

Christmas in the Barn

by F. Arnstein

Only two more days and Christmas would be here! It had been snowing hard, and Johnny was standing at the window, looking at the soft, white snow which covered the ground half a foot deep. He heard the noise of wheels coming up the road, and a wagon turned in at the gate and came past the window.

Johnny was very curious to know what the wagon could be bringing.

He pressed his little nose close to the cold window pane, and to his great surprise, saw two large Christmas-trees. Johnny wondered why there were TWO trees, and turned quickly to run and tell Mama all about it.

But then he remembered Mama was not at home. She had gone to the city to buy some Christmas presents and would not return until quite late. His grandmother was busy baking cookies in the kitchen.

Johnny began to feel that his toes and fingers had grown quite cold from standing at the window so long; so he drew his own little chair up to the cheerful grate fire and sat there quietly thinking.

Kittycat, who had been curled up like a little bundle of wool, in the very warmest corner, jumped up, and, going to Johnny, rubbed her head against his knee to attract his attention.

He patted her gently and began to talk to her about what was in his thoughts.

He had been wondering why two trees had come, and at last had made up his mind about them. "I know now, Kitty," said he, "why there are two trees. This morning when I kissed Papa good-bye at the gate he said he was going to buy one for me. And Mama, who was busy in the house, did not hear him say so; and I am sure she must have ordered the other. But what shall we do with two Christmas-trees?"

Kitty jumped into his lap and purred and purred. A plan suddenly flashed into Johnny's mind. "Would you like to have one, Kitty?" Kitty purred more loudly, and it seemed almost as though she had said yes.

"Oh! I will! If Mama will let me. I'll have a Christmas-tree out in the bam for you, Kitty, and for all the pets. Then you'll all be as happy as I shall be with my tree in the parlour."

By this time, Mama and Papa returned home.

Quick as a flash Johnny ran, with a happy, smiling face, to meet Papa and Mama and gave them each a loving kiss.

During the evening he told them all that he had done that day and also about the two big trees which the man had brought.

It was just as Johnny had thought. Papa and Mama had each bought one, and as it was so near Christmas they thought they would not send either of them back.

Johnny was very glad of this, and told them of the happy plan he had made and asked if he might have the extra tree.

Papa and Mama smiled a little as Johnny explained his plan but they said he might have the tree, and Johnny went to bed feeling very happy.

That night his Papa fastened the tree into a block of wood so that it would stand firmly and then set it in the middle of the barn floor.

The next day when Johnny had finished school he went to the kitchen, and asked Mama if she would save the bones and potato peels and all other extras from the day's meals and give them to him the following morning.

He also begged her to give him several cups full of salt and cornmeal, which she did, putting them in paper bags for him.

Then she gave him the dishes he asked for--a few chipped ones not good enough to be used at table--and an old wooden bowl.

Mama wanted to know what Johnny intended to do with all these things, but he only said: "Wait until tomorrow, then you shall see."

He gathered up all the things which Mama had given him and carried them to the barn, placing them on a shelf in one corner, where he was sure no one would touch them and where they would be all ready for him to use the next morning.

Christmas morning came, and, after he'd opened his stocking and a few presents, Johnny hurried out to the barn.

The Christmas tree was waiting for him. He was going to trim it all his pets.

The first thing he did was to get a paper bag of oats; this he tied to one of the branches of the tree, for Brownie the mare.

Then he made up several bundles of hay and tied these on the other side of the tree, not quite so high up, where White Face, the cow, could reach them.

And on the lowest branches some more hay for Spotty, the calf.

Next Johnny hurried to the kitchen to get the things Mama had promised to save for him.

She had plenty to give. With his arms and hands full he went back to the barn.

He found three bones with plenty of meat on them; these he tied together to another branch of the tree, for Rover, his big black dog.

Under the tree he placed the big wooden bowl, and filled it well with potato peels, rice, and meat, left from yesterday's dinner.

This was a full and tempting trough for Piggywig.

Near this, he placed a bowl of milk for Kitty.

On one plate he put the salt for the pet lamb, and on another the cornmeal for the dear little chickens.

On the top of the tree he tied a basket of nuts; these were for his pet squirrel.

And I had almost forgotten to tell you of the bunch of carrots tied very low down where soft white Bunny could reach them.

When all was done, Johnny stood off a little way to look at this wonderful Christmas-tree.

Clapping his hands with delight, he ran to call Papa and Mama, and they laughed aloud when they saw what he had done. It was the funniest Christmas-tree they had ever seen. They were sure the pets would like the presents Johnny had chosen.

Then there was a busy time in the barn. Papa and Mama helped to bring in the animals, and before long, Brownie, White Face, Spotty, Rover, Piggywig, Kitty, Lambkin, the chickens, the squirrel and Bunny, the rabbit, had been led each to his own Christmas breakfast on and under the tree.

What a funny sight it was to see them all standing around looking happy and contented, eating and drinking with such an appetite!

While watching them Johnny had another thought.

He ran quickly to the house, and brought out the new trumpet which Papa had given him for Christmas.

By this time the animals had all finished their breakfast. Johnny gave a little toot on his trumpet as a signal that the tree festival was over.

Brownie went, neighing and prancing, to her stall.

White Face walked demurely off with a bellow, which Spotty, the calf, running at her heels, tried to imitate.

The little lamb skipped bleating away.

Piggywig walked off with a grunt.

Kitty jumped on the fence with a mew.

The squirrel still sat up in the tree cracking her nuts.

Bunny hopped to her snug little quarters.

Rover, barking loudly, chased the chickens back to their coop.

Such a hubbub of noises!

Mama said it sounded as if they were trying to say, "Merry Christmas to you, Johnny! Merry Christmas to all."

A Christmas Star
by Katherine Pyle

"Come now, my dear little stars," said Mother Moon, "and I will tell you the Christmas story."

Every morning for a week before Christmas, Mother Moon called all the little stars around her and told them a story.

It was always the same story, but the stars never tired of it. It was the story of the Christmas star - the Star of Bethlehem.

When Mother Moon had finished the story the little stars always said: "And the star is shining still, isn't it, Mother Moon, even if we can't see it?"

And Mother Moon would answer: "Yes, my dears, only now it shines for all the people's hearts instead of their eyes."

Then the stars would bid the Mother Moon good-night and put on their little blue nightcaps and go to bed in the sky chamber; for the stars' bedtime is when people down on the earth are beginning to waken and see that it is morning.

But that particular morning when the little stars said good-night and went quietly away, one golden star still lingered beside Mother Moon.

"What is the matter, my little star?" asked the Mother Moon. "Why don't you go with your little sisters?"

"Oh, Mother Moon," said the golden star. "I am so sad! I wish I could shine for someone's heart like that star of wonder that you tell us about."

"Why, aren't you happy up here in the sky country?" asked Mother Moon.

"Yes, I have been very happy," said the star; "but tonight it seems just as if I must find some heart to shine for."

"Then if that is so," said Mother Moon, "the time has come, my little star, for you to go through the Wonder Entry."

"The Wonder Entry? What is that?" asked the star. But the Mother Moon made no answer.

Rising, she took the little star by the hand and led it to a door that it had never seen before.

The Mother Moon opened the door, and there was a long dark entry; at the far end was shining a little speck of light.

"What is this?" asked the star.

"It is the Wonder Entry; and it is through this that you must go to find the heart where you belong," said the Mother Moon.

Then the little star was afraid.

It longed to go through the entry as it had never longed for anything before; and yet it was afraid and clung to the Mother Moon.

But very gently, the Mother Moon drew her hand away. "Go, my child," she said.

Then, wondering and trembling, the little star stepped into the Wonder Entry, and the door of the sky house closed behind it.

The next thing the star knew it was hanging in a toy shop with a whole row of other stars colored blue and red and silver.

But it was a shining gold color.

The shop smelled of evergreen, and was full of Christmas shoppers, men and women and children.

The star looked at no one other than a little boy standing in front of the counter; for as soon as the star saw the child it knew that it wanted to belong to him.

The little boy was standing beside a sweet-faced woman in a long sparkling scarf and he was not looking at anything in particular.

The star shook and trembled on the string that held it, because it was afraid the child would not see it, or if he did, he would not choose it to take home with him.

The sweet-faced lady had a number of toys on the counter before her, and she was saying: "Now I think we have presents for everyone: There's the doll for Lou, and the game for Ned, and the music box for May; and then the rocking horse and the sled."

Suddenly the little boy caught her by the arm. "Oh, Mother," he said. He had seen the star.

"Well, what is it, darling?" asked the lady.

"Mother, see that star up there! I wish--oh, I do wish I had it."

"Oh, my dear Paul, we have so many things for the Christmas tree," said the mother.

"Yes, I know, but I do want the star," said the child.

"Very well," said the mother, smiling; "then we will take that, too."

So the star was taken down from the place where it hung and wrapped up in a piece of paper, and all the while it thrilled with joy, for now it belonged to the little boy.

It was not until the week before Christmas, when the tree was being decorated, that the golden star was unwrapped and taken out from the paper.

"Here is one more decoration," said the sweet-faced lady. "We must hang this on the tree. Paul took such a fancy to it that I had to get it for him. He will never be satisfied unless we hang it on too."

"Oh, yes," said Father, who was helping to decorate the tree; "we will hang it here on the very top."

So the little star hung on the highest branch of the Christmas tree.

That evening all the tiny lights shone on the Christmas tree, and there were so many that they fairly dazzled the eyes; and the gold and silver balls, and the nutcrackers shone and twinkled in the light; and high above them all shone the golden star.

At seven o'clock a bell was rung, and then the folding doors of the room where the Christmas tree stood were thrown open, and a crowd of children, aunts, uncles, and grandparents came merrily in.

They laughed and shouted and pointed, and all talked together, and after a while there was music, and presents were taken from the tree and given to the family.

How different it all was from the great, wide, still sky house!

The star had never been so happy in all its life, for the little boy was with him.

Paul stood apart from the other children, looking up at the star, with his hands clasped behind him, admiring the star and smiling with joy.

At last it was all over. The lights were put out, the children went to bed, and the house grew still.

Then the ornaments on the tree began to talk among themselves.

"What a lovely Christmas celebration!" said a silver ball. "It was very happy this evening - the happiest Christmas I remember."

"Yes," said a glass ornament; "the best of it is over. Of course people will come to look at us for several days yet, but it won't be like this evening."

"And then I suppose we'll be laid away for another year," said a garland of tinsel. "Such a few weeks out of the year and then to be shut up in the dark box again."

That evening, the mother, asked the father to bring the star down from the tree.

"That is it," she said, pointing to the golden star. Father climbed up on some steps and took down the star and put it in Mother's hand, and she carried it out into the hall and upstairs to a room where the little boy lay.

The sweet-faced lady sat by the bed, and Paul held out his hand for the star.

"Is this what you wanted, my darling?" she asked, bending over the little boy.

The child nodded and held out his hands for the star.

As he clasped it, a wonderful, shining smile came over his face.

The next morning the little boy's room was very still and dark.

The golden ornament that had been a real star lay on a table beside the bed, its five points very sharp and bright.

But it was not a real star, any more than a person's body is the real person.

The real star was living and shining now in the little boy's heart, filling him with peace and happiness, courage and love.

The First Christmas Tree

In a forest in the far, far East grew a great many pine trees. Most of them were tall trees, higher than the houses that we see, and with wide, strong branches.

But there was one tree that was not nearly so tall as the others; in fact, it was no taller than some of the children in kindergarten.

Now, the tall trees could see far, far out over the hilltops and into the valleys, and they could hear all the noises that went on in the world beyond the forest.

But the Little Tree was so small and the other trees grew so high and thick around it, that it could not see nor hear these things at all.

But the other trees were very kind, and they would stoop down and tell them to the Little Tree.

One night in the winter time there seemed to be something strange happening in the little town among the hills, for the trees did not go to sleep after the sun went down, but put their heads together and spoke in strange, low whispers that were full of awe and wonder.

The Little Tree, from its place close down to the ground, did not understand what it was all about.

It listened awhile, and then lifted its head as high as ever it could and shouted to its tall neighbor: "Will you please stoop and tell me what is happening?"

And the big tree stooped down and whispered: "The shepherds out on the hilltops are telling strange stories while they watch their sheep. The air is filled with sweet music, and there is a wonderful star coming up in the East, traveling westward always, and the shepherds say that they are waiting for it to stop and shine over a humble stable in their little town.

I have not heard why it is going to stop there, but I will look again and listen."

So the tall tree lifted up its head again, and reached far out so that it might hear more of the wonderful story.

Having listened a long while, it stooped down again, and whispered to the Little Tree:

"Oh, Little Tree, listen! There are angels among the shepherds on the hills, and they are all talking together. They seem to be awaiting the birth of a little child, who will be a king among the people, and the beautiful star will shine above the stable where the little king will be laid in a manger."

The tree again raised its head to listen, and the Little Tree, much puzzled, thought within itself: "It is very strange, indeed. Oh, how I wish that I could see it all!"

It waited a little longer, and everything grew quiet, and a great peace came upon the forest.

Then suddenly the town, and even the forest, was illuminated with a strange, white light that made everything as bright as day.

The air was filled with the flutter of angels' wings, and with music such as the world had never heard before.

The people, and the trees, even the stars in the heaven, lifted up their voices and sang together.

The whole world was filled with music and joy and love for the little Christ-child who had come to dwell upon the earth.

The Little Tree was filled with fear and wonder, for so great was the excitement that the other trees had almost forgotten it, and it could not understand the mysterious sounds.

At last, its tall friend said, "Listen, listen, Little Tree! Such news I have to tell! The Christ has come--the King! And the whole world is singing such beautiful music. There are wise men coming from the East, bringing beautiful gifts to the Christ-child. The angels, too, are upon the earth, and they bear gifts of gold and frankincense and myrrh. Wait! I will tell you more."

The tall tree had scarcely lifted up its head when it stooped again and whispered to the Little Tree, "Look! Look! Little Tree! They are coming this way; the angels are coming here, into our forest! Lift up your head high and you will see them as they pass."

The Little Tree lifted up its head and saw the white flutter of angel robes and heard the weird, sweet voices of the heavenly host who came with precious gifts into the forest.

"Oh," said the Little Tree, "they are coming here, toward me! What shall I do?" And in fear it bent its head so low that it almost touched the ground.

But the music came nearer and nearer, and the Little Tree felt a tender hand upon its branches, and a soft, gentle voice said to it, "Arise, Little Tree, and come with us, for we have come into the forest to seek you. Yes, you, the very smallest among the trees, are to be our gift-bearer. Come; lift up your head."

In fear and trembling the Little Tree did as the angel asked it.

But when it looked into the angel's face and saw love and kindness there, all fear was gone.

Little Tree said to the angel: "Yes; make me ready. I will come with you to the little Christ-child in the manger."

So all the angels brought their gifts of precious jewels and shining gold, and fastened them upon the branches of the Little Tree.

Then the leader of the angels' band took up the Little Tree from the ground and presented it, beautifully decorated with its precious ornaments, at the feet of the newborn baby Jesus, the Christ-child.

Candlelit Heart

By Mary E. Linton

Somewhere across the winter world tonight
You will be hearing chimes that fill the air;
Christmas extends its all-enfolding light
Across the distance...something we can
share.

You will be singing, just the same as I,
These familiar songs we know so well,
And you will see these same stars
in your sky
And wish upon that brightest one that fell.

I shall remember you and trim my tree,
One shining star upon the topmost bough;
I will hang wreaths of faith that all may see
Tonight I glimpse beyond the here and now.

And all the time that we must be apart
I keep a candle in my heart.

The Stockings Are Hung

~ Christmas Eve ~

The stockings are hung,
the carols are being sung.
My heart is filled with joy,
along with every girl and boy.
It's really hard to go to sleep,
you want to go and take a peep.
And, when you're finally in bed,
visions of Santa dance in your head.

~ Christmas Day ~

Your stockings are overflowing,
everyone's face is glowing.
You must open Santa's presents first,
you're so excited you just might burst.
Then family gifts are the next to go,
you tear off the wrapping and the bow.
You rip them open one by one,
seeing toy after toy, each filled with fun.

~ Christmas Night ~

Once your thank-yous have been said,
you are definitely ready for bed.
You tell everyone good-night,
and your heart becomes light.
And while in bed,
the day dances in your head.
You thank the Lord for today,
while you slowly drift away.