When it was hot he dropped in the corn, covered it up, and began to shake it about, first slowly, and then faster and faster as the corn popped off in little explosions inside, every few seconds looking at the sleepers to see that they didn’t wake up. They were far too tired to wake, and when he had poured the beautiful white shower out on the table they had not stirred once.

Then he went on to hang a stocking of each child on the wall near the bed; and then, tiptoeing around

A DROLL SANTA CLAUS

as though he were stepping on eggs, he went back and forth filling them. First down in the toe came beechnuts, filling all the foot; then popped corn stuffed the leg into a funny bunchy shape. Then over Lily's he hung the string of birds' eggs, and over Bertie's the comical horse.

All this work, varied by replenishing the fire, kept old Philip busy till nearly morning, and then he began to prepare breakfast. His potatoes were baked and his hoecakes mixed in the highest style of the art when Lily opened her eyes.

At first sight of Philip a look of fright came into her face, and then she remembered. "Oh!" said she, "I thought it was all a dream, and I was in my bed at home."

"But you isn't, honey. Yo's my guest this blessed Christmas mornin'. Wish yo' Merry Christmas. How do yo' feel?"

"I feel well enough," said Lily, sitting up. "Is this Christmas, really?"

"Yes," said old Philip. "See your stocking hanging up thar?"

Lily looked around quickly. "Oh! what a lovely string of eggs. Oh! where did you get it? Is it for me?" burst out of her eager lips.

"Course it's for yo'," said Philip, showing all his teeth. "Santa Claus mus' a know'd whar yo' was, an' done come down the chimbly an' leff it hyer fur yo'."

"Oh! Bertie, wake up!" cried Lily, shaking the sleepy boy. "It's Merry Christmas, and Santa Claus has been here."

KRISTY'S CHRISTMAS SURPRISE

Bertie was wide awake in a minute. "There's my horse," he shouted, as soon as he saw it. "Let me have a ride." And he snatched it down, got astride, and rode around the small room, perfectly happy.

"Let's see what else is in the stockings," said Lily, taking them down.

"Oh! pop-corn! Isn't it nice?" and they began to eat it at once.

"And what are these?" she asked, as she emptied the corn into her lap, and the nuts came down in a little brown shower.

"Le 's see," said Philip, looking at them curiously, as though he had never seen them. "Why, them 's beechnuts! Didn't you never see beechnuts afore? There's heaps in the woods."

"No, I never saw any," said Lily. "How do you open them?"

Philip showed her how to take out the delicate nut, and she declared it the most delicious nut in the world. "Santa Claus made them purpose for us, I guess," she said.

It was some time before Philip could get them to have their stockings and shoes on and eat their breakfast. But he hurried them by reminding them how anxious their mother would be; and as soon as he had seen them fed he got ready for his journey.

It did not look very promising outside. The snow was a foot deep, though it had stopped falling, and he resolved to start.

A DROLL SANTA CLAUS

“Now mind yo’ don’t set the house afire,” he said, as he put on his buckskin mittens and buttoned his one coat up tight to his chin. “Don’t let the fire go out, nuther, or you’ll freeze.”

“I’ll tend to it,” said Lily.

“Good-by. I’ll hurry fast as ever I kin,” said Philip, and went out and shut the door, leaving them alone. But not sad. Far from it; they were as merry over their rude Christmas presents as though they had a room full of toys.

And how do you suppose the night had passed in the home of Lily and Bertie? Not so quietly as in the shanty in the woods. When their absence was discovered there was great excitement, deepening as the village was searched and no trace of them revealed, turning to horror as the storm came up and the hours went by and no children to be found, and settling into despair when the various parties who were out hunting returned with no trace. There was excitement all through the village; but in their home it was agony. The father spent the night in scouring the country, the mother in going from one fainting fit to another, till the doctor despaired of her life.

It was a welcome sound when old Philip’s voice rang out at the door. “Done loss any chillen hyer?”

Mr. Deane, who had just returned, rushed out. “Yes. Do you bring any news?”

“Well, ’spects I does. Two chillen done spent the night in my cabin.”

KRISTY'S CHRISTMAS SURPRISE

“Come in,” cried the father, hastily drawing him in. “Where are they now? How did you find them? Where is your house? Bless you, I’ll never forget this!” he poured out in a stream.

“One at a time, Massa,” said old Philip, going up to the stove in the hall and spreading out his black hands to the pleasant warmth. “My shanty is over in the woods a piece—nigh on to two miles from here, I reckon. An’ them two chillen sot out, nigh’s I kin make out, about sundown, to find Santa Claus. They see my light, an’ come to my do’ bout eight o’c lock, I reckon, nigh about froze an’ starved; the boy cryin’, but the little gal brave an’ peart to the last.”

By the time the story was finished all the household had gathered around, and the father had Philip’s rough hands in both of his. “Bless you, my man, I’ll pay you for this.”

“No, you won’t,” said Philip. “I don’t want no pay. But them young ones is alone in the shanty, an’ they mowt set it afire, though I charged the little gal to look out.”

“Is there a road? Can I get there with a sleigh?” asked Mr. Deane.

“You kin go purty nigh,” said Philip.

“Well, you get warm and have some breakfast. Cook,” turning to her, “give him the best you can in five minutes, while I see about the horses. You, Barbara, get cloaks and things.”

Seated by the kitchen table, Philip disposed of a cup or two of hot coffee and some cold meat and bread

A DROLL SANTA CLAUS

in a few minutes, and when the sleigh came up to the door he came out.

“Have you no overcoat for this weather?” asked Mr. Deane, as he put on his own in the hall.

“No, sir,” said Philip. “The wood-sawin’ business isn’t over ’n above good since so many burns coal. I hasn’t had an obercoat fur many a year.”

Mr. Deane turned to the rack from which he had taken his. “Here’s one for you,” he said, handing him a heavy overcoat.

Philip was overcome. Something choked him so that he couldn’t speak, but he speedily got into it and followed Mr. Deane out to the sleigh. He was already in, and he bade Philip get in by him, and they started off.

Of course, it did not take very long to reach the point nearest the shanty, though the road was not broken and it was rather hard pulling for the stout pair of horses.

When the father opened the door he found Bertie prancing around on his horse and Lily perfectly happy, studying out her birds’ eggs.

“Oh! Papa,” she exclaimed when she saw him, “Santa Claus came here and left us such beautiful things!”

“See my horse!” shouted Bertie. “Santa Claus bringed him!”

Mr. Deane looked around the room and understood the poverty of its owner, and a happy idea occurred to him.

KRISTY'S CHRISTMAS SURPRISE

“Philip,” he said, “in the chamber of my barn is a comfortable room, built for a man, but my man don’t occupy it. I’m going to have you move down there this very day and live in it. There’s furniture enough about the house to make it comfortable, and I can find work enough for you to do all the year round. We burn lots of wood and have a garden in the summer; and, in fact, I take you into my employment from this hour, at the best wages going, to last your life. You needn’t say anything,” as Philip struggled to speak. “I can never repay you for what you have done for me; but I’ll do what I can. Now, if you’ll help me carry these little ones over to the sleigh, you shall have a team to come for your things.”

Well, the children were soon in their mother’s arms; and Mr. Deane, with the help of the whole household, spent the morning in furnishing up old Philip’s room. A very cosy place it was when all was ready: a carpet; a new little cooking-stove; a nice bed, made up with white sheets and things; a table, a chair or two, including one rocking-chair; a cupboard, containing dishes, tin, and ironware enough to set up a family; jars of sugar and tea and coffee and meal; and, in fact, everything the combined household could think of to add to the old man’s comfort—not forgetting a goodly array of half-worn garments from the family storeroom.

And Philip! Well, he stood and looked at it in silence, taking it in item by item, till he reached a picture which Lily had insisted on giving, hanging it up with her own hands, and then he just turned his face to the wall and covered it up with his hands.

A DROLL SANTA CLAUS

And they all stole away and left him alone.

When Uncle Tom ended his story it was very still in the room for a minute; nobody seemed inclined to speak. At last Kristy cleared her throat and said:

“I knew you’d tell a tip-top story, Uncle Tom. It’s lovely, and you must put it in a book for me.”

“Humph!” said Uncle Tom. “We shall see, Miss Queeny! Your reign is over tonight. Now, Aunt Joe, it’s your chance,” said he, turning mockingly upon his neighbor.

“Well,” said Aunt Joe quietly, “the strangest Christmas doings I know of happened a good many years ago.”