

CHRISTMAS STORIES



AND LEGENDS

Christmas Stories And Legends

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Contents:

<u>Foreword</u>
<u>The Legend Of The "White Gifts"</u>
<u>Her Birthday Dream</u>
<u>The Fir Tree</u>
<u>The Little Match Girl</u>
<u>Little Piccola</u>
<u>The Shepherd's Story</u>
<u>The Story Of Christmas</u>
<u>The Legend Of The Christmas Tree</u>
<u>Little Jean</u>
<u>How The Fir Tree Became The Christmas Tree</u>
<u>The Magi In The West And Their Search For The Christ</u>
<u>Little Gretchen And The Wooden Shoe</u>
<u>The Little Shepherd</u>
<u>Babouscka</u>
<u>The Boy With The Box</u>
<u>The Worker In Sandalwood</u>
<u>The Shepherd Who Didn't Go</u>
<u>Paulina's Christmas</u>
<u>Unto Us A Child Is Born</u>
<u>The Star</u>

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Foreword

No greater teaching force has ever been discovered than the story and no one has ever lived who used that force so skillfully as did our Great Teacher.

It is not strange, then, that among all the stories that have ever been written or told none are so dear to us as the stories and legends which center in His birth.

Young and old alike delight in them and never tire of hearing them.

Unusual care has been taken in compiling this little volume and each story has its own sweet lesson. Each one is from the pen of one who has imbibed the real spirit of Christmas. They were chosen as being particularly well adapted to use in connection with the Christmas Service "White Gifts for the King," but they will prove attractive and helpful at any time during the year.

It is our earnest wish that this little book may find its way into many homes and schools and Sunday Schools and that

its contents may help to give a deeper appreciation of the true Christmas spirit.

The Legend Of The "White Gifts"

A great many years ago in a land far away from us there was a certain king who was dearly beloved by all of his people. Men admired him because he was strong and just. In all of his dealings they knew they could depend upon him. Every matter that came to his consideration was carefully weighed in his mind and his decisions were always wise. Women trusted him because he was pure and true, with lofty thoughts and high ambitions, and the children loved him because of his gentleness and tenderness toward them. He was never so burdened with affairs of state that he could not stop to speak a pleasant word of greeting to the tiniest child, and the very poorest of his subjects knew they could count upon his interest in them.

This deep-seated love and reverence for their king made the people of this country wish very much for a way in which to give expression to it so that he would understand it. Many consultations were held and one after another the plans suggested were rejected, but at last a most happy solution was found. It was rapidly circulated here and there and it met with the most hearty approval everywhere.

It was a plan for celebrating the King's birthday.

Of course, that had been done in many lands before, but there were certain features about this celebration which differed materially from anything that had ever been tried. They decided that on the King's birthday the people should all bring him gifts, but they wanted in some way to let him know that these gifts were the expression of a love on the part of the giver which was pure and true and unselfish, and in order to show that, it was decided that each gift should be a "White Gift."

The King heard about this beautiful plan, and it touched his heart in a wonderful way. He decided that he would do his part to carry out the idea and let his loving subjects know how much he appreciated their thoughtfulness.

You can just imagine the excitement there was all over the land as the King's birthday drew near. All sorts of loving sacrifices had been made and everyone was anxious to make his gift the very best he had to offer. At last the day dawned, and eagerly the people came dressed in white and carrying their white gifts. To their surprise they were ushered into a great, big room—the largest one in the palace. They stood in silence when they first entered it, for it was beautiful beyond all expression. It was a *white* room;—the floor was white marble; the ceiling looked like a mass of soft, white fluffy clouds; the walls were hung with beautiful white silken draperies, and all the furnishings were white. In one end of the room stood a stately white throne, and seated upon it was their beloved ruler and he was clad in shining white robes, and his attendants—all dressed in white—were grouped around him.

Then came the presentation of the gifts. What a wealth of them there was—and how different they were in value. In those days it was just as it is now—there were many people

who had great wealth, and they brought gifts which were generous in proportion to their wealth.

One brought a handful of pearls, another a number of carved ivories. There were beautiful laces and silks and embroideries, all in pure white, and even splendid white chargers were brought to his majesty.

But many of the people were poor—some of them very poor—and their gifts were quite different from those I have been telling about. Some of the women brought handfuls of white rice, some of the boys brought their favorite white pigeons, and one dear little girl smilingly gave him a pure white rose.

It was wonderful to watch the King as each one came and kneeled before him as he presented his gift. He never seemed to notice whether the gift was great or small; he regarded not one gift above another so long as all were white. Never had the King been so happy as he was that day and never had such real joy filled the hearts of the people. They decided to use the same plan every year, and so it came to pass that year after year on the King's birthday the people came from here and there and everywhere and brought their white gifts—the gifts which showed that their love was pure, strong, true and without stain, and year after year the King sat in his white robes on the white throne in the great white room and it was always the same—he regarded not one gift above another so long as all were *white*.

Her Birthday Dream

Marcia Brownlow came out of the church, and walked rapidly down the street. She seemed perturbed; her gray eyes flashed, and on her cheeks glowed two red spots. She was glad she was not going home, so she wouldn't have to take a car, but could walk the short distance to Aunt Sophy's, where she had been invited to dine and visit with her special chum, Cousin Jack—who was home from college for the short Thanksgiving vacation. She slowed up as she reached her destination, and waited a little before going in—she wanted to get calmed down a bit, for she didn't want her friend to see her when she felt so "riled up." Back of it was a secret reluctance to meet Jack—he was so different since the Gipsy Smith revival; of course, he was perfectly lovely, and unchanged toward her, but—somehow, she felt uncomfortable in his presence—and she didn't enjoy having her self-satisfaction disturbed.

As she entered the dining-room, she was greeted with exclamations of surprise and pleasure.

"Why, Marcia!" said Aunt Sophia; "we had given you up! I almost never knew of your being late in keeping an appointment."

"You must excuse me, Auntie; and lay this offense to the charge of our Sunday school superintendent," answered Marcia.

"I suppose Mr. Robinson is laying his plans for Christmas," remarked Uncle John. "He believes in taking time by the forelock—and a very commendable habit it is, too."

"Yes," answered Marcia laconically.

Jack glanced at her keenly. "Is there anything new in the Christmas line?" he asked.

The gray eyes grew black, and the red spots burned again, as Marcia replied: "Well, I should think so—he proposes to turn things topsy-turvy!"

"My! What does he want to do?" inquired Cousin Augusta.

"Oh, he calls it the 'White Gift Christmas'; but the long and short of the matter is, that he proposes to 'turn down' Santa Claus, and all the old time-honored customs connected with Christmas that are so dear to the hearts of the children, and have the school do the giving. He has a big banner hung up in the Sunday school room bearing the words, 'Gifts for the Christ-Child'."

"An excellent idea," exclaimed Uncle John, "but I don't see much of an innovation about that; you have always made the children's giving a part of your Christmas celebration, have you not?"

"Certainly!" rejoined Marcia. "They have always brought their little gifts for the poor, and that is all right; but this time there are no gifts to the Sunday school at all."

"Not even to the Primary School?" asked Augusta.

"Well," admitted Marcia, "Mr. Robinson gave the children their choice today, whether they would have the old Christmas or the 'White Gift Christmas,' and they all voted for the new idea."

"Why then should the children be obliged to have gifts, if they don't want them?" laughed Augusta.

"Oh, children are always taken with novelty, and Mr. Robinson told it to them in such a way that fancy was captivated; but I don't think they really understood what they were giving up."

"Marcia, it seems to me that you are emphasizing the wrong side of the subject if I understand it aright," said Jack.

"Why, do you know about it?" asked Marcia, in surprise.

"Not much," replied Jack; "but I read the White Gift story in the 'Sunday School Times,' and the report of the Painesville experiment."

"Well, Jack, tell us what you know about this mysterious 'White Gift'," commanded his father.

"I would rather Marcia should tell it, father; I know so little."

"Oh, go on, Jack," urged Marcia; "you can't possibly know less about it than I do, for I confess I was so full of the disappointment of the little ones that the other side of it didn't impress me very much."

"Well, as I remember it," said Jack, "the gist of the plan is this—that Christmas is Christ's birthday, and we should make our gifts to him, instead of to one another; and the idea of the White Gift was suggested by the story of the Persian king named Kublah Khan, who was a wise and good ruler, and greatly beloved. On his birthday his subjects kept what they called the 'White Feast.' This was celebrated in

an immense great white banqueting-hall, and each one of his subjects brought to their king a white gift to express that the love and loyalty of their hearts was without stain. The rich brought white chargers, ivory and alabaster; the poor brought white pigeons, or even a measure of rice; and the great king regarded all gifts alike, so long as they were white. Have I told it right, cousin?" queried Jack.

"Yes, I think so. It is a beautiful thought, I must confess, and might be all right in a large, rich Sunday school; but in a mission school like ours I am sure it will be a failure. It will end in our losing our scholars. I don't believe in taking up new ideas without considering whether they are adapted to our needs or not. But please, dear folkses, don't let us say anything more about it," pleaded Marcia, and so the subject was dropped.

That evening as Jack Thornton bade his cousin good-bye, he placed in her hand a little package, saying: "I am so sorry, Marcia, that I can't be here for your birthday, but here is my remembrance. Now don't you dare open it before Tuesday, and, dear, you may be sure it is a 'white gift,' and may you have a 'white birthday'." And before she could say a word, he had opened the door, and was gone.

Touched by his thoughtful gift and his words, she said to herself: "A 'white birthday!' I always have perfectly beautiful birthdays." And so she did; for she was always looking out for other people's birthdays, and making much of them; and so she always got the gospel measure: "Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall man give into your bosom."

But these thoughts were crowded out by the pressure of things to be done—father and mother had gone into the

country to visit a sick friend, and the younger brothers and sisters surrounded her and clamored for songs and Bible stories, and as she was a good older sister she devoted herself to them until their bedtime. Then, turning out the lights, she sat down in an easy chair before the library grate, and yielded herself to the spell of the quiet hour. The strained, irritated nerves relaxed, and a strange, sweet peace stole over her. As she gazed dreamily into the fire, a star seemed to rise out of the glowing coals, and beam at her with a beautiful soft radiance, and the words of the Evangel came into her mind: "And when they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding joy; and when they were come into the house they saw the young child, with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshipped him; and when they had opened their treasures they presented unto him gifts, gold, frankincense and myrrh." She repeated the words over and over to herself. How simple and restful they were; how direct and genuine and satisfying was this old-time giving! There it was—Gifts for the Christ-Child—"They presented unto him gifts, gold, frankincense and myrrh." She remembered reading somewhere that the gold represented our earthly possessions, the frankincense typified our service and the myrrh our suffering for his sake.

As she gazed into the fire, and mused, she fell asleep, and all these thoughts were woven into the fabric of a dream—and who shall say that God does not speak to his children still in dreams?

She dreamed that it was the morning of her birthday. She heard cheery voices in the hall calling out to one another: "This is Marcia's birthday. Wish you many returns of the day!" There was an excited running to and fro between the different rooms, and gleeful exclamations—but no one came near her! She sat up in bed listening, and wondering

what it could mean! Why, mother always came into her room, and folded her to her heart, and said those precious things that only a mother can say; and the children always scrambled to see who should be the first to give sister a birthday kiss. Were they playing some joke on her? She would be quiet and watch, and so not be taken unawares.

Presently they went trooping happily downstairs into the dining-room, and she heard father's voice say: "Good morning, children; I wish you many happy returns of Marcia's birthday."

What did it all mean? Was she going crazy? Or were they just going to surprise her by some novel way of celebrating her birthday? She arose, and with trembling fingers dressed herself hastily, and stole softly down the stairs, and looked into the dining-room. Hush!—father was asking a blessing. He returned thanks for dear Marcia's birthday, and asked that it should be a happy day for them all. Beside each plate save her own, were various packages; and these were opened amid ejaculations of surprise and pleasure, and sundry hugs and kisses.

After the first burst of happiness had subsided, Marcia braced herself and entered the dining-room, saying with forced gayety: "Good morning, dear ones all." They looked up with blank, unanswering faces, and said: "Good morning, Marcia"—that was all. But Marcia's heart leaped at the recognition of her presence, for she had begun to fear that she was dead, and that it was her spirit that was wandering about.

She stooped and kissed her mother, who murmured abstractedly, "Yes, dear," never once looking up from the presents she was examining. With a sinking heart she turned away from her mother and went and stood behind

her father's chair, and leaning over whispered in his ear: "Dear father, have you forgotten that this is my birthday?" He answered kindly but absent-mindedly: "Why, daughter, am I likely to forget it with all these tokens around me?"—and he waved his hand toward the gifts piled around his plate. This was almost more than Marcia could bear, for father was always specially tender and attentive to her on her birthday. She always sat on his knee a while; and he told her what a joy and comfort she was to him, and he always paid her some pretty compliment that made her girlish heart swell with innocent pride, for every girl knows that compliments from one's father are a little sweeter than any others.

In vain she hung around waiting for some clue to this mysterious, unnatural conduct of the family. They were all absorbed in plans for spending this birthday—Marcia's birthday, but no reference whatever was made to what she liked; no one consulted her as to what she wanted to do, or to have done. The boys were going skating in the forenoon; the little girls were to invite four of their friends to help serve the first dinner in the new doll's house, and in the afternoon father would take them all for an automobile ride into the country to a dear friend's—all but Marcia, who couldn't bear to get into an auto since a terrible accident she had been in a few weeks ago. A troop of her girl friends came in, and in a conventional way wished her "many happy returns" of the day; and then proceeded to ignore her, and gave gifts to other members of the family. "It is a wonder," thought Marcia, bitterly, "that they didn't have a birthday party for Marcia with Marcia left out."

And so it went on all through that strange, miserable day; while they were all busy celebrating her birthday, she herself was neglected and ignored as she sat in the quiet house alone in the twilight—for she had no heart to light