How Christmas Came to Millicent Ann

By Fullerton L. Waldo

Millicent Ann had an old doll, a very old doll, for it had belonged to her mother before her. The doll's name was Dora, and Dora was as ragged and as dirty as Millicent Ann herself. But as you have seen a dog that faithfully stuck by a poor family that maltreated and underfed him, so Dora the doll went on living hopefully and pluckily with people who never touched a sponge to her smudged and sooty face or thought of giving her a new dress or a new wig that did not show the cheesecloth here and there where the hairs had come away.

For the fact is, in Millicent Ann's family there was no money to be frittered away on a body that had been fed once and for all with sawdust, and never cried for cold or for lack of a baked potato. There were too many little living bodies in that house that were always wanting something—too many small hands to be mittened and feet to be shod. Worse than that, there were voices that were lifted as quickly as the flame of kerosene leaps from a soaked stick when anything went wrong—and something was always going wrong.

Millicent Ann was eight, and Sarah Jane was four, and Baby Jim was two—so Millicent Ann had to do all the giving in and the giving up, and about all she had left in the world was the turkey-red dress she wore, and Dora the doll, and a strong faith that every dog she met was her friend, and a smile that wouldn't come off and found an answering smile even in the set and frozen, expressionless features of Dora.

Millicent Ann believed in Santa Claus, as she believed in fairies. She had never met a fairy, but she had seen and spoken with Santa Claus. He stood on a cold, windy corner, dressed in turkey-red like the stuff of which her dress was made, and he had a long white beard, and he rang a bell to call attention to a kettle by his side, and every now and then Millicent Ann saw somebody pause and drop something into the kettle instead of taking something out. Millicent Ann wished that she dared to peep over the edge and find out what it held.

"Where's thu sleigh 'n' thu reindeer?" she asked, not doubtfully, but hopefully, as though he had them hitched somewhere just out of sight and might ask her to take a ride.

"Had to leave 'em behind," said Santa, in a thin and quavery but good-natured voice.

"Ain't you got any presents for people in there?" asked Millicent Ann, pointing to the kettle.

Santa Claus shook his head. "That's to buy things with," he said. "That's to put things into, not to take 'em out. It's the Salvation Army," he explained.

Millicent Ann had no idea what the Salvation Army meant. She did not see any sign of a soldier or a gun. She would not have been afraid anyway, for the eyes of the saint were mild and blue as the sky, and it was plain that he was fond of little girls, and would protect her against an army, if one came.

"If somebody goes 'n' puts somep'm in that kettle, does anybody get it?"

"Yes," said Santa. "We give people bread and meat and chickens and potatoes and shirts and stockings and shoes and things."

"Can anybody put somep'm in?"

"Yes," said Santa.

Millicent Ann was lost in thought.

"Don't you ever get cold 'n' hungry sometimes yourself waitin' for people to put things in?"

"Oh, yes," said Santa cheerfully. "I don't mind."

"Why not?" persisted the little girl.

"'Cause it's for the Lord."

Millicent Ann lifted her eyebrows in surprise. "I didn't know you worked for anybody."

Santa stopped ringing his bell long enough to laugh heartily. Then he grew solemn again.

"It's the best job there is," he said.

"I'll tell my father about it," said the child. "Do you think the Lord could find somep'm for him to do, too?"

"Ain't got no doubt about it," Santa said, positively.

Millicent Ann went home and wrote a letter on a piece of brown paper, with the family pencil:

"dear lord:

i am sorry I aint got nuthing to put in only my doll dora please be good to her lord becauz she aint nefer bin away from me befor and pleaz sent my papa and us sumthing to eat anythin nobody elts wants will do

yours truely

Millicent Ann Dobson.

eight years old 4013 Pearl Street

P s if there is anybody Poorer than us give it to them"

Then she took Dora in her arms and went back to the corner. The letter was stuck in the front of Dora's dress, but Dora was innocent of her fate.

Santa Claus stood with his back to the curb, and Millicent Ann was ashamed to let him see that she was crying, so she went all the way around the block and tiptoed up behind him while he ceaselessly tinkled the bell and lifted the loose grating on the kettle and plopped the dolly in. Then she ran away with her fingers in her ears, for a mother can hear her child calling when nobody else can.

"Why, what is this?" said a soft and sympathetic voice to Santa Claus a few minutes later.

It was the voice of a very beautiful and richly clad young woman, daintily stepping across the sidewalk to her limousine and pausing to drop a coin into Santa's kettle.

With the hand that was not hidden by the enormous white muff she pointed at the limp, dilapidated form of Dora, sprawling among pennies and nickels at the bottom of the kettle.

Dora must have been very much ashamed of the contrast between her bedraggled estate and the Beautiful Lady when Santa Claus, with an exclamation, dragged her forth by her shoeless left foot and held her up to the unpitying daylight.

The Beautiful Lady read the letter that was imprisoned in Dora's dress.

"Here," she said to Santa Claus, handing him a dollar bill, "you take this and let me have the doll."

Santa Claus hardly knew what to make of a gift of such magnitude. "God bless you, lady," he said fervently, "you can have the doll and welcome. I didn't know it was there. I bet maybe a little girl I was talkin' with just now stuck her in an' then run away."

The Beautiful Lady put Dora inside her muff. No doubt the quarters seemed dark and cramped, and Dora wondered where she was going—but what a warm and violet-scented luxuriousness for one accustomed to hard boards and neglect from every one but Millicent Ann!

So Dora journeyed in darkness, and did not see where the Beautiful Lady went and what was purchased, for she was hidden behind a cushion in the limousine for about twenty-four hours. She did not know till afterward.

For the next day, which was Christmas, found Millicent Ann at home, not daring to expect anything would really come from Santa Claus, or any of the friends of Santa Claus in return for the sacrifice of Dora. Her mother and father and Sarah Jane and Baby Jim were making a brave show of Christmas, and Millicent Ann was helping with all her might, but the best that all combined could do was pitiful, though they all laughed a great deal, and the three children danced together while their father whistled a tune that he remembered from the time that he had work and was paid for it.

Millicent Ann gave her father a picture from a life-insurance calendar that she had found in an ash barrel. Sarah Jane and Baby Jim each got a pair of stockings that their mother had made, and a stick of lemon candy and a green apple. Millicent Ann got a pair of red flannel mittens made from the edge of an undershirt, the rest of which her father continued to wear. Mother and father had nothing to give each other except a kiss. They had canned corned beef instead of Christmas turkey. For dessert there was cold catmeal without milk from the morning's breakfast.

"My!" said Millicent Ann, plashing with her spoon, "Ain't this ice cream good? Choc'lut, too. My fav'rite kind!"

The babies giggled. They both clutched their lemon candy while they made way with the oatmeal, as though the candy might take wings like Dora if they let go of it for a moment.

For the disappearance of Dora had made a sensation. Millicent Ann kept a stiff upper lip and told nothing. She was, if anything, more diligent than the others in searching the nooks and corners of a house so barren that the hunt was easy.

The spoons were rattling in empty saucers when there came a knock at the door.

A caller—except the landlord, to whom they owed $17—was a highly unusual event.

"Milly, you run and see!" said her mother, nervously. "Tell him—well, I guess it don't make much difference what you tell him. We can't say any more'n what we've said already—only it does seem too bad he should come in when we're makin' believe we're havin' our Christmas dinner."

When the door opened it was a beautiful young lady.

"Does this dolly live here?" asked the beautiful one, holding out Dora, not by one leg, but just as carefully as though she were handling a baby.

With a cry of joy and thanksgiving at once, Millicent Ann reached for the doll, and clasped her to her faded dress. Then she remembered that she ought to be disappointed because Dora had come home empty-handed.

"I thought—maybe—Santa Claus would——"

"I know," said the beautiful lady gently. "I read your letter. See what I've brought."

It was unbelievable. Father, mother, the babies and Millicent Ann had to keep pinching themselves to make sure they were not dreaming. The beautiful lady must have imagined, or found out, about the whole family. There were warm things to wear for everybody—soft, furry things like this Christmas angel's own—things that Mrs. Dobson had told the children that princesses wore in the fairy tales. Mrs. Dobson had to remember the stories, for they had no books in the house except a Bible and a few old almanacs. Then there was a most wonderful dinner, part of it all ready to eat—a roast turkey with potatoes, other vegetables and oranges.

What a feast it was! The beautiful lady would not stay to share it with them. But before she went she took Mr. Dobson aside.

"My father will give you a position on the railroad," she said, "if you will come to his office at 9 o'clock tomorrow and bring this card."

At that remarkable Christmas feast Dora sat at the head of the table in an old abandoned high chair. Her waxen features actually seemed to have relaxed into something like a smile—there was color in her cheeks, it seemed to Millicent Ann— perhaps from the outdoors and the exercise.

Millicent Ann rose with her cheeks full of turkey and cranberry sauce, and went to where Dora sat and threw her arms around the doll and hugged and kissed her.

"You did it, Dora; you were the one that brought us Christmas. Wasn't she, mother? Isn't she the most beautifulest, loveliest doll there ever was in all the world?"

The Pianomaker of London, England, estimates that there are between 1,800 and 1,900 piano factories in the world, with an average annual production of 500 instruments. This would mean a normal production of 900,000 pianos annually; last year, however, production reached only 700,000.

GOLD, FRANKINCENSE AND MYRRH.

Through the stable's dusty space
  Wavering sunbeams shine,
Where Madonna, filled with grace,
Bending o'er the Christ-Child's face,
Happy in that hapless place,
  Sings among the kine.

"From the East the Three Kings came,
Guided by a starry flame,
Where in Thy nativity
The Most High o'ershadows Thee!
They were very old and wise,
Knowledge filled their lips and eyes,
Yet, my Babe, they offered Thee
Precious gifts on bended knee;
Could they bring Thee all the gold
Costliest kingly coffers hold,
Still with Thee my arms I fill
With a goodlier treasure still!

"Myrrh and frankincense and gold—
All their gifts for Thee I hold;
Gold, because a King to be,
Tribute thus they offer Thee;
Frankincense, in fragrance poured
For the Son of God the Lord;
Myrrh—yet wherefore should they bring
Myrrh to Thee, who art a King?
Speaking with its bitter breath
Of the sepulchre and death—
Thou, the Son of David—Thou,
With God's promise on Thy brow—
Thou, God's own interpreter—
Wherefore should they bring Thee
  myrrh?"

Hushed the song, the sunbeams fled,
Dark and silence came instead.
In Madonna's eyes the tears
Told of coming suffering years,
Till upon a day to be
She should stand on Calvary.
With its shadow overcast
He should answer at the last
That one question troubling her—
"Wherefore should they bring Thee
  myrrh?"

—Robert Gilbert Welsh.

The Pleasant Way.

A pleasant way is the Christmas way,
  With youngsters dancing upon it,
And the lilt and lift of a music gay,
  And the joy of the world to sun it;
A pleasant way, as it keeps its faith
  In the old dreams and the fine,
With childhood brimmed and the rosy wraith
  Of the love that grows divine.

A pleasant way, where the plodding throngs
  Go by with hop and skip,
And always breathing the song of songs
  And whistling with puckered lip,
A fairy way for the hosts of strife
  To find when the time draws near,
So beautiful with the dreams of life
  And sweet with the Christmas cheer.

A pleasant way, where the people pass
  With light hearts and bright eyes,
The old and the young, the lad and the lass,
  And above them the bright blue skies.
A way that is rich with the hopes of things
  And stored with the dreams of men,
And a voice of life's beautiful love that sings
  Of a King that shall come again.

Good for the Christmas party. Boil half a pound of white sugar with a little water until it is of the consistency of thin syrup. Cut up fairly small some tinned pears, apricots, peaches, cherries—anything in the fruit line, almost. Pour the syrup over the fruit, and some well-chopped nuts, and place in ice to freeze. When wanted, fill some custard-cups with the iced fruit, placing a little whipped cream on top.

The prefix "O" before the names of so many Irish families is an abbreviation of the word "Ogha," meaning grandchild."